THE RESULT

"The one we've been waiting for"? Our site won't hold the mandatory certification on the due date. Ask first, then decide.

A CRO at a 20,000-person rail equipment maker works through the CEO's push to bid on a $140M transit RFP, with any AI chat her company allows.

THE RESULT What Ruth gives the CEO on December 4. Fictional company.

TAMSIN RAIL SYSTEMS · REVENUE

Northshore Transit RFP: go/no-go

For: Martin Hale, CEO
From: Ruth Okonkwo · December 4

MY RECOMMENDATION

Not on the current terms. The RFP needs IRIS certification at submission on December 11, and Hamilton's audit is in February 2027. We bid only if Northshore's answers clear the certification and the first milestone and cap the liquidated damages, and the 8-year fixed price is changed or approved before we submit. · Inputs 2, 3, 4

WHAT THE TERMS SAY

IRIS certification	First 40 bogies	Late penalties	Contract value
Not by Dec 11	September	1% a week	Up to $140M
Hamilton audit booked Feb 2027	RFP milestone: June 30, 2027	No cap; our policy caps at 10%	Budget estimate; may be split in two

WHAT HAPPENS THIS WEEK

ASK BY WED — **Clarification questions to Northshore**
Certification in progress or a certified partner; the June 30 milestone; a cap on damages; indexation on the price; a split or spares-only lot. · Input 2

DECIDE FRI — **Bid only if all four clear: certification, the milestone, capped damages and the 8-year price**
Our policy allows fixed prices for up to 3 years without indexation. Northshore allows indexation, or the approver legal names signs off the 8-year price, before we submit on December 11. · Inputs 2, 4

NOTE — **The incumbent has won all three similar RFPs since 2019**
The inputs give no basis yet for our chance of winning. · Input 5

CAUGHT ON REVIEW

1. IRIS certification is **mandatory at submission**; Hamilton's audit is in February
2. Hamilton's first 40 bogies come **in September, after the June 30 milestone**
3. "$140M" is **a budget estimate that may be split** between two suppliers

UC-006 · SC-03 · REV B	
FOR **Chief Revenue Officer**	SECTOR **Rail & transit equipment**
COMPANY **20,000 people · 9 sites · UK, Germany, Canada**	TASK **Decide whether to bid on a large strategic RFP**
WRITTEN FOR **ChatGPT · Claude · Gemini · Copilot**	
AI TEST **Claude, Nov 14, 2026 · 7 of 7 found**	

STEP 0 · THE MESS

What landed on Ruth's desk

An enthusiastic email from the CEO, an RFP summary with its terms, a short note from the bid team, two lines from legal and what sales operations knows about the customer. The opportunity is real. So are the terms.

EMAIL · CEO [1]

Northshore

"This is the one we've been waiting for: $140M over 8 years … It's strategic."

1 **Pressure from the top.**

RFP SUMMARY [2]

Key terms

Mandatory at submission: IRIS certification … Liquidated damages: no cap.

2 **Read the terms.**

NOTE · BID TEAM [3]

Hamilton

"Hamilton's IRIS certification audit is booked for February 2027."

3 **Check the date.**

NOTE · LEGAL [4]

Policy

"Our policy caps liquidated damages at 10% of contract value."

4 **Our own rules.**

NOTE · SALES OPS [5]

The customer

"The incumbent won all three … the award may be split."

5 **What's it worth?**

YOU'RE NOT ALONE

45%

is the average win rate proposal teams report on the RFPs they answer, so more than half of bids are lost.

Loopio with APMP, 2025 RFP Response Trends & Benchmarks Report (1,544 participants). Source

STEPS 1–3 · HOW IT WORKS

Three steps, one chat

Here the AI works through a decision with pressure from the top. The prompt points it at what could rule you out.

1 Open a new chat

Use the AI tool your company approves: ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini or Copilot.

2 Paste the prompt and the inputs

Copy the prompt and the five fictional inputs from the appendix into one message.

3 Check the dates yourself

Put the submission date next to the certification date, and the first milestone next to your delivery date. Then decide what to ask the customer.

