
Three operators awarded Spanish high speed paths

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High speed infrastructure manager Adif AV has selected three preferred bidders to negotiate 10-year framework agreements enabling them to operate passenger services on the routes from Madrid east to Valencia and Alacant, south to Sevilla and Málaga and north to Barcelona and the French border.

The train paths are being awarded as three bundles of varying sizes.

The winning bidders named on November 27 are state incumbent Renfe Viajeros (Package A), the ILSA joint venture owned by the backers of regional airline Air Nostrum through Operador Ferroviario de Levante (55%) and Italian state operator Trenitalia (45%) (package B), and the Rielsfera subsidiary of France's SNCF (Package C).

Eco Rail, the Motion Rail joint venture of Talgo, Globalia and Trilantic, and a joint venture of Globalvía and Moventia were unsuccessful.

Adif AV said the award process had been a success, with the proposals received by the October 31 deadline far exceeding the capacity available.

The bidding process was completed in 11 months, giving the winners slightly more than a year to plan their services ahead of the opening of the domestic rail market on December 14 2020. The final signing of the framework agreements is planned by March 15.

ILSA said it would begin operations in January 2022, linking Madrid with Alacant, Barcelona, Málaga, Sevilla and Valencia using a fleet of 23 Hitachi/Bombardier Frecciarossa 1000 trainsets.

ILSA President Carlos Bertomeu said market opening would offer passengers improved service quality, more attractive fares and greater choice, while Trenitalia CEO Orazio Iacono said the Italian national operator would bring the experience gained from 10 years of operation in the competitive Italian high speed rail market.

Nick Brooks, Secretary General of the ALLRAIL association of new market entrants, said "it is really good to see one of the last network monopolies being broken up this way, introducing new choice, lower fares and better quality for Spanish rail

passengers. We expect the total rail sector to grow this way. However, with state owned incumbents either controlling or involved in all three winning bids, we can but speculate as to whether this is quite the kind of competition that European policymakers have spent years trying to foment”.

(Railway Gazette)