

Respondent Information Form and Questions

Please Note this form **must** be returned with your response to ensure that we handle your response appropriately

1. Name/Organisation

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3. Permissions - I am responding as...

Individual

☐

/ Group/Organisation

☐

Please tick as appropriate

- (a) Do you agree to your response being made available to the public (in Scottish Government library and/or on the Scottish Government web site)?

Please tick as appropriate ☐ Yes ☐ No

- (b) Where confidentiality is not requested, we will make your responses available to the public on the following basis

Please tick ONE of the following boxes

Yes, make my response, name and address all available ☐

or

Yes, make my response available, but not my name and address ☐

or

Yes, make my response and name available, but not my address ☐

- (c) The name and address of your organisation **will be** made available to the public (in the Scottish Government library and/or on the Scottish Government web site).

Are you content for your **response** to be made available?

Please tick as appropriate Yes ☐ No ☐

- (d) We will share your response internally with other Scottish Government policy teams who may be addressing the issues you discuss. They may wish to contact you again in the future, but we require your permission to do so. Are you content for Scottish Government to contact you again in relation to this consultation exercise?

Please tick as appropriate

Yes ☐

No ☐

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:

We would not want a dual focus franchise to lead to a two-class railway.

The Social Railway plays an important role in linking rural communities to the rest of the country. The West Highland Lines (WHL) are recognised as world-class tourist routes. Tourism is Scotland's most valuable industry, with a high growth target. Trains, service quality and marketing on the WHL must not be a second level franchise overshadowed by focusing on commercial services.

However, we accept that targets for different service groups within the franchise should differentiate between commercial and social routes, with greater commercial freedom for potentially profitable routes, and a higher level of specification for social routes.

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

Q2 comments:

A long franchise would allow the franchisee to develop a long-term growth strategy for the WHL, and invest in upgraded trains.

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

Q3 comments:

No comment.

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

Q4 comments:

No comment.

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

Q5 comments:

The Fort William-Mallaig "Jacobite" trains have been very successful. Development of more tourist trains by third parties, using heritage trains with relatively low capital cost, could attract more visitors to the West Highlands.

However, these trains must not abstract revenue from the year-round ScotRail train service.

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

Q6 comments:

The WHL have important roles as transport links for local communities, while also attracting tourists to the West Highlands and Islands.

The franchise terms should include development of the tourism role as a specific objective, with targets set for traffic growth and increased tourist visits by rail to the West Highlands. Additional trains from Edinburgh or the south to the West Highland Lines should be considered as an initiative to develop these markets.

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:

The franchise should have an early termination clause that can be invoked by government if commitments are not met.

Achieving reliability, performance and service quality

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

Q9 comments:

Poor performance should be penalised. Presumably good performance will be rewarded with higher revenue. The bonus culture is on the way out.

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:

We believe the WHL and other rural routes would benefit from individual performance regimes. Otherwise, potential poor performance on rural trains could be outweighed by better results from the more frequent trains on commuter routes.

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

Q11 comments:

The suggestion in the Consultation Document that rural/tourist train service delays are less important than commuter train delays is wrong. Most West Highland trains, for instance, have ferry connections at Oban and Mallaig, as well as connections via Glasgow to England. The impact of missing the last ferry to Mull due to a late train arrival in Oban is much greater than the inconvenience of a commuter train arriving 10 minutes late in Dalmeir

The issue of connections needs to be covered by the performance regime. When trains (or ferries) are running late, penalising the train operating company for holding a connecting train is not in the interests of passengers. Sensible decision-making, contingency planning, and performance analysis, is needed.

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

Q12 comments:

On the West Highland Lines, journey times are rather slow due to the mountainous terrain through which the railway is built. Punctuality is normally good. So we would be against extending journey times to improve punctuality statistics.

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 should apply to factors managed through the franchise.

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

Q14 comments:

The SQUIRE system takes no account of some factors important to passengers, for instance the temperature inside trains, and the suitability of train facilities, for instance comfort of seating, and the number of toilets.

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:

On the WHL, standing is not acceptable. The line is a showpiece for Scottish tourists.

The franchisee should provide sufficient capacity to cover peak travel periods. The value of the tourist industry to Scotland, at £4 billion annually, is much greater than the incremental cost of providing additional train capacity when needed to ensure that visitors do not have a negative experience of Scotland.

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:

Passengers do not like changing if it can be avoided. People who are infirm, old or carrying luggage are particularly inconvenienced. So reducing the number of direct trains would be an unpopular development. On the WHL, where journeys are slow and services are infrequent, having fewer direct services would be a significant handicap.

