

Respondent Information Form and Questions

Please Note this form **must** be returned with your response to ensure that we handle your response appropriately

1. Name/Organisation

Organisation Name

Blair Atholl & Struan Community Council

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3. Permissions - I am responding as...

Individual

/ Group/Organisation

Please tick as appropriate

☒

- (a) Do you agree to your response being made available to the public (in Scottish Government library and/or on the Scottish Government web site)?

Please tick as appropriate Yes ☐ No

- (b) Where confidentiality is not requested, we will make your responses available to the public on the following basis

Please tick ONE of the following boxes

Yes, make my response, name and address all available

or ☐

Yes, make my response available, but not my name and address

or ☐

Yes, make my response and name available, but not my address

- (c) The name and address of your organisation **will be** made available to the public (in the Scottish Government library and/or on the Scottish Government web site).

Are you content for your **response** to be made available?

Please tick as appropriate ☒ Yes ☐ No

- (d) We will share your response internally with other Scottish Government policy teams who may be addressing the issues you discuss. They may wish to contact you again in the future, but we require your permission to do so. Are you content for Scottish Government to contact you again in relation to this consultation exercise?

Please tick as appropriate

☒ Yes

☐ No

Consultation Questions

The answer boxes will expand as you type.

Procuring rail passenger services

1. What are the merits of offering the ScotRail franchise as a dual focus franchise and what services should be covered by the economic rail element, and what by the social rail element?

Q1 comments: Not sure about the merits. Some disadvantages are: (1) how do services move from one franchise to the other as economic conditions affecting a service change? (2) will social rail be treated as less important when conflicts arise and will either franchisee hold trains for late-running connections, bearing in mind that social services are likely to be much less frequent? (3) what if some services on an otherwise economic route are not economic? Will the same operator run them or will another operator have to step in with all the cost implications?

2. What should be the length of the contract for future franchises, and what factors lead you to this view?

Q2 comments: Long enough to allow a good level of investment in enhancements and promoting services – at least 10 and perhaps 20 years, with interim reviews say every 5 years to ensure new economic, social and environmental conditions can be properly reflected. In particular, the whole franchise should be reviewed when the HS line is due to open so that Scottish internal services are aligned with the new services.

3. What risk support mechanism should be reflected within the franchise?

Q3 No comment

4. What, if any, profit share mechanism should apply within the franchise?

Q4 No comment

5. Under what terms should third parties be involved in the operation of passenger rail services?

Q5 comments: These should be encouraged provided they do not have a serious adverse effect on the taxpayer or rail passenger. Sometimes, some support will be required initially, but if the case is good enough and there is a long-term return to the taxpayer or passenger, then that should be encouraged

6. What is the best way to structure and incentivise the achievement of outcome measures whilst ensuring value for money?

Q6 No comment

7. What level of performance bond and/or parent company guarantees are appropriate?

Q7 Normal practice should apply

8. What sanctions should be used to ensure the franchisee fulfils its franchise commitments?

Q8 No comment

Achieving reliability, performance and service quality

9. Under the franchise, should we incentivise good performance or only penalise poor performance?

Q9 comments: The franchise is let under the assumption of good performance and only the penalty aspect should remain

10. Should the performance regime be aligned with actual routes or service groups, or should there be one system for the whole of Scotland?

Q10 comments: There should be different regimes for different types of service, reflecting the predominant passenger type on each service. For example, commuters value reliability and punctuality highly, whereas “leisure” and “social rail” customers may be more interested in on-board service and reliability of connections.

11. How can we make the performance regime more aligned with passenger issues?

Q11 comments: See response to Q10. Need to ensure there is a system for obtaining passenger views, not just station groups (which may not be representative of all views in the area). Main source should be on-train views.

12. What should the balance be between journey times and performance?

Q12 comments: It is important, particularly for journeys involving changes, that trains arrive at (or before) the time stated. For business users and commuters, journey time is probably more important. This implies a different approach at off-peak times. On Dutch railways in the 1980s, trains generally ran “on time” but seemed to spend a long time at stations. A similar approach in Scotland should be considered. Passenger views should be sought on the relative benefits of shorter published journey times against punctuality.

13. Is a Service Quality Incentive Regime required? And if so should it cover all aspects of stations and service delivery, or just those being managed through the franchise?

Q13 comments: Emphatically YES! This should cover those factors which most affect passengers' perceptions of railway services, eg refurbishment of Victorian bridges at stations and keeping the line side free of litter.

14. What other mechanisms could be used for assessing train and station quality?

Q14 For unmanned stations, there is a need to consult with a suitable local body such as the Community Council.

