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Consultation Questions

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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:

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

Q2 comments:

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

Q3 comments:

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

All profits should be returned to the taxpayer through the form of improved transport infrastructure and services.

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

On the basis that they will deliver most for the efficiency, safety and effectiveness of the rail service and that they will meet social and environmental objectives ahead of economic ones.

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

By returning the railway to public ownership and accountability, instigating some form of social ownership, and introducing clear lines of management borrowing extensively on European experience of running railways.

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

The state should guarantee the service absolutely and totally. The most economic way of achieving this is through public ownership. Anything else will

compromise the effectiveness of an essential public service unacceptably.

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

Absolute and total sanctions. Poor performance, strictly defined, should be sanctioned through the total expropriation of the railway operation and assets back to the public without compensation in recognition of the heavily discounted fire-sale of the system to the private sector in 1993.

Achieving reliability, performance and service quality

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

Penalise poor performance. Poor performance should constitute anything less than good performance, so the question is moot.

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

One system for the whole of Scotland.

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

Through careful consideration of passenger needs, not just short term data on usage which is a self-fulfilling prophesy.

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

Good journey times *are* good performance. Adjusting the timetable to artificially create the conditions for good performance is an unacceptable compromise.

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:

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

Passenger feedback.

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?

On long distance or inter city services (this includes Glasgow-Edinburgh) standing should not be considered acceptable at all. On metropolitan services (effectively, this only means those within the SPT area) some degree of standing should be acceptable at peak times only. 10 minutes is about right. The question should be, should more carriages be procured and redundancy be introduced to the system to meet demand? The answer to that question would be 'yes'.

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?

Scotland requires both. The use of interchanges is appropriate in dense areas – effectively the SPT area only. In other areas, the geography of the country and the unique value of trains against other modes demand the protection of through direct services. The challenges could be met through greater use of multiple destinations (ie the Oban/Fort William model), improving track capacity at key points, and increasing rolling stock capacity. This would have dual benefits (see question 15).

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?

The SG should direct these. See also response to question 11. Responding to demand data is a self fulfilling prophecy. Essential rural services, off peak services that enable a flexible labour force, a comprehensive service that incentivises shifts from other modes and reduces transport congestion – all these objectives would be hit by slavish adherence to customer demand data. If demand data are to be used, a better understanding of the economic distinction between *notional* demand and *effective* demand is required.

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

No response.

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

Through direction. The SG should identify innovation and require the operator to implement it. This would require a more hands-on and expert rail division within the SG.

Scottish rail fares

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

The fares policy should be one that balances the need for investment in the system with the long term need to grow the use of rail services to help meet economic, social and environmental objectives. Rail should be subsidised. It is entirely natural and fair that the system is not just funded from the fare-box. Transport is an essential public service and should be subsidised in the same way as other essential services (health, education). Private sector involvement should be on the basis of contracted provision of specific work only.

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)?

It is an anachronism that 'peak fares' should be regulated differently to 'off peak' fares if the objective is to reduce transport network overcrowding and encourage modal shift. All fares should be regulated according to RPI.

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?

Taxpayer subsidy and revenue contributions should be balanced to ensure an effective RPI-linked rate of fare inflation whilst also allowing for new capital investment in the railway and rolling stock. If this means increased taxpayer contributions then this is an acceptable price to pay for a modern efficient transport system that meets a range of social, economic and environmental needs (see also answer to question 20).

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?

No. Ideally there would be no difference. The economy is moving towards more flexible patterns and there should be no difference. Passengers find the split fare system very confusing. The goal should be a flat, affordable fare structure with discounts for the usual concessionary groups as well as those that pay into some form of loyalty scheme (such as a national railcard system like Switzerland).

Scottish stations

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

On the basis of notional demand (see answer to question 17) and not on the basis of effective demand. To this, should be long term infrastructure planning issues. Town planners should be consulted in terms of the long term needs of area development.

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?

There are merits in this in certain specific cases (e.g. some rural services) but it should be used as a rare exception and not the rule.

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?

The SG should own the network and be responsible for it. It should also encourage local stewardship where necessary. (Whatever happened to the likes of the old station master at Aberdour? His is the model to follow!).