THE PROMPT, PART BY PART

COPY-READY VERSION IN THE APPENDIX

I'm Chief Revenue Officer at a rail equipment manufacturer. Our CEO wants us to bid on a large transit maintenance RFP. Bids are due Friday, December 11, and I've promised him a go/no-go by Friday, December 4. Today is Tuesday, December 1. Below are his email, a summary of the RFP and its terms, our bid team's note, legal's comments, and our sales operations notes on the customer.

1 Who you are, who's pushing, the bid date, your decision date and today's date.

Please give me a one-page go/no-go:

1. **My recommendation**: bid, don't bid, or bid only if..., in two sentences.
2. **Anything that rules us out or breaks our own policy**, with the input that shows it.
3. **What the deal is really worth, and what it could cost us**, on the RFP's own terms.
4. **What would change the answer**, who decides each point, and by when.

2 A recommendation with conditions, what rules you out or breaks policy, what the deal is worth and could cost, and what would change the answer.

Read the terms for what could disqualify us or cost us, not only for what we could win. Check every date against our own plan. Don't add facts that aren't in the inputs; if you assume something, say so.

3 The heavy lifting: read the terms for what disqualifies or costs you, not only what you could win, and check every date against your own plan. It found all seven problems.

WHERE TO PASTE

Every tool has one message box. Paste the prompt, add a blank line, paste the inputs, send. RFP documents can be attached as files if your tool allows it.

SAFE TO TRY

Practise with the fictional inputs first. Real RFPs and pricing are confidential and often under NDA: use only your company's approved tool, and check what the RFP allows.

THE AI'S FIRST ANSWER

What Claude actually wrote

Exactly as it came back, not edited. Read it the way Ruth did: check each point against the source it cites.

UNEDITED Claude · fresh session, no other context · Nov 14, 2026 · one run

Go/no-go: Northshore Transit bogie overhaul RFP For Ruth (CRO), decision due Friday, December 4. Bids due Friday, December 11.

1. Recommendation Don't bid on the current facts. The RFP requires IRIS certification at submission, and Hamilton's audit isn't until February 2027. Bid only if, by Friday December 4, three things are true: Northshore's answer to a clarification question (or another certified site of ours) clears the IRIS problem; we have a credible plan to deliver the first 40 bogies by June 30, 2027; and the board is ready to approve the uncapped liquidated damages and the 8-year fixed price. `B: a cap, not an exception`

2. What rules us out or breaks our policy | Issue | What the inputs say | Effect | |---|---|---| | IRIS certification | RFP [2]: IRIS (ISO/TS 22163) is mandatory at submission for the site doing the work. Bid team [3]: Hamilton's audit is booked for February 2027. | **Rules us out.** Hamilton won't be certified on December 11, 2026. Booking an audit doesn't mean we'll pass it. `found` | | First milestone | RFP [2]: first 40 bogies by June 30, 2027. Bid team [3]: Hamilton can deliver by September 2027 at current capacity. | We would plan to be late from day one, by about 9 to 13 weeks depending on the exact September date. `found` | | Liquidated damages | RFP [2]: 1% of contract value per week late, no cap. Legal [4]: our cap is 10%; uncapped needs board approval. | **Breaks policy.** Needs board approval. `found` | | Fixed price | RFP [2]: price fixed for 8 years, no escalation. Legal [4]: fixed price allowed for up to 3 years only. | **Breaks policy** by 5 years. Legal [4] doesn't say who can approve an exception (assumed board or CFO). `found` | | 25% in-province | Bid team [3]: Hamilton is in the province. | Appears met. This assumes the work at Hamilton is at least 25% of contract value. Not confirmed. | | Clarification deadline | RFP [2]: questions close Friday, December 4, the same day as your decision. | Questions have to go in **before** the decision, ideally by Wednesday, December 2. Waiting until Friday loses our only chance to ask. `found` |