Scottish train services

15. Can better use be made of existing train capacity, such as increasing the permitted standing time beyond the limit of 10 minutes or increasing the capacity limit? What is an acceptable limit for standing times on rail services?

Q15 comments: 10 minutes seems very short. 20 – 30 minutes seems acceptable (provided able-bodied present day passengers can be persuaded to recognise when they should give up their seats to those in greater need)

16. Should the number of services making use of interchange stations (both rail to rail and rail to other modes) be increased to reduce the number of direct services? What would be the opportunities and challenges of this?

Q16 comments: Rail to other modes – YES!!! Rail to rail – No. Opportunities would be to encourage use of public transport. Biggest challenge is to get operators to speak to each other and make sure (1) timetables fit and (2) connections are held as far as practicable. As an example close to home, the infrequent bus service between Blair Atholl and Pitlochry appears to take no notice of the times of trains that stop at Pitlochry but not Blair Atholl. The only concession we have seen locally in a timetable is that the last local bus north from Blair Atholl (at about 6.00pm) would wait up to about 5 minutes for the train if the bus operator was notified before 12.00 (no longer relevant due to changes in the train timetable). However, hubs are important where through services are impractical eg Blair Atholl to Dundee / Aberdeen. There should be an incentive to develop these to make them more attractive, both in physical terms (shorter / easier walks between trains) and also to improve connection times – it's very annoying to find a connection will be missed by a few minutes when the services are hourly or less frequent.

17. Should Government direct aspects of service provision such as frequency and journey time, or would these be better determined by the franchisee based on customer demand?

Q17 comments: Government should set a challenge to the franchisee to do better, but restrict the ability of the operators to impose interchange as this causes difficulties with heavy luggage and disability. If the franchisee is determining services by customer demand, then there has to be proper consultation to find out what demand there is. As an example, we are not aware of any local consultation prior to the recent “improvements” to the Highland Main Line timetable, which have generally resulted in a poorer service from Blair Atholl. It would require a major effort, but local transport surveys could be very useful. Many of these could be organised using local volunteers at low cost if the local communities thought the results would be listened to.

18. What level of contract specification should we use for the next ScotRail franchise?

Q18 Targeted specification to protect the customer whilst still encouraging the franchisee

19. How should the contract incentivise the franchisee to be innovative in the provision of services?

Q19 comments: Particularly if it is a long franchise, it should allow the franchisee the opportunity to get a level of support for innovation provided a good case is made and there is a long-term benefit to taxpayer and/or passenger. In such cases, the costs and benefits should be shared.

Scottish rail fares

20. What should be the rationale for, and purpose of, our fares policy?

Q20 comments: Primary objective should be to encourage use of public transport (all modes). Needs, for example, (1) through ticketing for all journeys (ideally with reduced fares being available for the whole journey without each sector having to be booked separately); (2) inter-availability of tickets on train and bus for whole or part of journey. This will obviously need work with bus and ferry operators as well, but should be a medium term (5 year) goal of the franchise.

21. What fares should be regulated by government and what should be set on a commercial basis? Do your recommendations change by geographic area (the Strathclyde area example), or by type of journey (for example suburban or intercity)?

Q21 comments:

22. How should we achieve a balance between the taxpayer subsidy and passenger revenue contributions in funding the Scottish rail network? At what rate should fares be increased, and how feasible would it be to apply higher increases to Sections of the network which have recently been enhanced?

Q22 comments: Why should fares necessarily be increased? Why not be bold and look at Europe? According to some reports, UK fares are the highest in Europe, yet subsidies are also high. How do subsidies elsewhere compare? Maybe instead of lots of different cheap fares, there should be a real reduction in all fares. This might take a few years as no doubt extra trains would be required, but there could be a long-term benefit for rail passengers, taxpayers and the environment.

23. What should the difference be between peak and off-peak fares? Will this help encourage people to switch to travelling in the off-peak?

Q23 comments: The concept of “ peak” is less applicable north of Perth and differences should be minimised. Travellers beyond Perth with off-peak tickets should not be restricted from using peak services from Edinburgh and Glasgow. Using the current situation for Blair Atholl as an example, it is not practical to have a day out in Edinburgh at an off-peak fare of any description (first off-peak train arrives around 13.30, even though it is only 80 miles away; off-peak return at either 14.30 or 19.30). A day out in Glasgow is similar, although advance fares can be booked on the 07.12 from Blair Atholl (not exactly a time for off-peak travel) with arrival around 09.15. Return times are similar to Edinburgh. NOTHING would encourage people to switch to off-peak for these journeys except more trains stopping at Blair Atholl.