There could, on the other hand, be an opportunity to increase the effective frequency of trains economically on the WHL by providing additional connecting services at Crianlarich. But this would only be acceptable as an addition to the existing infrequent direct services provided on the lines.

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:

Frequency and journey time are poor on the WHL. Customer demand varies with season much more than on intercity and commuter lines. The train service is an important social and tourist asset for the West Highlands. The Government should, therefore, direct the franchisee to improve frequency of service, commensurate with the higher levels of traffic on the West Highland Lines compared with other Scottish rural lines.

Train speeds on the West Highland Lines are restricted by line curvature and ground stability. It would be very expensive to improve this. But trains are stationary for up to 20% of rail journey time (i.e. up to about 40 minutes) between Glasgow and Fort William. Improvements to the radio signalling system to cut down on transmission time, and installation of powered entrance and exit points at loops, could reduce journey times significantly, particularly if some of the quieter intermediate stations become request halts. This work by Network Rail could be funded as part of the new franchise.

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

Q18 comments:

The franchise should be sufficiently flexible to allow additional services to be added to the timetable through the duration of the contract.

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

Q19 comments:

The Government could set up an innovation fund to incentivise the franchisee to introduce additional services on an experimental basis. If successful, these would be incorporated in the franchise.

Scottish rail fares

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

Q20 comments:

The overarching principle should be to attract more passengers and revenue while increasing operational efficiency. The ability to buy reasonably priced tickets on the day of travel must be protected in the franchise. Rail travel should be affordable compared with car travel.

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:

On the West Highland Lines, normal fares, eg anytime returns, should be regulated. But the franchisee should have commercial freedom to offer special fares to attract optional leisure travel from the markets in the Central Belt, and further afield in England and internationally.

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:

More efficient ways of running the train service will reduce the subsidy. Staffing levels and costs should be investigated.

Network Rail is also expected to increase efficiency. Overhead costs could be further reduced by greater integration of Network Rail and ScotRail (vertical integration).

There is huge potential to generate additional revenue on the WHL by improving marketing and timetables to attract more local and leisure travellers, and also more international visitors.

Fares rising above inflation would not be advisable on the WHL, as journey times are uncompetitive. Revenue growth should come from higher usage, not higher fares.

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:

The peak on the WHL is the summer. However, we do not recommend higher summer fares.

The Highland Railcard gives all-year local users a 50% discount. This is the WHL equivalent of an "off-peak" fare and should become a franchise commitment.

Club55 also offers discounts for over-55s at quieter times of year. This should also become a franchise commitment.

We are concerned that free concessionary bus travel reduces rail travel and revenue on the WHL. A solution to this market distortion is needed, either by extending free concessionary travel to trains, or by restricting free concessionary bus travel to local journeys (as has been done in England).

Scottish stations

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

Q24 comments:

Some of the stations on the WHL are in very remote countryside, with little or no alternative transport. No closure proposal should be made until current usage, future potential, alternative transport, and the scope to reduce the station maintenance cost have been analysed.

The cost of maintaining low usage platforms could be reduced if a derogation from national engineering standards can be obtained for quiet stations on rural lines like the WHL, accompanied by introduction of selective door opening on the trains. This type of initiative is consistent with the McNulty Report.

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:

Giving a greater role to HITRANS and SPT, matched by a transfer of some of the transport responsibility and budget away from Transport Scotland to RTPs, would allow development to more closely follow local aspirations. For instance, increasing the poor service frequency on the Oban line would be seen as a priority, with a view to attracting more rail use and tourism.

On rural lines, local support groups (eg Friends of the West Highland Lines) could be given a greater role, as part of a local line support organisation. For each line, an association could be constituted, involving Friends Associations (eg FWHL, Friends of the Far North, Friends of the Kyle Line, SAYLSA), together with local authorities and business organisations, to promote services, marketing and other initiatives. The franchisee would be given the responsibility to liaise with each local line support group on a regular basis.

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:

It would be simpler to leave station maintenance with the franchisee, as the most customer-facing rail organisation. The franchisee could be given the freedom to subcontract some stations to local line support groups.

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

Q27 comments:

Expansion of the Adopt-a-Station programme. The local line support groups advocated in the answer to Q25 could also have a role. (Friends of the West Highland Lines have already adopted Helensburgh Upper station).

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

Q28 comments:

On the West Highland Lines, the stations fall into two categories:

Interchange (Oban, Fort William, Mallaig), should provide staffed ticket office, waiting room, toilets, left-luggage lockers, newspaper stall, and information about the local area and connecting bus and ferry services. Local management should be given responsibility to monitor critical ferry and bus connections.

