

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:

Q1 A single franchise should be offered as far as train operations are concerned, however, many franchise-holders do not maintain their trains properly, so I would propose that train maintenance depots should be the subject of a separate franchise. However, before the franchise goes out to tender, an investigation should be carried out into the question of whether the most rural routes would be the subject of any interest from non-profit-making organisations. They would inevitably need financial help to start with, but this would be more than made up for by reduction in operating subsidies. I would also like to see talks with the government of Northern Ireland with a view to allowing Northern Ireland Railways to bid. They operate a very efficient railway system in Northern Ireland and should not be banned from bidding.

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

Q2 comments:

Q2. All franchises should be for a fixed-term of 7 years with no provision for any extension.

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

Q3 comments:

Q3. Provision should be made for trains to continue to operate irrespective of insolvency of operating company or of its parent company.

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

Q4 comments:

Q4. With the current economic outlook being very uncertain, this should not apply at present, but it should be re-considered when the next franchise goes out to tender.

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

Q5 comments:

Q5. There should be far more public involvement, especially by persons who:

- (a) regularly travel on rural lines,
- (b) are disabled,
- (c) do not have access to cars.
- (d) have experience of rail travel in many other countries.

Very often decisions are made by those who do not understand the needs of (a), (b) or (c) and who have little or no experience of (d).

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

Q6 comments:

Q6. The best incentive is to take into account the operator's previous record when the next franchise goes out to tender, but without prejudice to the chances of those who have never previously been successful in being awarded a tender.

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

Q7 comments:

Q7. Bonds as such are not necessary. Payment of subsidies in arrears is a better incentive with part payment being delayed during any investigation and with-held if necessary. This should not apply to non-profit-making organisations, see my comments to Q1.

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

Q8 comments:

Q8. With-holding of subsidies as per my reply to Q7 above. In serious cases, cancellation of franchise.

Achieving reliability, performance and service quality

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

Q9 comments:

Q9. Rewarding good performance is better. However, there is one exception to this. Penalties should be imposed on an organisation that fails to deal properly with customer complaints. Independent consultants should be used to carry out surveys on the way that customer complaints are handled. It is important that this should be based on customer satisfaction with the way complaints are handled rather than the actual number of complaints.

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:

Q10. There has to be a combination of the two. For example, a passenger waiting for a train at Corrour will be stranded if a train is cancelled because the railway bus replacement service cannot serve Corrour. Many years ago, some passengers were waiting for cancelled train at Corrour on 24th December and they were stranded there until 27th December because there were no trains running on December 25th or 26th and Corrour Station is inaccessible by road. It is therefore essential that performance regimes must take into account the effect of a train breaking down on individual passengers because a cancelled train serving Corrour has a much more profound effect on passengers than a cancelled train would have on passengers waiting at Paisley Gilmour Street for example.

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

Q11 comments:

Q11. By setting up a passenger panel that will meet regularly all over Scotland. They will not get paid but will be able to claim expenses. It is very important that the passenger panel should include persons specified in my answer to Q5 above

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

Q12 comments:

Q12. I do not feel that either of these issues is particularly important. What is far more important are the times of first and last trains. For example, it is impossible for students studying in Newcastle or Durham or York and living in Oban or Fort William to go home at weekends because on winter Sundays the train from Oban, Fort William, and Mallaig runs too late for onward connections. Similarly, the northbound train on winter Sundays runs too late for ferry connections. The Sunday service that runs in spring and autumn should operate in winter as well.

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:

Q13. It should cover everything, with special emphasis on the way that customer complaints are handled.

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

Q14 comments:

Q14. The passenger panel (see my answer to Q11 above) would be the best people to do this. If they were given free passes to travel anywhere in Scotland, they could carry out random inspections of train and station quality in addition to their other duties.

