

## 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: The rail passenger operation in Scotland is not large enough to justify separate franchises. The advantages of smaller franchises should be obtainable by specifying requirements for particular parts of the network under the single franchise agreement. One of ScotRail's problems at present is a lack of efficient local supervision. This is particularly evident at times of stress when the managerial organisation gives the impression of losing control completely. The division of "economic rail" and "social rail" cannot be answered without an economic analysis of various services and groups thereof.

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

Q2 comments: A maximum of 10 years would seem appropriate giving a measure of continuity and encouraging investment. Anything longer could lead to complacency. The worst of all worlds comes from short term extensions.

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

Q3 comments: The current risk support system is biased in favour of the franchisee who can get his forecasts wrong and pay little or nothing in the way of penalty. Worry not, the taxpayer picks up the tab seems to be the attitude.

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

Q4 comments: A commercial decision for the civil servants and politicians to decide – and to stand or fall by their decisions.

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

Q5 comments: See reply to Q4 above

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

Q6 comments: There should be a system of penalties for failure to meet performance targets and a system of reward for agreed outperformance.

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

Q7 comments: No comment

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

Q8 comments: Financial penalties for minor breaches. Franchise termination in the case of major failure.

### **Achieving reliability, performance and service quality**

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

Q9 comments: Good performance and imaginative and enterprising operation of the franchise should be rewarded. Poor performance must be penalised.

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: The performance regime should be tailored to individual routes and/or groups of routes. Their characteristics can vary widely.

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

Q11 comments: The performance regime as such is of no interest to passengers; all the passenger wants is a service which is punctual, reliable, comfortable and clean. The regime is only a measuring mechanism.

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

Q12 comments: Journey times should be as short as possible consistent with achievability. This will vary between services.

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: SQUIRE may do the things listed but 99.9% of passengers would not have clue what SQUIRE means nor does it appear to be very

effective.

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

Q14 comments: It is not new methods of assessment which are the solution to the problems of station and train quality but effective local management/supervision and attention to detail. Something which all the “isms” in the world cannot replace.

### **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: The standing limit of 10 minutes is meaningless as is the capacity limit. ScotRail appears to operate a “Pack ‘em in regardless” policy. There is no point in setting such targets if they cannot be enforced. Gross overcrowding of trains also raises questions of safety. One other factor is the fitness for purpose of the trains themselves. A large proportion of the present ScotRail fleet (Classes 158 and 170) is patently unfit.

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: The answer to this is “No, no and no again!” It is a ruling principle of railway operation that the most efficient method of operating a railway is to run trains for as long distances as possible thus minimising journey times. More changes equal longer journey times, higher costs, passenger confusion and passenger dissatisfaction.

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: Let the franchise get on with it as far as possible. Micro management by government – however tempting that may be for civil servants and politicians – is a sure and costly recipe for problems.

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

Q18 comments: A high level set by route, but allowing some flexibility for

change during the life of the franchise.

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

Q19 comments: The only incentive which will be effective is cash. Innovation should be rewarded but the franchisee must bear the risk.

### **Scottish rail fares**

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

Q20 comments: Fares policy should strike a balance between a simple structure, maximisation of carryings and minimisation of subsidy.

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: Fare regulation should be applied only when absolutely necessary. Would not a policy of profit limitation – say a specified percentage of turnover – be a better method of control?

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: Rail holds only a small percentage of passenger travel. Fairness to the non-rail user and taxpayers in general demands that subsidy be limited. At the end of the day this is a highly political decision.

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: There is a considerable risk of over complicating the fares' structure by tinkering with the peak/off peak time and cost differentials which are already sore and confusing issues with many passengers.

## Scottish stations

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

Q24 comments: The measures of whether a station should be closed are:

1. The costs of retention
2. The savings to be made from closure. (Not always the same as the costs of retention).
3. The use made of it.
4. The social costs of closure.
5. An issue which gives rise to concern regarding the provision of new or reopened stations is the seemingly enormous costs quoted by NetWork Rail. This requires to be looked at very closely.

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: Is the question of funding new stations or services a real issue? The costs involved normally frighten off the proposers very rapidly. See also the response to Q24 above.

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: The present split of station ownership and management seems to work well in practice. "If it ain't broke don't mend it".

