

First Group plc discusses open access growth in trading update

March 13, 2024



In a pre-close trading update issued this week, **First Group plc** said that trading in its rail division had been “slightly ahead” of its expectations – attributing this to “strong performance in the division’s open access operations as a result of continued strong demand, effective yield management, and the settlement of certain one-off infrastructure and other claims during the period.”

Open access growth

First Group plc also provided an update on its open access operations, stating that, on 5 January 2024, it had submitted the first phase of an application for a new open access rail service between London and Sheffield to the Office of Road and Rail (ORR). The service would be part of First Group plc’s **Hull Trains** business, and comprise two return journeys a day from London King’s Cross, calling at Retford, Worksop, Woodhouse and Sheffield.

In its update, the group stated that the ORR consultation with industry partners had now concluded, and that capacity and performance modelling is underway. It added that it is also working on the fleet strategy

and is in discussions with rolling stock companies. It anticipates that services could begin in the second half of 2025.

The update also touched on operator Lumo, which has identified opportunities to extend a number of its daily London to Edinburgh journeys to Glasgow. First Group plc said that discussions about the final route and timings are in progress with Transport Scotland and Network Rail. An application for access rights can then be submitted to the ORR.

If successful, the new services will be operated with the existing Lumo fleet of all-electric trains, and could begin in the second half of the 2025.

Bid to operate Elizabeth line

In its update, the group added that it was looking forward to submitting a “compelling bid” to become the new operator of the Elizabeth line on behalf of Transport for London, working with partner Keolis SA.

The partners were shortlisted to participate in the competitive process earlier this year.

Graham Sutherland, FirstGroup Chief Executive Officer, said: “Our focus on operational delivery, driving demand for our services and growing and diversifying our portfolio has resulted in further progress in the second half of our financial year. This leaves us well positioned to create further sustainable value for all our stakeholders.”