

Richard Arden

**Rail 2014 New Franchise Consultation
Response to Transport Scotland**

by Richard Arden.

1. I have found it impossible to fit my comments on the future operation of ScotRail and the future financing of Network Rail into the structure imposed by the response form. My views are outlined briefly below.

Passenger Representation

2. Passengers want to have pride and confidence in Scotland's Railway. They also want to have more of a say in its running. There needs to be a much stronger consumer representation organisation fully covering all areas of Scotland. **A new effective "Rail Passengers' Committee for Scotland" is required.**

Rolling Stock

3. **Passengers want to see a proper standard of inter-city rolling stock on services between Edinburgh/Glasgow and Aberdeen/Inverness.** This is evident from frequent correspondence in the Scottish press. Passengers have no means of knowing whether the current franchise holder (or indeed anybody) has been championing their views with Government over a number of years and their frustration is evident in the newspapers.
4. **To achieve the goal of modal shift, such trains have to be equal or better than the private car.** Without being too prescriptive, this requirement could be met by IC 125 trains in 2 plus 5 formations refurbished to their original seating density, or by a completely new train.

Infrastructure and Service Improvements

5. While there has been lots of welcome railway investment in the Central Belt, the Strategic Transport Projects Review (STPR) schemes for the Borders and for the Highland lines are taking far too long to implement. They are long overdue improvements which are strategic for the whole of Scotland to improve connectivity between cities and regions.
6. Services to Inverness and, to some extent, Aberdeen are dependent on single track lines with passing places. This severely limits the capacity of these lines for both passenger and freight trains. In 2004, I supplied a paper to the Scottish Government suggesting that these lines should be incrementally improved by a **Highland Counties Rail Track Scheme** similar to the old Crofter Counties Roads Scheme.

7. **A new Highland Main Line hourly service frequency of trains with journey times less than three hours was promised by the First Minister in 2008.** There is no sign yet of the reinstatement of the former passing loops now required for this. The suggestion in the Scottish Government's Infrastructure Investment Plan (SGIIP) in December that this "priority project" may not be completed until 2025 has come as a most unwelcome shock to the business community throughout Scotland. Some slippage can be understood, due to the current capital constraints, but this is excessive.
8. First arrivals in Edinburgh at 10.00; in Glasgow at 10.14; and in Inverness at 10.28 are not attractive to the business community, particularly those travelling from Edinburgh to Inverness where the connecting service takes only one minute less than four hours! This is not competitive. **It is possible to run to Inverness in three hours now, and there is an urgent need for limited stop morning and evening business trains between Edinburgh/Glasgow and Inverness in three hours or less to be introduced before 2014.**
9. **The Inverness to Aberdeen hourly service frequency of trains with journey times of two hours is an STPR priority which was promised for completion in 2016.** This project was first requested by ScotRail in 1994. The railway can still be quicker than the road and there is plenty of intermediate traffic to make an improved service very attractive. Once again, the suggestion in the new SGIIP that this may not now happen until 2030 has been most unwelcome.
10. **May we please have both the HML and Inverness to Aberdeen STPR improvements completed during the 2014 – 2019 control period?**
11. The Far North Line journey from Inverness to Wick via Thurso was slowed down by 25 minutes in 2005. Journey times are not competitive and Network Rail at the highest level agrees that substantial improvements to this line are necessary.
12. **Passenger comfort on station platforms and waiting shelters could be improved by providing covers for sale or hire to take away the coldness from the metal seats which have now become a standard feature.**

Cross-Border Services

13. **Both sleeper and daytime cross-border trains should not only continue, but be increased in number.** Having to do more changing of trains at Edinburgh would lose passengers to rail. Currently, Trans Pennine trains arrive in Edinburgh just after the Inverness trains have departed. **An Inverness-Lancashire-West Midlands via Motherwell service should be reinstated.**

The New Operator

14. Whatever the outcome of the Referendum, the Scottish Government does not want to be locked in to an over-expensive franchising system for a long period.
15. It is indefensible that national rail companies from the rest of the world may bid to run Scotland's railways, with the exception of Scotland's government. Legislation may be needed to change this.
16. **ScotRail should be run as a not-for-profit company** so that any profits are ploughed back in to the railway.
17. **ScotRail and Network Rail Scotland should both be run by not-for-profit companies ultimately owned by the Scottish Government.**
18. **Rolling stock and track assets etc should be owned by the Scottish Government.**
19. This would be the most effective way to bring down costs and prevent money leaking out in train and track leasing costs, delay minutes charges, administering and arguing over the same, franchisee profits and shareholder dividends.
20. Obviously some of the delay minutes system might have to continue with respect to other passenger and freight franchisees currently using Scottish tracks.
21. If the system advocated in 16) and 17) above cannot be implemented in time for 2014, a Scottish version of Directly Operated Railways would have to be arranged as an interim operator.
22. It is unfortunate that the new operating structure is being considered for implementation at a time of severe financial stringency. This will almost inevitably have a deleterious effect on desirable improvements. It is important to remember that railway equipment (particularly trains), has a long shelf life and an inch taken off leg room as a cost saving measure now would affect passengers for the next forty years. **It is important to maximise improvements and money saved by going for a not-for-profit operator would facilitate this.**

RJA/20 February 2012.

Respondent information form and questions follows as page 4.