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by David Tooley
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Britain's biggest ever rail franchise will include a requirement for more trains to serve Luton Airport Parkway station.

The move has been welcomed by a spokesman for Luton Airport who said they had been lobbying behind an increase in rail services for some time.

Oliver Jaycock, general manager, marketing, for London Luton Airport told a business meeting in Leighton Buzzard on Thursday that part of the reason so many people drive to the hub is the currently limited rail service from London.

He said he felt it would make a difference if there was a reliable and frequent service 24 hours a day.

Documents supporting the new rail franchise, issued on September 26, stipulate there must be a minimum of two trains per hour arriving at Luton Airport Parkway between 3am and 6.59am from Blackfriars on Monday to Saturday morning, with a maximum interval of 40 minutes between consecutive arrivals.

The Department of Transport says the new combined Thameslink, Southern and Great Northern (TSGN) Franchise will be the largest UK rail franchise ever let.

When all the services have been incorporated, it will have the greatest passenger numbers, the highest income and the most trains and staff of any franchise in the UK rail sector and is likely to be worth many hundreds of millions of pounds.

The franchise will be responsible for planning and delivering rail services across Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Greater London, Hampshire, Hertfordshire, Kent, Norfolk, Surrey and East and West Sussex.

The rail franchise is the first to go out to tender since a debacle in Department for Transport's number crunching led to the scrapping of the award of the West Coast franchise.

But rail minister Simon Burns has said he believes franchising has been a "force for good".

He added: "We are now looking for innovative bids that provide value for money for taxpayers and put passengers right back at the heart of our railways."

It is anticipated the successful bids will be announced in May 2014. The Thameslink and Great Northern elements of the TSGN franchise will start in September 2014 with the Southern element being phased in by July 2015. The franchise will run for seven years.

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