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:

Q15. Trains are unnecessarily overcrowded due to bad scheduling. For example, passenger making day return journey from Fort William to Edinburgh must travel on the 1715 from Edinburgh because if he waited till the rush hour was over, he would miss the last train from Glasgow Queen Street to Fort William. Another way to reduce overcrowding on the Edinburgh to Glasgow Queen Street (via Falkirk High) service is to charge lower fares for travel between Edinburgh and Glasgow Queen Street Low Level via Bathgate. This service is underused and lower fares would encourage more passengers to use that service rather than the service via Falkirk High which gets very badly overcrowded. Another way to reduce overcrowding is for the morning rush hour to officially start at 0730 and trains arriving at destination before 0730 should not be classed as rush hour trains. This should be combined with a campaign to encourage firms who currently require staff to work from 0900 to 1700 to allow staff to work from 0730 to 1530 instead. The present approach to overcrowding is wrong. With a fresh approach there would be no need for passengers to stand, and no need to increase capacity.

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:

Q16. No. This would only discourage rail travel. There should be a greater variety of destinations served by through trains. Here are some examples of how to improve services without any expenditure on infrastructure, though there would be a need to increase rolling stock and staff. The present train service from Larkhall to Dalmuir via Singer should be extended to Balloch. And the present train service from Airdrie to Balloch should terminate at Dalmuir. This would provide a through service from stations west of Dalmuir to Glasgow Central Low Level. At present there is a through service on Sundays only. Another way of reducing the number of changes needed is for the train service from Glasgow Central to Newton to be extended to Motherwell. On Sundays the train service from Glasgow Central to Newton should be extended to Larkhall to replace the Sunday trains from Partick to Larkhall. The train service from Glasgow Queen Street to Falkirk Grahamston via Cumbernauld should be extended to Kirkcaldy calling at all stations, and the train service from Motherwell to Cumbernauld should be extended to Larbert and Stirling, with arrival and departure times at Stirling being scheduled to connect with the Aberdeen trains. The present train service between Motherwell and Cumbernauld is badly underused because it does not terminate at the right destination. There are a few exceptions to the need for better connections, an example of this is that the bus service (subsidised by Strathclyde P T E) between Helensburgh and Alexandria should be re-scheduled to fit in with train times at Helensburgh Upper Station. Another example of bad connections is that the first train from Mallaig gets to Glasgow Queen Street too late to connect with train from Glasgow Central to Stranraer, and Ayr/Cairnryan/Belfast ferry, and there is a wait of several hours for the next service.

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:

Q17. Yes. There should be very rigid direction of precise scheduling. I enclose an example of a line that needs very detailed scheduling. It is a line that has greatly underused potential but has been badly neglected for many years. This is because the trains are so old that they frequently break down, the toilets are frequently out of order, in frosty weather they often won't couple up, and replacement bus services are all too frequent. The first train in the morning does not start out until after 0800 which is the latest starting time of any line in UK. The example I give is in the **SCHEDULE** to this consultation response.

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

Q18 comments:

Q18. The specification should be very detailed indeed. I have already given some of the detail in my answers to Q15 Q16 and Q17. It should also specify things like train services where the end-to-end journey time exceeds 90 minutes must have toilets. Train services where the end-to-end journey time exceeds 3 hours must have a buffet service. All interchange stations (such as Dalmuir, Motherwell, Haymarket, Inverness) must have wheelchair access and toilets. All stations must have notices giving details of local bus schedules, nearest toilet if none at station, telephone numbers of local taxi firms. It should also specify that ticket machines and telephone and online booking services must not exclude special fares such as fares applicable to holders of local authority concession cards. At present, some holders of concession cards, especially disabled, cannot buy tickets at ticket offices because they are unable to stand in queues, and because nobody is allowed through ticket barrier without a ticket, they are forced to pay for a full-fare ticket from a ticket machine because the machines will not issue tickets at Strathclyde or local authority concession fares.

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

Q19 comments:

Q19. By not only paying a subsidy but also guaranteeing against making a loss for the first 3 years. For an example of an innovative service see Q38.

