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Northern end aligned with TransPennine finish

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Northern Rail has been granted a six month franchise extension which will see the train operator continue to run local and regional rail services across the north of England until 1 April 2014.

The franchise, operated by a joint venture between Serco and Abellio, had been due to end on 15 September 2013 after Northern secured a two year extension in 2010. This agreement contained a clause allowing the Department for Transport to grant a franchise continuation of up to seven reporting periods, which it has now chosen to do.

Ian Bevan, Northern Rail managing director, said: "We are delighted that the Department for Transport has chosen to confirm this continuation. Since we began operating in 2004 we have worked hard to improve the service we offer our customers. Confirming the continuation means we can continue this work, focusing on the areas we know matter to our customers."

Bevan said that since the franchise began Northern's shareholders, Serco and Abellio, have invested more than £130m despite taking on a franchise specified as 'no growth, no investment'. The money has contributed to additional train carriages, new stations, improvements to existing station facilities and employee accommodation.

Over the coming months Northern will be improving the cleanliness of trains by upgrading the washing plants at depots. The company says this will support significant changes to the cleaning regime on its trains.

Bevan added: "We'll be improving the ticket office, waiting rooms and toilet facilities at a number of stations. We're also working with partners to install more customer information screens at stations, making sure passengers get accurate information about how their train is running."

Last year the government granted a three year extension to the First/Keolis operated TransPennine Express franchise, which is now due to run until 1 April 2015. However, this agreement includes an option allowing the DfT to terminate it one year early which, if exercised, would coincide with the new expiry date of the Northern franchise. This would allow a single operator to take over the two franchises as has previously been suggested (TB 7861).

Northern: latest extension will see Abellio/Serco joint venture stay in charge until April 2014



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