3. What the deal is really worth, and what it could cost

- **$140M is not the deal.** It's Northshore's budget estimate, and the award may be split between up to two suppliers [5]. If the split is equal (my assumption, not stated), our share could be about $70M over 8 years. It could be less. `found`
- **Margin:** 14% at today's steel prices [3]. That's about $19.6M on $140M, or about $9.8M on $70M, spread over 8 years. With no escalation, any rise in steel prices comes straight out of that margin. The inputs don't quantify that risk.
- **Late-delivery cost on the first milestone alone:** 1% of contract value per week. That's $1.4M a week on $140M, or $0.7M on $70M.
  - At 9 weeks late, that's 9% of contract value ($12.6M or $6.3M).
  - At 13 weeks late (end of September), it's 13% ($18.2M or $9.1M). That wipes out nearly all of the 8-year margin and goes past our 10% policy cap.
  - Damages are charged "any milestone": later milestones add more, and there's no ceiling.
- **Chance of winning:** the incumbent has supplied Northshore for 12 years and won all three similar RFPs since 2019 [5]. That doesn't prove we'd lose, but it argues against putting heavy bid cost and policy exceptions behind this. `found`
- **"Strategic, gets us into North American transit"** [1] is the CEO's view. The inputs give no figures to support or size it.

4. What would change the answer, who decides, and by when `C: the CEO's page is shorter` | Question | Who decides | By when | |---|---|---| | Will Northshore accept certification after submission, or a certified partner or alternate site? (clarification question) | Bid team submits; Northshore answers | Submit by Wed Dec 2; questions close Fri Dec 4 | | Can the Hamilton IRIS audit move before December 11? (Assumed unlikely; not stated.) | Quality / operations | Wed Dec 2 | | Will Northshore move the June 30, 2027 milestone or cap liquidated damages? (clarification question) | Bid team asks; Northshore answers | Fri Dec 4 | | Can Hamilton add capacity to deliver 40 bogies by June 30, 2027, and at what cost to the 14% margin? | Operations / finance | Thu Dec 3 | | Will the board approve uncapped damages and an 8-year fixed price, and can it meet before December 11? | Board (exception route for the fixed price to be confirmed with legal) | Board must be scheduled by Fri Dec 4 to decide before Fri Dec 11 | | Is our likely contract value $140M, $70M or something else? Does Hamilton's work meet the 25% in-province rule? | Sales ops / bid team | Thu Dec 3 |

If the IRIS answer is "no", the decision is no-bid, whatever the other answers are. Tell Martin by Friday, December 4, and say you'd recommend preparing for Northshore's next RFP once Hamilton is certified. `A: tell the CEO first`

Assumptions I made: an equal two-way split; "by September 2027" meaning between September 1 and September 30; the board or CFO being the approver for pricing exceptions; and the RFP's clarification process allowing questions about the mandatory terms.

`found` caught a planted problem `A–C` Ruth changes it; see the next section

THE HUMAN PART

What Ruth changed, and why

Claude found every planted problem and spotted that the clarification window closes on decision day. Ruth's edits are about the CEO, where she draws the line, and length.

WHAT CLAUDE FOUND: 7 OF 7 PLANTED PROBLEMS

One run

- ✓ Certification missing at submission
- ✓ First milestone missed
- ✓ Uncapped penalties
- ✓ 8-year fixed price
- ✓ “$140M” may be split
- ✓ Incumbent won 3 of 3
- ✓ Ask before you decide

THREE EDITS, ALL JUDGMENT CALLS

	CLAUDE WROTE	RUTH'S VERSION	WHY · RELATIONSHIP
A	“If the IRIS answer is "no", the decision is no-bid … Tell Martin by Friday, December 4.”	**Ruth calls Martin today, before the questions go in. He hears about the certification problem from her first and agrees the questions.**	He asked for a bid. Learning on Friday that his deal was in trouble since Tuesday would cost more than the deal.

	CLAUDE WROTE	RUTH'S VERSION	WHY · DECISION
B	Bid only if … “the board is ready to approve the uncapped liquidated damages and the 8-year fixed price.”	**Bid only if Northshore caps the damages, and only if the 8-year fixed price is changed by Northshore or approved by whoever legal names, before submission. Ruth doesn't plan to take an uncapped exception to the board for a bid the incumbent has won three times running.**	Both are conditions of bidding, not things to get waived after the fact. Board time is better spent on deals the company can win.

	CLAUDE WROTE	RUTH'S VERSION	WHY · LENGTH
C	A six-row table of questions, owners and dates.	**The CEO sees the recommendation, four terms and this week's two steps. The question table goes to the bid team.**	The CEO decides whether to back a bid. The bid team needs the full list.

What only you can do Bring the CEO in before the bad news is final, decide where your line is, and give him the page he needs. The AI read the terms. You decide what the company won't sign.