Scottish rail fares

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

Q20 comments:

Q20. At present too many passengers are being sold inappropriate tickets at very high fares. This applies especially to those buying tickets online. For example, when buying a ticket from Aberdeen to London, it is cheaper to buy a ticket from Aberdeen to Edinburgh and a separate ticket from Edinburgh to London. This has the effect of distorting travel statistics. A passenger travelling from London Kings Cross to Aberdeen can save money by buying a ticket from London to Edinburgh, getting off the train there, and buying another ticket From Edinburgh to Aberdeen and continuing the journey on the next available Scotrail train. But if buying online you will get a through ticket from Aberdeen to London or from London to Aberdeen which is much more expensive. The rationale of fares policy should be to ban over-charging by issuing a through ticket when it is cheaper to buy one ticket for the first part of a journey and another ticket for the second part of the journey. The price charged should be no greater than the price for two or more separate tickets, each for part of the journey. Here is another example. When travelling from Aberdeen to North Berwick and back the same day, the cheapest fare is by getting a day return ticket from Aberdeen to Dundee, then another day return ticket from Dundee to Edinburgh, then another day return ticket from Edinburgh to North Berwick. Yet passengers are not told about this. Much tougher regulation is needed to ensure that passengers get the cheapest available tickets. There are also considerable problems with the fares for the Caledonian Sleeper service. The cheapest fares are called "Bargain Berth" tickets, starting from £19 single, which are available only by booking online. But they are not suitable for those who are unable to climb the steps to upper berths because the Scotrail website does not say whether you are getting an upper berth or a lower berth. This amounts to discrimination against disabled customers. For those who cannot cope with sleepers, the cost of ordinary seating accommodation is much more expensive than £19. This also amounts to disability discrimination because disabled people have to pay more. I heard of an instance of a passenger going to Fort William Station to enquire about facilities for disabled people, and was told she could get special accommodation but would have to pay a lot extra because the "Bargain Berth" fares can only be booked online. She was also told that "bargain berth" tickets cannot be used in seated accommodation on the Caledonian Sleeper service.

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:

Q21. Fares should not be regulated except as stated in my answers to Q18 and to Q20.

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:

Q21. Fares should not be regulated except as stated in my answers to Q18 and to Q20.

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:

Q23 It is not the fare differences between peak and off-peak fares that count but the timing and attitude that counts. The present morning peak is from 0001 to 0915 which is absurd. The morning peak should be redefined as running from 0730 to 0915 and the evening peak should run from 1620 to 1805. See also my reply to Q15 relating to overcrowding. In many cases off-peak fares exist only in theory. For example, passengers wishing to travel from Oban to Wick or from Wick to Oban always have to pay peak fares because it is not possible to do these journeys without starting out during the morning peak hours. On rural lines, off-peak fares should be charged at all times.

Scottish stations

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

Q24 comments:

Q24 The only station that should be closed is Helensburgh Upper. All trains that currently serve Helensburgh Upper should stop at Cardross instead. Passengers would then change at Cardross to or from Helensburgh Central which is in a much better location. Ideally they should stop at Craigendoran rather than Cardross but that would mean infrastructure expenditure due to the need to re-construct old platform at Craigendoran whereas there would be no infrastructure costs at Cardross. The remains of the old platform at Craigendoran are still there but it has not been used for about 40 years.

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:

Q25 This is an issue that should be raised again when the franchise is next renewed. In the present economic climate this is a non-starter.

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:

Q26 The present system should remain unchanged.

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

Q27 comments:

Q27 By giving them a say in train scheduling and by ignoring those who say that millions of pounds of taxpayers money could be saved if all railways were shut down.

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

Q28 comments:

Q28 The system of ticket barriers is very bad for disabled people who cannot stand in long queues. I would suggest that the number one priority should be that all stations with ticket barriers must have ticket machines that issue tickets at disabled persons' local authority concession card rates. It is not so much the facilities that are supplied but the way that the service is provided that is so important. Here is an example. There are toilets at Oban station. The 1821 train from Glasgow Queen Street to Oban had a toilet that was locked and marked "out of order." When the train eventually arrived at Oban passengers were desperate to use the toilet. But the staff refused to unlock the toilets. Passengers were told "We have strict instructions from Scotrail that the toilets must be locked as soon as the last train goes at 1811. We are not allowed to re-open the toilets when the last train arrives, even if the on-train toilet is out of order." There are no public toilets near Oban Station that are open in the evenings and many of the passengers were so angry that they said they would never use Scotrail again. It is no use at all providing facilities at stations if passengers are not allowed to use the facilities when most needed. There certainly needs to be a review of facilities. Another example is that the very busy station at Prestwick Airport has no ticket office. There are often so many people getting on there that the conductor cannot collect all the fares before the train arrives at Glasgow Central. The large number of ticketless people arriving at Glasgow Central Station from Prestwick Airport causes long delays at the ticket barrier. Unstaffed stations that are so busy should be banned: and the contract should insist that busy stations like Prestwick Airport must have a ticket office.