Scottish stations

24. How should we determine what rail stations are required and where, including whether a station should be closed?

Q24 comments: New stations should be considered where there is potential demand that would reduce car journeys. Conversely, stations should not be closed just because people don't use them. It is important to ask why they are not used. If the service is poor, then a proper investigation needs to be carried out to see if there is unmet demand. In rural areas where bus services as well as train services are infrequent, the train may be a vital element that sustains a community. Full LOCAL consultation is essential and must be fully taken into account before any closure is considered. An improved / more frequent service may prove more economical than closing a station.

25. What are the merits or issues that arise from a third party (such as a local authority or local business) being able to propose, promote and fund a station or service?

Q25 comments: If the franchisee appears to be failing to respond to a local

need, then third parties should be encouraged to propose, promote and fund stations or services. The franchise needs to recognise this to ensure the franchisee does not take the benefits without contributing.

26. Should only one organisation be responsible for the management and maintenance of stations? If this was the franchisee how should that responsibility be structured in terms of leasing, investment, and issues relating to residual capital value?

Q26 comments: In principle, there seems no reason why stations should not be managed by a range of parties (with only one organisation for any one station) and the franchisee should be allowed to do this. The franchisee would need to have an obligation to look after any “unclaimed” stations. The franchisee should be encouraged to invest throughout the franchise with the expectation of getting a reasonable return (need to watch perverse incentives that encourage poor-value investment at the end of the franchise). Questions should be asked about why the annual leasing costs of stations in Table 5 are so high and what Network Rail does for the money. How do the leasing costs for other stations compare?

27. How can local communities be encouraged to support their local station?

Q27 comments: By ensuring the franchisee has an obligation to approach local groups (eg Community Council) on a regular basis (every 2-3 years) to invite local involvement and offer support. This should include what station facilities could be made available, eg unused rooms.

28. What categories of station should be designated and what facilities should be available at each category of station?

Q28 comments: Unmanned stations like Blair Atholl should have shelter on both platforms giving all-round protection. This needs to include shade from the sun. At present the shelter on the southbound platform is inadequate – no shade from the sun in the middle of the day, and shelter from wind / rain on only two sides. Other essential facilities are a public telephone nearby; access from the platform to rail enquiries, information boards, cycle racks, car parking and an access road in reasonable condition (Blair Atholl has large potholes which are impossible to avoid in a car).

Cross-border services

29. Should cross-border services continue to go north of Edinburgh? In operating alongside ScotRail services, how do cross-border services benefit passengers and taxpayers? And who should specify these services, the Department of Transport or the Scottish Ministers?

Q29 comments: YES. They benefit passengers by allowing (and encouraging) long-distance passengers to use the train rather than car. The

through service to Inverness is used predominantly by “leisure” passengers due to the timing, but is usually appears to be patronised. The services should be JOINTLY specified by DoT and SMs – passengers using these services originate in both Scotland and England. Lots of long-distance and through services operate in Europe – we should do this too. The French have even built a high-speed line round Paris to assist long-distance travel. Stopping all long-distance services in Edinburgh is like insisting all flights into the UK arrive in London.

30. Or should the cross-border services terminate at Edinburgh Waverley, allowing opportunities for Scottish connections? And if so, what additional benefits would accrue from having an Edinburgh Hub?

Q30 comments: CERTIANLY NOT. Past experience tells us that one operator will not wait for another operator's late-running train. Passengers do not want to have to get off a train and onto a bus because there is no alternative train; equally they do not want to wait for ages when a connection has just been missed.

IF (and we would do not support the option) a Hub is created at Edinburgh, certain trains need to be identified as important connections. As far as possible (and this needs far more co-operation between the two Train Operators involved and Network Rail than is apparent at present), connections should be possible on the level and ideally at adjoining platforms, but certainly without having to change level or go through ticket barriers. Waverley Station is not ideal as a Hub and would require further extensive re-modelling.

Rolling stock

31. What alternative strategies or mechanisms could be used to reduce the cost of the provision of rolling stock?

Q31 comments: EGIP will release 170s allowing longer trains to be used

32. What facilities should be present on a train and to what extent should these facilities vary according to the route served?

Q32 comments: Our main interest is in longer distance services. These require (1) good accommodation for luggage and cycles - the space available on class 158 and 170 trains is inadequate; (2) sockets for charging phones and computers; (3) good catering services appropriate to the time of day; (4) a good view from all seats – some of the seats on class 158 and 170 trains feel very enclosed; either provide decent 1st class accommodation or don't bother. Some passengers use East Coast services within Scotland because they offer a better environment, better facilities and better catering.