YOUR TURN

Make it yours

Use it whenever you're deciding whether to bid: an RFP, a tender, a large proposal someone senior wants you to chase.

YOUR PROMPT: FILL IN THE BRACKETS

I'm the **[your role]** at a **[industry]** company. **[Who]** wants us to bid on **[the RFP]**. Bids are due **[date]**, and I've promised a go/no-go by **[date]**. Today is **[date]**. Below are **[the request, the RFP's key terms, our bid team's note, legal's comments, what we know about the customer]**.

Please give me a one-page go/no-go: **1. My recommendation**: bid, don't bid, or bid only if..., in two sentences. **2. Anything that rules us out or breaks our own policy**, with the input that shows it. **3. What the deal is really worth, and what it could cost us**, on the RFP's own terms. **4. What would change the answer**, who decides each point, and by when.

Read the terms for what could disqualify us or cost us, not only for what we could win. Check every date against our own plan. Don't add facts that aren't in the inputs; if you assume something, say so.

FIVE CHECKS BEFORE YOU DECIDE

1. Every mandatory requirement is met on the submission date, not later.
2. Every milestone is checked against your own delivery plan.
3. Penalties are costed against the margin, in weeks late.
4. The contract value is the one you could actually win, not the budget.
5. Clarification questions go in before the window closes.

MAKE IT REPEATABLE (OPTIONAL)

Save the prompt once and reuse it for every bid decision: a custom GPT in ChatGPT, a project in Claude, a Gem in Gemini, or an agent in Copilot. Some companies switch these off; copy and paste always works.

WITH REAL DATA

RFPs, pricing and legal terms are confidential and often under NDA. Use only the AI tool your company approves, check what the RFP allows you to share, and take contract questions to legal.

WHAT THIS EXAMPLE SHOWS

One run of this prompt in Claude found all seven problems planted in fictional inputs and spotted that the clarification window closes on decision day.

WHAT IT DOESN'T SHOW

That every tool, setting or run will do the same, how much time it saves you, or what any real contract or certification requires. Tamsin Rail Systems, Northshore Transit and their people are fictional.

APPENDIX

Copy-ready: the prompt and the five inputs

Copy the prompt, then all five inputs, into one message in a new chat. Everything here is fictional and safe to paste. One note: the fictional RFP names the certification standard as ISO/TS 22163, its older name. The current standard is ISO 22163:2023, used with IRIS Certification Rev.04. We kept the wording the AI was tested on; neither it nor we spotted this before review.

THE PROMPT

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Read the terms for what could disqualify us or cost us, not only for what we could win. Check every date against our own plan. Don't add facts that aren't in the inputs; if you assume something, say so.

[1] EMAIL FROM MARTIN HALE, CEO

Ruth, this is the one we've been waiting for: $140M over 8 years with Northshore Transit. It's strategic and it gets us into North American transit. I want us to bid. Your call by Friday.

[2] RFP SUMMARY AND KEY TERMS (NORTHSHORE TRANSIT, BOGIE OVERHAUL AND SPARES)

- Scope: overhaul of 320 bogies over 8 years, plus spare parts. The first 40 overhauled by June 30, 2027.
- Mandatory at submission: IRIS rail quality certification (ISO/TS 22163) for the site doing the work.
- Liquidated damages: 1% of contract value for each week any milestone is late. No cap.
- At least 25% of contract value performed in the province.
- Price fixed for the full 8 years, with no escalation.
- Clarification questions close Friday, December 4.

[3] NOTE FROM THE BID TEAM

We'd do the work at our Hamilton site, which is in the province. Hamilton's IRIS certification audit is booked for February 2027. Our price gives a 14% margin at today's steel prices. At current capacity, Hamilton can deliver the first 40 bogies by September 2027.

[4] COMMENTS FROM LEGAL

Our policy caps liquidated damages at 10% of contract value; anything uncapped needs board approval. Our pricing policy allows fixed prices for up to 3 years without indexation.

[5] SALES OPERATIONS NOTES ON NORTHSHORE

The incumbent has supplied Northshore for 12 years. Northshore has run three similar RFPs since 2019, and the incumbent won all three. The $140M is Northshore's budget estimate; the RFP says the award may be split between up to two suppliers.