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:

Q29 Cross-border services should continue to run north of Edinburgh. The present statistics relating to passengers travelling on these services are distorted by it being cheaper to re-book. For further details see my reply to Q20. There needs to be a better service between Edinburgh and Newcastle. The first train is too late and the last train is too early. There needs to be a later train from Edinburgh to Newcastle at about 2330 Mondays to Fridays, 2315 Saturdays, and 2330 Sundays. There should also be earlier train from Newcastle to Edinburgh at 0530 Mondays to Fridays, 0545 Saturdays, and 0830 Sundays. Additional overnight services, not necessarily with sleepers, should be specified in the franchise. For details see my answer to Q37.

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:

Q30 There are no additional benefits. It would mean more tourists staying in already-overcrowded Edinburgh and fewer tourists travelling to other parts of Scotland.

Rolling stock

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

Q31 comments:

Q31 This issue is already covered in my reply to Q15.

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

Q32 comments:

Q32 Trains on journeys with end-to-end journey times of an hour and a half or more should be required to have toilets. Train on journeys with end-to-end journey times of two and a half hours or more should be required to have refreshment facilities and seats with fixed tables. All trains must have wheelchair spaces. All trains must have heating. On certain routes, (Glasgow Queen Street – Edinburgh via Falkirk High, and Glasgow Central – Ayr) more luggage space is needed to prevent passengers having to block doorways, aisles and wheelchair spaces with luggage.

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:

Q33 Provisions for this should be banned. Mobile phone use and laptop use are a nuisance to other passengers.

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:

Q34 First class facilities should be extended. First class fares should never be regulated and charging higher fares for travel in first class would enable train operators to keep standard class fares down. Here is an example. On the West Highland Line “the present trains are long overdue for the scrap heap.” *[Quotation from a regular driver on that line]*. The ideal type of train to replace them would be the type of train currently being used by First Trans-Pennine on the route between Glasgow Central and Manchester Airport. They operate in 3-carriage units, with two toilets to each 3-carriage unit, and have a small first class section in each 3-carriage unit. The present trains on the West Highland Line operate in 2-carriage units with only one toilet, constantly getting flooded, to each unit. Changing to the First Trans-Pennine type of rolling stock would mean 6-carriage units between Glasgow Queen Street and Crianlarich (with 4 toilets), then 3-carriage units between Crianlarich and Oban (with 2 toilets) and 3-carriage units between Crianlarich and Mallaig (with 2 toilets). There would also be a small amount of first class accomodation on both routes.

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

Q35 comments:

Q35. There is no need for any further evidence. The consumption of alcohol should be banned on all trains in Scotland.

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

Q36 comments:

Q36. By using larger information screens. When a train is in a platform, it should be possible to tell which train it is. But the computer information screen displays instead security notices about not leaving luggage unattended. This type of notice should not appear on train information screens. They should be on printed posters so that such notices do not clutter up train information screens. Also need better information about platforms. For example, platform numbers at Glasgow Queen Street are not given on the departure boards until the train is ready to depart and elderly and disabled passengers do not get enough time to reach the train before it has gone, this applies particularly to trains leaving from platform 1. There are similar problems at Haymarket. There are sometimes announcements about platform alterations when the train is just arriving, and not enough warning is given to enable elderly or disabled passengers to cross over to another platform. There being no lift on platforms 0 and 1 makes the situation even worse. Passengers should be given much more advance warning of platform alterations.

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:

Q37 I object to the use of the word “sleeper” in Q37 and Q38. They are overnight trains and should not necessarily have any sleeping accommodation. The entire system of overnight train services needs radical overhaul. There should be 5 overnight train services as follows:

(a) The present overnight train service from Edinburgh to London should not be combined with the train service from Glasgow Central. Passengers would have the choice of sleepers or seats. There would also be a buffet service. Trains should call at the following places: Edinburgh, Carlisle, Stratford International, Calais Frethun, Brussels Midi, Antwerpen Centraal, Rotterdam Centraal, and Amsterdam Centraal. Some sleepers would be detached at Stratford International and a restaurant car would be added at that point.

