

Transport Scotland Rail 2014 Consultation

Response to Questionnaire from Janetta Christie (Caithness)

Q1. A single rather than a dual franchise should suffice for all Scotland's requirements.

It is necessary to ensure that any future franchise offers the best possible value for money to taxpayers and passengers.

Q2. Probably between 5-7 years would be a suitable time for a franchise.

Q9. I feel it is unnecessary for incentives to be given to do a good job but certainly penalties given for any failures.

Should the aims and aspirations of the travellers be fulfilled then the incentive would be to offer a further few years added to the franchise. Only if very bad reports given on performance should a franchise be withdrawn. Travellers should be made aware of how to send in their complaints. Not everyone uses e.g. e-mails. Complaint forms should not only be available at stations (as is the custom) but, also, on board trains (as they used to be).

Q15. No-one should be expected to stand for more than 10 minutes on any journey. Continued monitoring of situations where overcrowding takes place should highlight where and when extra coaches are needed.

Q16. There may be a place for interchange stations on some routes but, on the whole, I feel that these should not be introduced on "Direct Routes" which are valued by those wanting an uninterrupted and hassle-free journey from A to B.

Q17. The Government ought to give some guidance on what is to be expected as regards service provision e.g. All areas, whether they be in the busy Central region or in the quieter, remote places, should all be regarded as important and provided with a good rail system suitable to their needs.

Q20. The fare structure is far too complicated: too many different prices for the same journey. Single fares should be fairer. Why are people not allowed to break their journey en-route to somewhere but can do so on their return journey? A Concessionary travel scheme (as on bus services) might be worth considering. The \$19 Anywhere in Scotland scheme is a good offer worth retaining. However, as with most offers, there is not enough Advertising.

Q22. Fares should not be increased too much as this may discourage those already rail travellers who may then revert to cars and buses and may also discourage new clients.

I feel it would be unfair to charge more to those who live in an area which requires to be subsidised and to those in whose areas rail improvements have been made.

Again, more advertising could help generate more income.

e.g. Rail/hotel offers when certain shows/exhibitions are on in various parts of the country.....not only in the south but, also in the north of Scotland. Could there be someone whose job would be to advertise in local papers and on noticeboards in cities, towns and villages?

Q23. It is necessary to make Off-peak fares much cheaper to encourage more folk to travel at less busy times.

Q24. The closing of any stationeven if under-used...should not be on the agenda. In fact,in this day and age, we actually require more stations to be opened. Some may have been closed in the past and others may be new. One I should like to mention is at Dornoch. It has long been realised that re-opening a Station there would benefit many folk. This would involve a rail bridge across the Firth there which would cut the journey time by 45minutes between Wick/Thurso and Inverness. In 2001 the Scottish Executive did a survey asking what improvements people wanted. To our delight, a Dornoch Firth Rail Link came 4th in the list. In the Autumn of 2011, DoRLAG (Dornoch Rail Link Action Group) did a survey involving over 500 rail travellers. The results proved that 90% of people said that they would use the train more often if the journey time to and from Inverness was shorter. People in the Far North travel by train not only for business, shopping and leisure but also for Appointments at Raigmore Hospital in Inverness. The elderly especially need a comfortable, fast train to get from A to B and back. Therefore, it is disappointing to learn that there are to be scarcely any improvements on the Far North Line planned for within the next 10 years because, we are told, it does not meet the Benefit Cost Ratio. We do welcome the minor improvements promised (more loops, better signalling,etc) but we must ensure that a Dornoch Firth Rail Bridge project and the re-opening of Dornoch Station stay on the agenda until there is more money in the kitty!

Q25 Regarding the taking care of Stations, it seems an excellent idea to employ a third party to look after and maintain them. Local Authorities seem to have difficulty coping with their work-load but the involvement of local community groups and also keen individuals may work well. I think the franchisee/s should take on the responsibility of leasing any part of a station to a third party and decide on conditions and charge. Stations take on a more interesting look and feel brighter with activities going on within them. This has been visible in a few of Scotland's stations. Artists, too, have been producing murals to cheer us up!

Q28 It is essential that all stations have toilet facilities. The opening and closing times could coincide with those of the stations. When it comes to shelter at stations complaints do arise, especially during Winter time. According to NetWork Rail "Passengers should have shelter from the elements". However, the main section of Thurso station is often locked. In the very bad Winter of 2010 at least 20 morning passengers were left to stand for 40 minutes in the freezing cold at the front entrance to await alternative transport...taxis and mini-buses (the trains having been cancelled). This can occur quite often! Someone should be put on duty at those times to look after the passengers and allow them to wait in comfort within the main building area. At least, there is now a free-phone at the station to inform folk of cancellations,etc.....though not everyone knows it is there to make use of. There is usually one person who does know of its existence, finds out the information and all the other passengers usually follow like sheep! The tourists,however, stand, looking bewildered!

Q29 It is important to keep the Cross-border services as they are with no-one travelling beyond Edinburgh having to change trains. Should it be altered, many folk, I am sure, would not use the train. I can remember being somewhere in a "Sleeper" which was shunted into a siding for a time before being linked up to another train for the rest of the journey. Thus, there was no hassle of changing trains. If need be, perhaps this idea could be tried out.....though this can add more TIME to a journey!

Q30 Edinburgh Waverley Station has always acted as an interchange Hub as far as I remember. There are always crowds of people rushing to and fro looking for their connections to various places throughout Scotland and beyond.

Q31 Probably the electrifying of more lines would help reduce the cost of provision of rolling stock as it is. I have read it

is cheaper to build and maintain electric ones. However, as it is only certain areas (i.e. Central Belt) which are, at this time to have electrification, it looks as if we, elsewhere, shall have to wait a long time for such modernisation.