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

Q27 comments: Sub leasing of station facilities including ticket sales etc to small businesses and local communities seems to work in other countries. Why not here. Better than unstaffed stations.

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

Q28 comments: This is not an issue worth spending time on.

## 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: The passenger has not the least interest in ORCATS or other such arcane jargon. Terminating trains from England at Glasgow and/or Edinburgh would be an unmitigated disaster and would result in a significant drop in passenger numbers and revenue. **It would also be highly unpopular politically.**

So far as specification is concerned surely it is possible for the Department of Transport in London and Scottish Ministers to agree such a minor matter between them? After all, the numbers of trains involved are relatively small and the question verges on the ridiculous.

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: No. Termination at Waverley is completely unacceptable. It is difficult in the extreme to imagine any benefits to the passenger from such an arrangement.

The facts are that such a policy would lead to significantly extended journey times and much inconvenience to passengers. There is also the question of loss of business and revenue as passengers transfer to other forms of transport. There may well be increased operational costs also.

The other major problem is that ScotRail has no suitable rolling stock for such a job. Just consider a large number of passengers complete with luggage trundling through Waverley station, finding their onward train and getting their luggage aboard a Class 170. These trains are completely unsuitable because of their cramped seating and insufficient toilet and luggage capacity.

For such a system to work a very high level of punctuality and cross platform transfer is required. A level of service which seems to be completely beyond the capabilities of our current railway operators. I would suggest that Transport Scotland, NetWork Rail and ScotRail send a delegation to Switzerland and Germany to see what is required.

## **Rolling stock**

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

Q31 comments: The quality of the current diesel rolling stock in Scotland is abysmal and urgently requires replacement. Acceptance of that fact would be a suitable starting point for an investigation of the cost of provision of rolling stock.

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

Q32 comments: The current fleets of Classes 156, 158 and 170 diesel trains in use for long distance trains in Scotland are quite unsuitable for the job. All three types suffer from:

- Cramped accommodation
- Insufficient and unreliable toilets
- Hopelessly inadequate facilities for luggage, prams, bikes etc.
- Heating and temperature control which can best be summarised as freeze in winter, fry in summer.

Solve these problems and you have the answer to your question.

## **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: Start with the fitting of the trains with the longest journey times.

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: A question for the commercial judgement of the franchisee.

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

Q35 comments: As with smoking, alcohol on trains should be banned. It gives rise to anti-social behaviour which on train find very difficult to deal with and they tend to hide. (That is not a criticism – I would probably do the same. It is unquestionably an issue which deters potential passengers from using trains.

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

Q36 comments: It is not only passengers who suffer from lack of information but ScotRail staff themselves, especially in times of disruption. There is no magic bullet required but rather good quality management and supervision. This a matter which requires close and careful examination when the contract comes up for renewal.

### **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: Overtaken by events? Withdrawal of these services would be highly unpopular and incur a political penalty on those responsible.

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: There should be no question of “options”. The Sleeper service should be put out to separate tender, perhaps on a management only basis.

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:

- The appeal of the Sleeper services is that they are an easy and time saving method of travelling to and from London. So far as passengers to and from Aberdeen and the North of Scotland are concerned more “early and late” trains are not a feasible option because of the distances concerned.
- The present destinations of Aberdeen, Fort William and Inverness are all that are required. Sleeper services have been tried to Oban in the past but were not a success.



- The present facilities, suitably updated are all that most passengers require. It is unlikely that they would be prepared to pay much more for additional facilities. I would not.

### **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: So far as the franchise is concerned it is difficult to see how potential franchisees could do much on the environmental front given that they will be stuck with existing rolling stock and its emissions. At least so First Scotrail claims. There is no doubt that new rolling stock would improve the situation given the advances to be derived from the latest engine technology.

The biggest offender is NetWork Rail which is responsible for the eyesores to be seen at many places in Scotland. Look at the former marshalling yard at Perth. Look at the rails and other equipment disappearing in the undergrowth at Perth, Elgin, Keith and Huntly to name but a few places. NWR must be sitting on a fortune in scrap all over the country. And what about the appalling graffiti ridden approaches to Glasgow Central and other places. The impression given by such scenes is a real deterrent to travel by rail and thus affects the size of the subsidy necessary.