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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: It seems over complicated to me to do this – the railway system is complex enough already, so stick with a franchise that covers both elements.

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

Q2 comments: No comments

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

Q3 comments: No comments

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

Q4 comments: No comments

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

Q5 comments: Where they can provide a distinctive additional service that can work with the main franchisee to improve overall service. I assume, for example, you mean a company that could provide the catering, separate to the train operating company. This could work well.

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

Q6 comments: No comments

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

Q7 comments: No comments

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

Q8 comments: No comments

Achieving reliability, performance and service quality

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

Q9 comments: Both should be done – one could envisage a sliding scale that worked both ways.

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: One system for the whole of Scotland would make it easier to understand and measure.

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

Q11 comments: No comments

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

Q12 comments: Reliability is the most important issue. You have to be able to rely on the train and know it will run. If you increase journey lengths to make them more reliable, and reduce train frequency slightly, you could compensate by increasing the number of train carriages to maintain capacity?

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: Yes it is required and should cover both

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

Q14 comments: You could set up an independent panel of rail users to report back through inspections and opinions, and you should act on the views expressed by it.

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: Frequently standing times are much longer than 10 minutes. I have often had to stand from Edinburgh to Kirkcaldy and sometime beyond. If this is a target, it means little. It would seem the best option is to procure more carriages, since often the excuse given over the intercom is that “the train was shorter than we expected” or “we expected a longer train”. This is not good enough. Some trains are very short for the journey they make.

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: No comment on this exact question, but it is important to ensure that important stops en route are not bypassed. For example, the trains from Aberdeen to Glasgow/Edinburgh operate an unacceptable and confusing system, whereby some stop at Stonehaven but not Montrose, and others the opposite, for no apparent reason. All services on this route should serve both of these large centres on all journeys. The bus connectivity is also poor – there are many trains that arrive in Aberdeen either two minutes before certain buses leave or just after. When one needs a rural bus that only runs every two hours or so, it is not a great incentive to use public transport when something like this happens. This should be addressed – Scotland’s public transport system needs better integration and this should be forced if operators do not wish to pursue it.

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: Yes, government should dictate some of these aspects.

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

Q18 comments: Targeted – it has to be a mixture of direction and some commercial judgement.

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

Q19 comments: No comments

Scottish rail fares

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

Q20 comments: Ensuring that more people choose train travel than car travel. This means keeping fares relatively low.

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: No 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: There has to be a major government subsidy (taxpayer) to make the system work. It is an important plank of environmental policy and the market will not achieve this. On the contrary, fares will rise far higher if operators had to recoup their costs largely through fares, this driving down passenger numbers and thence the attractiveness of bidding for a top-quality service franchise – ultimately driving more people back into cars.

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: This should be differentiated according to route – some peak time routes are very crowded, whereas others are not. This could be reflected in the price difference on different routes. Also, people have to travel at peak times to get to work, so there should be a substantial discount for season tickets.

Scottish stations

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

Q24 comments: Where there are enough people to warrant a new station, one should be built or opened. This has to be done. Existing stations should not be closed, even those serving very few people (often in rural areas) but ways should be sought of reducing the operating costs for them. Some form of community involvement could be devised.

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: This is worth pursuing for new station operation and maintenance, but is unlikely for a service and would raise many complex issues.

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: Yes, ideally one organisation should be, unless as above a new station is proposed or provided that would not have otherwise been provided by that franchisee.

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

Q27 comments: By allowing other activities to take place at a station that might make the buildings more viable – such as cafes, bookshops, retail outlets, drop in centres and so on – this might attract other sources of funding to allow maintenance.

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

Q28 comments: No comments.

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: Absolutely they should continue to operate north of

Edinburgh. This a highly biased central belt question! Three quarters of the country lies north of Edinburgh. If trains heading north of Edinburgh are frequently under-utilised, since they offer the same journey times and station stops as a Scotrail service, why would terminating them and replacing with a Scotrail service make any difference to passenger use? Those of us living and doing business in the rest of Scotland, we do not wish to be treated like second class citizens. It should be possible to devise an equitable arrangement in the financing and incentivising of these services such that the subsidies and risks are shared between Scotland and the rest of the UK.

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: Definitely not. Changing trains at Edinburgh is already unpleasant enough – we do not want more of this.

Rolling stock

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

Q31 comments: No comments

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

Q32 comments: Catering of some form should be available on all trains operating over a certain journey length. It is unacceptable that on Cross country trains for example they do not offer this north of Edinburgh, whereas Scotrail and East Coast do. If it is good enough for two operators it should be required of the other.

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: WiFi should be available free on all trains. The business benefits of doing this are so obvious, and it would help facilitate a move from cars to trains. This should be seen as a 'green' investment, not simply as a rail service.

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: I believe that first class accommodation on many trains is inappropriate – it is a joke, for example, on the Aberdeen to central belt trains. There should be a way of reducing this to increase slightly the capacity of standard class. Retaining a first class carriage or two on longer trains such as cross-border is OK, and under current arrangements it is essential on the sleeper since this is the only way of obtaining a cabin without sharing, which many people do not wish to do.

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

Q35 comments: Just major football trains. Otherwise it is an insult to the rest of us. I do not believe that there should be an alcohol ban on all trains – this is not found to the best of my knowledge on any other European train service, and the very fact that just Scotland is contemplating this suggests that there are deeper underlying factors that influence such anti-social behaviour which will not disappear if alcohol is banned.

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

Q36 comments: It works fairly well now, but one thing that really helps is that the train guard can communicate with the destination stations and give passengers information about connections and whether a train will wait for a late train when many passengers are transferring onto it.

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: The operation of the Caledonian sleepers between London and the existing Scottish stations is essential. It makes an enormous difference to being able to live and work effectively in many parts of Scotland while retaining business and social links with destinations further south.

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: I believe that it is better for it to be operated by a train company that runs a wider network, such as the Scotrail 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: I use the sleeper a lot – it makes a big difference to the business that I do, and removes completely the need to fly south. Indeed, my company operates a no-fly policy for environmental reasons, and this would have to change if the sleepers ceased. However, I note that some services on some days are often not well-subscribed. I believe this is because of the extreme cost of some of the tickets. Increasing them still further would not increase use, even if the facilities were better. Having a better fare structure (e.g. the ability to buy books of tickets in advance at a discount, as at present) might encourage more use if accompanied by marketing. I find the current facilities acceptable – having WiFi and a mains electricity supply throughout

the train would be the main improvement I would really value. Some better soundproofing would also help. Basically, I use the train mainly for London (and sometimes Crewe) and having more late/early trains as suggested would not help this much. Please retain the London to Aberdeen service – terminating everything at Edinburgh would be a negative step as it is for the destinations further north that the sleeper really comes into its own.

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: It is important that energy use targets are set and driven downwards, waste separation and reduction targets are set as above, and that biodiversity conservation targets are included especially for land owned and managed by train companies, network rail and other franchisees. There could be better biodiversity management of such land, and a group should be convened to consider this, including initially some of the conservation NGOs and ideally Scottish Natural Heritage. An inventory and audit of the land resource and its biodiversity should be undertaken.