Q32 Because of the above statement, if we, elsewhere, have to have the DMUs, then it is necessary that they be re-furbished to a much higher standard than many are right now.

e.g. 1. Comfort....headrests at a more sensible height at the back and to the sides of seats.

(A sore neck is a common complaint)

Why is there such a huge difference in comfort, speed and noise levels between trains used in the Far North and those in the South? On the Far North Line one often feels that the track and train are not always compatible. The violent shaking and the noise this generates make for a most uncomfortable journey. Having had such a trip yesterday (15th February), an English traveller commented "Long ago convicts were sent overseas to Australia: now-a-days they ought to be sent on a journey on the Far North Line as a punishment"!

2. Still more leg room required.

3. Boarding and alighting made more safe.

(e.g. the gap between train and platform is often a worry at some stations)

4. Reservation tickets are not always on seats which have been reserved. (The main culprit being Waverley on the early morning train on a Sunday!)

Sometimes there can be a coach missing.

e.g. Someone may have a ticket for a reserved seat on coach B and there happens to be no coach labelled B that day.

5. Luggage space and cycle space have been improved but could be even better.

6. Noise level from the on-board info-system has, thankfully, been reduced.

7. C.C.T.V. should be compulsory in each compartment. It makes one feel so much safer these days.

8. Temperature is often a problem....sometimes too hot other times, too cold. This should be addressed.

e.g. Passengers travelling from Wick/Thurso early in the morning (some for ops/check-ups, etc. at Raigmore Hospital in Inverness) regularly have no heating or hot drinks.

How about introducing an air-ventilation system as on buses? It is most effective! When it gets too hot and uncomfortable all one has to do is turn on the air- vent above ones head to get some cool air.

9. The toilets are regularly a disgrace: the disposal of waste still needs to be addressed. Too often the toilets are over-flowing and water can be seen leaking into the corridors where people walk! This is not acceptable in this day and age. One feels ashamed, especially when traveling with foreign tourists. What must they think of this Country allowing such a situation?!
10. The modern locking system of toilet doors is not always functional. Very many people are not at all happy with the press-buttons to open, shut, lock and open again. Older folk especially say they prefer the old-fashioned and straight-forward “slotting” system where it is easy to see whether or not the door is locked.
11. Could there, perhaps, be a notice in carriages asking Parents to please control their children while travelling? Far too many use the aisles and toilets as play areas.....causing a noise and disturbance to passengers. All passengers want is to look forward to a comfortable, enjoyable and fast journey from A to B.

Q33 While it is essential for some passengers, especially business folk, to have provision (on long or busy commuter routes) for Wi-Fi, mobile phones, etc., could there also be included an area on-board which could be designated as a Quiet Area for those wanting Peace to read/rest? (As in some areas of the USA) Knowing that such a choice is available would encourage more folk to use the train. There should then be no need to have a 1st class compartment which, I have often noticed, is not always used to full capacity. The whole train should be of a high standard of comfort for all travellers. Perhaps a notice could be put up in carriages to remind mobile-phone users that not everyone on-board wants to hear their

private conversations!

Q34 As mentioned above, is it necessary to have a 1st class compartment, sometimes with very few users? How often do they have the company of folk who cannot find a seat in the standard class section? How unfair is that? What steps can be taken in the future to remedy that situation? A complete new design of train perhaps?

Q35 As far as Alcohol on trains is concerned I feel that, having had so many journeys utterly spoiled by those inebriated, then it should be entirely banned: not only the selling of it but the taking on-board of large quantities of cans and bottles of drink for so-called celebrations. It is not “a one- off” but a “regular” happening! There is no reason why the celebration cannot wait until their destination is reached! Through time the situation could cause rail travellers to decide to use the bus service because there is a complete ban of Alcohol on all buses. If a decision is made, however, not to ban alcohol on trains, then there should be stricter rules for folk to adhere to. Perhaps, when a group books seats and say it is a celebration party, a carriage could be made available for their own use and other travellers would not have to suffer. The behaviour, noise and language was so bad on one of our trips, I stood up and asked that some consideration be given for others on board. Apology was given and there was 10 minutes peace before the noise level rose again to a higher pitch as more alcohol was consumed. Then the ticket person ...who could not control the group..asked us if we would care to move to another compartment!! Information ought to be available on how to contact the Transport Police should any situation get out of hand.

Q36 Regarding suggestions on improving “Train Information” I would recommend a similar system to the recently installed and very effective one now at Inverness Station.....which covers most of what one needs to know. While actually travelling, it would be helpful if the staff on-board were kept up-to-date with any changes or hold-ups and let the passengers know rather than leave everyone wondering what is going on. At smaller stations notice-boards highlighting such information should be sufficient.

Q37 I believe that the continuing future and cost,etc. of the Caledonian Sleeper service has already been discussed and assured.

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Q38 This service should be the responsibility of the Franchisee.

Finally, our Scottish Ministers must ensure that, when an application is made for the next franchise, the future franchisee must promise to undertake the aims specified and try to realise people's vision and expectations as set out before them. There should be careful monitoring of the group chosen to ensure all its promises and requirements are being fulfilled. It is essential to have more money ploughed into our rail system if we want to encourage more people (locals, tourists and freight companies) to use it, thus helping to relieve some of the congestion on our roads. The group must also be made aware that we, living in the Far North, do not consider our rail route to be "rural". It is actually a continuation of the Main line from the South and, therefore, ought to be treated as such.

Janetta Christie
(a rail traveller for over 70 years)