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

They should not be encouraged in any way other than having a useful, effective and affordable train service. Pricing people off the railway is a self-fulfilling prophecy, as is the case with so many of the issues raised in this consultation.

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

Three categories would seem appropriate:

- **Major stations** in services centres of population (not just the cities, but sizeable towns). These should have some form of retail facility; toilets; left luggage; and staff available at all open times
- **'Metro' stations**, effectively only those more minor ones in the SPT area, where basic shelter facilities and automated ticket purchase combined with remote helplines would be the norm
- **All other stations**, which should be staffed, include ticket purchase and enquiry facilities, and toilets.

Advance and through booking and European ticket facilities should be available in all **major stations**, utilising effective computer technology

available for this.

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?

Yes. The rail service's advantage over other modes (especially air) is that of comfort and convenience over speed. Cross border services benefit passengers in obvious ways – they are convenient and comfortable and cut down on the number of air journeys that are needed. The DfT should specify these services in conference with Scottish Ministers.

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?

No. There are no obvious benefits. Edinburgh is not even the largest city in Scotland. Is there even capacity at Waverley? It is massively topologically restricted. It's already the case that most services terminate at Waverley – more should be done to increase the number of long distance services going through. The border is a political construct: real peoples' lives don't start and end at Berwick and the future economic strength of Scotland depends on close integration with its neighbouring markets (note that this includes rail services to Ireland via Stranraer, etc.)

Rolling stock

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

Buying in bulk (economies of scale). Better interoperability. Less use of multiple units and greater use of flexible consists that can be adapted to meet short term changes in demand.

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

Conductor on all services. Catering on all non-metro services.

Passengers – information, security and services

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

This is a medium priority. Network operators should shoulder the burden for this. Better use of the railway will lead to a more effective market. But if my local bus service can have WiFi, it should

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?

First class should be available on longer distance services, but otherwise additional seating capacity can be introduced through the use of longer trains.

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

Better staff presence (conductors) on trains would help to control problems associated with alcohol consumption. Prohibition won't help. The current system where alcohol can be banned on certain trains (e.g. football days) seems sensible. You don't hear of airlines banning alcohol. Why would they – it's part of their offer?

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

By making sure it is comprehensive and current by whatever mode. Staff in stations can give you the real picture and offer advice.

Caledonian Sleeper

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

They should be specified. They are an essential cross border and within-Scotland service (see answers to questions 29 and 30) and consideration should be given to increase their specification. Sleeping accommodation does not necessarily need to be tied to dedicated trains – it can be attached to existing services using more flexible rolling stock consists.

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:

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?

The service is the only way that allows many people to get from addresses in England to certain Scottish destinations. Oban is the main missing link and consideration should be given to how a carriage could be added to the current Fort William services and added to an existing early morning/late evening Glasgow-Oban service (see answer to question 37). The value of the services is that they offer specific benefits over all other modes, including time savings. There are important economic and environmental benefits to the sleeper. German Railways' experience in expanding the use of high quality sleepers should be examined. It cannot be a solely Scottish issue because the unique geography of the UK means that sleepers are nearly always used (although not exclusively) for cross border travel. Consideration should be given to greater European integration (e.g. with Eurostar). HS2 in England will enhance, not diminish, the potential of sleeper services by allowing effective cross Europe travel in a way that will genuinely compete with air. Sleeper services should provide decent catering facilities. First class could be more distinct from second class and could be used to adjust the economics of the service. Some groups will always pay for sleeper services for the convenience they provide, and this can be exploited, but the general principle again should be that they should not be seen solely on the basis of whether they was their own face in revenue terms. Subsidy of rail is inevitable and desirable.

Shared bunks are not necessarily a problem, especially for groups. More density of sleeping services should be used instead of the seated sleeper coaches.

Sleeper services are valuable in that they don't just service the main cities but their unique potential is in serving smaller stations too without any impact on the service (because speed is not of the essence).

Environmental issues

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

The key environmental issue is not the performance of the railway itself but the contribution it can make to a more environmentally sustainable transport system within Scotland (and the UK) as a whole.