

## Ex-Scot rail boss to help National Express rail bid



Mary Grant was at FirstGroup when they won the ScotRail contract. Picture: Contributed

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FORMER ScotRail chief Mary Grant is to attempt to win back the franchise for National Express – nine years after she led FirstGroup’s successful bid, The Scotsman has learned.

Grant will focus on bidding for the next ten-year contract for Scotland’s main train operator when a three-year “departure agreement” with First barring her from UK rail work expires next spring.

She won a string of accolades for her five-year tenure at the train operator from 2004, then ran First’s rail division before leaving the firm in 2011.

Grant later worked in the mobile phone industry before joining National Express this month as managing director for business development.

The news sets the stage for a battle royal for the franchise – worth more than £6 billion in combined revenue and subsidy between incumbent FirstGroup and National Express, which had previously run ScotRail. Other bidders are expected to include Dutch rail firm Abellio, Arriva and Serco.

The Scottish Government’s Transport Scotland agency issued a prequalification questionnaire for the new franchise from 2015 on Wednesday, seeking expressions of interest by next month. Grant masterminded First’s last bid for ScotRail along with Dean Finch, now chief executive of National Express.

Leading rail industry figures talked up her record yesterday, one telling The Scotsman: “She was the most outstanding managing director I have worked with in 25 years on the railways. She is second to none, straight and effective.”

Another said: “[She] won over the trade unions very quickly to her thinking about how she wished ScotRail to deliver a rail service. This was no easy task but she achieved it. Some would say she is missed today at ScotRail.”

A National Express spokesman said: “Mary’s working for us on international projects at the moment. She will only start working for us on rail bids next year.”

FirstGroup declined to comment on the prospect of bidding against Grant to retain the franchise.

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