

National Express sign up ex-Scotrail boss Grant



Mary Grant, former Scotrail boss. Picture: contributed

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FORMER ScotRail boss Mary Grant is returning to the transport sector with a senior role helping National Express bid for new rail franchises.

Grant, who led the successful FirstGroup bid to run Scotrail in 2004 and then managed the franchise, will become managing director for business development at National Express next month.

The company said she will initially work on developing international growth opportunities, but will increasingly focus on UK rail opportunities.

Many franchises are expected to become available as the UK government launches a new round of bidding next year.

National Express was heavily criticised for abandoning the east coast main line franchise in 2009, but this has not stopped it bidding for other services. Last year it took part in the Great Western bidding process, which the government was forced to put on hold after the fiasco over the flawed awarding of the west coast main line franchise. It has even secured an extension to its London commuter service, C2C.

Analysts say that, with relatively few companies in the sector, the government cannot afford to hold a grudge and sideline an experienced operator. Gerald Khoo, at Espirito Santo Investment Bank, said: "There's nothing that prevents them qualifying for rail franchises, as they already have. The government has made that very clear. And if you are in it, you have to be able to win it."

Before she has the job of persuading ministers that National Express can go the distance on a major franchise, Grant is likely to look at possibilities for expanding the overseas business, which includes rail and coach services in Germany and a contracting business in the US.

Her moves marks a swift return to the sector she quit in early 2012 when she took over as chief executive of the 600 store high street chain Phones4U. She left the role last month, citing "personal reasons".

Grant worked with National Express in the UK and Australia in the late 1990s.

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