

David Finlayson

I have read with great interest your consultation document.

It is entirely appropriate to review rail services but I would make the following points which I would be grateful to you for considering:

My family are regular rail users from Inverness to the central belt and Aberdeen and also of the London services including the sleeper.

1. The huge advantage of the train over bus to the central belt and air to London is that one can usually work (although one needs to remember a continental adaptor to plug a laptop in the sleeper!). It is rarely possible to peruse confidential papers on an aircraft and much time is wasted getting to the airport and queuing. Reading on buses?!?

2. If travelling alone to Glasgow, Edinburgh or Aberdeen, train journey times can be competitive when remembering parking which is ever more difficult especially in Edinburgh

3. Special offers such as Club 55, weekend first and young persons rail cards have particularly welcome to us.

4. The Highland services desperately need more bicycle space. We have had to use the car when trains could not take bikes. Consideration should be given to a bogie for bikes such as used by the new Bike Bus which travels to the far North-West from Inverness during the summer months. Ease of booking and labeling of bikes for stations (colour tags?) would aid the speedy offloading at each station.

5. The cross-border train by East Coast is the only truly first class service. Scot rail first class is a bit of a joke by comparison. East Coast is used by locals and tourists alike. The inconvenience of changing in Edinburgh will however make air more competitive and will be particularly inconvenient to the elderly or infirm and those travelling with much luggage or children. The staff on East Coast are also generally of a very high standard. (the same ones who were there when it was GNER!)

6. The sleeper is essential. From Fort William there is no other practical way of going to London for business given the distances to nearest airport. From Inverness it remains the only way of attending meetings in central London before 10:00am. To use a flight and budget hotel means leaving home (even in Inverness) some 4-5 hours earlier. Even with the current rolling stock I continue to use it and the lounge car improvements have been very welcome.

7. With planning and a flexipass carnet for the sleeper, the first class ticket is distinctly competitive with air travel. If however that was not available then it would be less attractive for business travel.

8. Rail remains the best environmental option and is infinitely preferable to driving the A9. It is a better fit with the government's "green" agenda.

My summary therefore:

More room for bikes

Do not stop East Coast in Edinburgh (it is only one train a day)

Keep promoting the sleeper

Push special offers which give airlines a run for their money.