(b) The present Glasgow overnight train should combine with the Fort William service at Motherwell. Passengers from both Glasgow and from Fort William would get choice of sleepers or seats. Each would also have a buffet service. Fort William portion would call at all stations between Fort William and Helensburgh Upper (some would be request stops), then Dalmuir, Westerton, Coatbridge Central, and Motherwell where it would join up with the Glasgow portion. The Glasgow portion would call at Glasgow Central, Motherwell, Carlisle, Preston, Wigan North-Western, Crewe, Stratford International, Marne La Vallee, Lyon TGV, Montpellier, Perpignan, Barcelona Sant, Valencia, and Alicante. Some sleepers would be detached at Stratford International and a restaurant car would be added at that point. Connections to and from Paris are available by half-hourly local service to and from Marne La Vallee. The Fort William portion would have connection at Crianlarich to and from Oban. For further details of Oban connection see the SCHEDULE to this consultation response.

(c) The Aberdeen and Inverness trains would combine at Edinburgh. They would both have sleepers, seats, and buffets. North of Edinburgh they would call at the same stations as at present. After Edinburgh they would call at Carlisle, Watford Junction, Stratford International, Lille Europa, Brussels Midi, Liege, Aachen, Cologne Hauptbahnhof, Duisberg, Essen, Bochum, and Dortmund. Some sleepers would be detached at Stratford International and a restaurant car would be added at that point. Connection available at Cologne Hauptbahnhof to and from Berlin Hauptbahnhof, Warsaw Central, and Moscow Smolenskaya

(d) The franchise operator should be offered a subsidy and a guarantee against loss (see my response to Q19) for an experimental overnight train service operating between Glasgow Queen Street and Wick. The train would have at least 2 carriages of seats. It would also have a buffet between Glasgow Queen Street and Perth and between Inverness and Wick. Providing a buffet between Perth and Inverness would be optional. Provision of sleeping accommodation would also be optional.

(e) The franchise operator should be required to operate an overnight train service on the following route. Seats should be compulsory and a buffet service should be compulsory. Provision of sleeping accommodation would be optional. The train would start from Glasgow Central and call at Motherwell, Carlisle, Lancaster, Preston, Bolton, Manchester Piccadilly, Manchester Airport, Crewe, Birmingham New Street, Cheltenham, Bristol Temple Meads, Taunton, Exeter Saint David's, Newton Abbot, and Plymouth.

All the above trains (a) to (e) would operate to an exactly similar pattern in the opposite direction.

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:

Q38 All the overnight services specified in my replies should be part of the Scotrail franchise and would be compulsory except for 37 (d) which would be an innovative service as per my response to Q19.

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:

Q39 Part one: The appeal is overnight travel, not sleepers. Many people dislike sleepers but like overnight travel in ordinary seats.

Part two: Fort William, Aberdeen, and Inverness, are the correct destinations, but the other end of the route (London Euston) is incorrect. See my answers to Q37. In addition, it is very important that the Fort William service should have a connection (not a through service) to and from Oban at Crianlarich. There have been numerous calls for a commuter train service from Dalmally to Oban, and I have solved this by combining the two: a train that provides the commuter service and also serves as a connection for Oban from the overnight train to Fort William. Detailed timetable is shown in the attached SCHEDULE.

Part three: Would only pay extra for not having to share, but first class sleepers are far too expensive. The sleeper trains operated by Great Western between London Paddington and Penzance offer a much better system. For my views on the fares structure for the current Caledonian Sleeper service, see my reply to Q20.

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:

Q40. The suggestion put forward in Q16 (reducing the number of direct services) would have a very bad impact on the environment because it would discourage people from travelling by train and many would travel by car instead. The best way to protect the environment is to divert funds from road to rail. An example of how to do this is given in my reply to Q22. My reply to Q37 would encourage rail travel rather than air travel which would also benefit the environment.