Rural (eg Corrour, Ardlui) providing basic shelter, help point, and basic local information.

We are not convinced a separate “tourist” category would be relevant.

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:

Through cross-border services to Glasgow are essential in providing connections to the West Highlands from England. Current connections to Manchester, Birmingham and London will continue via the West Coast. CrossCountry trains from Glasgow via Edinburgh provide the only link with Newcastle, York, Leeds and Sheffield and must be retained. Otherwise, journeys to the West Highlands from these places would require two changes of train (in Edinburgh and Glasgow), which would be a disincentive to travel by rail.

The case for introducing a direct daytime Anglo-Scottish train service to the WHL should be investigated, possibly using Voyager or equivalent train.

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:

For the West Highlands, an Edinburgh Hub would be detrimental (unless all West Highland trains are extended to start from Edinburgh and run via Glasgow).

Rolling stock

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

Q31 comments:

Replacement of the Class 156 trains used on the WHL is needed urgently. The optimum solution would be new diesel trains customised for scenic lines. However, it is understood that, with the extensive electrification programmes in Scotland and England, the focus will be on new electric trains, replacing diesel trains, many of which are quite modern.

Costs could therefore be reduced by cascading suitable modern diesel trains displaced by electrification. These could be refurbished to high standards for West Highland use.

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 Class 156 units used on the WHL have draughty windows and doors and are unsuitable for longer distance West Highland journeys, given the increasingly cold and windy conditions experienced in recent years.

Adequate provision of retention toilets is needed on longer distance trains. Operation of Class 156s (with one non-retention toilet per 138 seats) on West Highland journeys of between 3 and 5 hours is inadequate when trains are busy, leading to queues and, occasionally, tanks running dry, rather a disgrace on what is recognised to be the UK's prime tourist line, voted Top Rail Journey in the World by the Wanderlust magazine.

On the scenic WHL, visibility is important, so seats should line with windows where possible, and seat backs should not create a claustrophobic feeling.

Space for bicycles should be provided on rural lines.

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:

On the WHL, these are unrealistic and not seen as a priority.

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:

First Class should be retained on Sleeper trains.

There may be a commercial justification for offering a higher specification of accommodation, catering service, and journey commentary via headphones, for a supplementary payment, for tourists on the WHL. (Up to the 1980s, some trains had Observation Cars). This could also attract more business travel as a more relaxing alternative to driving.

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

Q35 comments:

On a long-distance tourist route like the WHL, a blanket ban on alcohol could be unnecessary. The effect of banning alcohol on sales of refreshments should also be considered, as the catering service is provided on a commercial basis.

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

Q36 comments:

On the WHL, travel information should be widened to cover marketing of services, on station billboards, in the press, TV, radio and internet. Attractive posters (in addition to basic timetable sheets) should be displayed. (FWHL has created an attractive poster now on display in Helensburgh). Franchisees should be required to submit a marketing plan as part of the bidding process. Advertising of connections with ferries and local buses should be improved.

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:

Sleeper services need to be specified, as they are not currently profitable.

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:

A separate sleeper franchise could attract lower cost operators. On the other hand, the current operation of the WHL sleeper could be made more efficient by integrating it more fully into the WHL train service (as was the case prior to BR sectorisation when sleeper trains were moved into the InterCity sector). This also applies to other Caledonian Sleeper services.

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:

Demand for longer distance sleeper routes (eg to Fort William, Inverness and Aberdeen) is likely to remain buoyant as daytime trains involve long journeys.

It is understood that the locomotives used on the sleepers may be restricted from operating to Oban. However, re-organising the WHL timetable could provide a connection for Oban by changing from the sleeper at Crianlarich.

To improve operational efficiency, the possibility of operating the Fort William sleeper as a section of the Glasgow sleeper (attaching/detaching in Glasgow Central) should be investigated. The timing of the West Highland sleeper would need to be adjusted, but this could open up the possibility of attracting more day excursion traffic between Glasgow and Fort William.

The funding for new or upgraded sleeper coaches, recently announced by the Scottish and UK governments, should provide private toilets/showers in some of the sleeper compartments (at premium or 1st class rates), reprogrammable door entry keys, together with reclining seat accommodation for budget travel. Best features from the continental City NightLine sleeper services should be incorporated.

The possibility of re-introducing Motorail has been raised and should be further investigated. The Motorail ramp still exists at Fort William station.

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:

One environmental factor which should be addressed relates to the use of trains with non-retention toilets leaving debris on the sensitive West Highland countryside.

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