The basic provision on trains should be an ability to get a seat, enough clean toilets, adequate luggage space and a clean environment at an acceptable

temperature

Passengers – information, security and services

33. How should we prioritise investment for mobile phone provision and / or Wi-Fi type high-bandwidth services?

Q33 comments: If buses provide Wi-Fi then all trains should do so too

34. How should we balance the need for additional seating capacity and retain the flexibility of a franchisee to offer first-class services if commercially viable?

Q34 comments: Use longer trains and stop trying to use the same trains for so many different services. The existing First Class provision on our line is not even adequate.

35. What issues and evidence should be considered prior to determining whether or not to ban the consumption of alcohol on trains?

Q35 comments: Is there a regular problem on a service or group of services? If so, ban in the same way as for football matches. One way to control consumption would be to insist on purchasing on board – this should also ensure that excessive drinking is prevented (may be difficult to enforce without police presence, but penalties could be severe to discourage)

36. How can the provision of travel information for passengers be further improved?

Q36 comments: Better information on problems arising from late trains, eg expected arrival times, connections – particularly on single lines where simply adding current minutes late to the timetable may not apply (for example a train leaving Perth on time can be 15 minutes late by Pitlochry because of the need to wait to pass another train – the on-board information has to know where trains will actually pass and the consequences of this)

Caledonian Sleeper

37. Should we continue to specify sleeper services, or should this be a purely commercial matter for a train operating company?

Q37 comments: We believe the sleeper provides is vital for this area as so many of our communities are hours away from an airport. This will become more important with moves to reduce transport-related emissions, which will discourage people from travelling by car and air. The sleeper therefore must be specified..

38. Should the Caledonian Sleeper services be contracted for separately from the main ScotRail franchise? Or should it be an option for within the main ScotRail franchise?

Q38 comments: As it appears to be a self-contained service with no overlap with other ScotRail services, it could be offered as a separate franchise – there may be someone who has innovative ideas to improve the service. However, it must be compatible with the rest of the franchise.

39. We would be interested in your views in the level and type of service that the Caledonian Sleeper Services should provide. Including:

- What is the appeal of the Caledonian Sleeper Service, and if there were more early and late trains would the appeal of the sleeper services change?
- What is the value of sleeper services to Fort William, Inverness and Aberdeen and are these the correct destinations, for example would Oban provide better connectivity?
- What facilities should the sleeper services provide and would you pay more for better facilities?

Q39 comments:

- You can spend a complete day in England or Scotland and therefore no time is lost in travel. Appeal from Blair Atholl is the ability to get to Central London for an early start. From Highland Perthshire, the alternative is to leave around 4.00 am for the first flight or travel the day before. In the other direction, you can arrive in Blair Atholl early morning and hire your bikes from the Base Camp offices, travel around Highland Perthshire and get back on the train in the late evening and back to London for the next day
- The sleeper to and from Inverness is vital because of the lack of timely access to alternative early morning / late evening services to / from Central Scotland.
- The sleeping cars and the lounge cars should be of a good standard and consideration be given to dimmed lighting and a reasonable temperature throughout the train. Wi-Fi is essential. We suggest that en-suite toilets should be standard for 1st class.

Environmental issues

40. What environmental key performance indicators should we consider for inclusion in the franchise agreement or the High Level Output Specification?

Q40 comments:

- Greater use of electric trains.

- Use of recycling bags to collect rubbish on the train as opposed to the present black bags for all rubbish
- There should be an incentive to reduce all waste. However, care should be taken to ensure that the franchisee is not penalised for providing more services and thereby reducing Scotland's overall carbon and other emissions.

Further suggestions Blair Atholl & Struan Community Council wishes to be considered

1. 170s could be replaced by Voyager Trains. 158s should be limited to short-distance commuter services.
2. The two extra trains each way between Perth and Inverness seven days a week have not given any benefits to passengers to and from Blair Atholl, and for many journeys the service is poorer than before. We would like to see more trains stopping at Blair Atholl, with times to suit the requirements of potential passengers. Consideration should be given to an hourly service with alternate trains stopping at every station. The last train from Edinburgh to get to Blair Atholl in the evening leaves at 1936 !
3. The 0713 from Blair Atholl to Edinburgh is very unreliable and therefore folk are not using it. It is thought it would improve if it became the 0555 from Inverness. The second train south from Blair Atholl is not until 1114, and doesn't reach Edinburgh and Glasgow until well after 1300 !