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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: I can see no merit in this as it will reduce the opportunities for efficient utilisation of rolling stock and may lead to more anomalies in through ticket prices.

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

Q2 comments: no comment

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: where a particular need is met eg the long-established 'Jacobite' steam train from Fort William to Mallaig. Similar opportunities may add value to other routes by promoting tourism and leisure eg Kyle Line and Ayr/Stranraer.

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

Q6 comments: no comment

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

Achieving reliability, performance and service quality

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

Q9 comments: both

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: align with services groups and prioritise based on the potential impact on key parts of the system and other operators.

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

Q11 comments: engage the Passenger Focus groups to suggest key elements.

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

Q12 comments: the timetable must first be realistic and achievable and then performance measures can be generated to reflect shortcomings by TOCs, FOCs and Network Rail.

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: it should cover all stations as the Public are not really interested in who manages what.

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

Q14 comments: feedback from regular travellers.

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: I was not aware of a 'stated' permitted standing time or capacity limit. However it would seem prudent not to exceed, say, 15 minutes on journeys of up to an hour and 30 minutes on journeys up to 3 hours.

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: this should be part of an overall transport strategy for Scotland, particularly in the Central Belt. High Quality rail/bus interchanges [as in Holland and other European countries], combined with 'all-mode' tickets would enable a significant reduction in buses needing to run right into city-centres and ease the endemic congestion and pollution evident on too many streets in Glasgow and Edinburgh in particular.

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: Government must direct the minimum service provision parameters otherwise the franchisee may thin-out off-peak services in a random way and lose many the benefits of a regular-interval service.

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

Q18 comments: no comment

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

Q19 comments: listen to ideas from passenger focus groups.

Scottish rail fares

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

Q20 comments: [re section 6.4] the fares policy must be transparent and be absolutely 'fair'. There are still too many examples where a through fare from a station on one of the Edinburgh/Glasgow routes to another station in the Glasgow conurbation is much dearer than the sum of the parts, even when a change of train is necessary. This applies equally to 'Anytime' and 'Off-Peak' tickets. For example look at Livingston North to Bishopbriggs or Livingston

South to Paisley Gilmour Street where the advertised through adult return ticket is almost £10 more than legitimately buying two separate tickets. Many of the Booking Office and On-train staff are very helpful in trying the alternatives in order to get the cheapest. It should be made easy for everyone to know that they are paying the cheapest fare for the same journey.

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: the basic commuter season ticket fares should be regulated so as to avoid punitive rises year on year and to encourage purchase of them. A Commercial approach should be used to set Off-peak and leisure fares so that the spare capacity is best used. The SPT inspired 'Zonocard' system must be retained as this excellent inter-modal facility [train/bus/subway] is, in my opinion, a model for other conurbations. The Lothians and Fife is the obvious area where a similar facility is long overdue. Section 6.11 refers to Leisure use of rail and again the SPT area still has the excellent 'Roundabout' and 'Daytripper' tickets which make it economic for a family to leave the car at home. These should be retained and the principle should be considered for Lothians and Fife. Also the existing ScotRail 'Kids go free' and 'Club 55' tickets are obviously popular on journeys that I witness and a future franchise specification should direct their continuation or enhancement. Section 6.13 refers to encouraging use of 'new' routes/services between cities. It is disappointing that, for example, adult return fares between Livingston and Glasgow are £2.20 [off-peak £1.90] dearer on the new 'A2B' route than on the Shotts route. Obviously the service frequency is better but there is still considerable unused capacity. However the current fares level make it difficult for the car-commuter to justify the economics of a shift to rail.

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: the idea of charging more for recently enhanced sections needs to be tempered with the need to grow or re-establish custom. See my comments in Q21 above. Also passengers deeply resent being 'stung' immediately after an enhancement as they are likely to have been inconvenienced during the work by train diversions or bustitution over a significant period. This message needs to be kept to the forefront of the current/forthcoming EGIP works.

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: [re Section 6.27] Consideration should be given to an early

morning Off-peak [eg before 07.00] akin to 'workers tickets' of old so as to ease some pressure on the morning peak. I realise that the document says that 'shoulder pricing' has been discounted but when linked to a 'Smartcard' system the actual operation of it may be more practical.

Scottish stations

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

Q24 comments: this should be done in collaboration with the Council Planning process, in particular development of Structure Plans. Even although some stations are physically close, they often serve different catchments due to the particular road/footpath layout.

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 should be encouraged as it may enable a particular need or opportunity to be met earlier. In the past British Rail facilitated Prestwick Airport Station and Railtrack facilitated Edinburgh Park Station. Network Rail will, I understand, deliver Edinburgh Gateway Tram Interchange near The Gyle so there is plenty of experience at doing this.

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 current arrangement appears to work quite well and as a rail user for over 50 years, I think that the general standard at stations is as good as it has ever been. One 'winter' issue does however concern me, namely that Rock-Salt continues to be used [almost universally and in generous quantities] on platforms and car parks. Regrettably it is also being used on metallic structures at stations such as footbridges, ramps and lifts. This is leading to premature corrosion of structures and equipment [and indeed parts of the trains due to tracking of salt on passengers' footwear]. Repairs and renewals will be required to be funded earlier than should have been necessary and all this will come out of the overall Transport Scotland allocation for rail. British Rail were well aware of this problem some 20 years ago and introduced a non-corrosive de-icing material for parts of stations. I would have thought that the Station Leases already reflected the need to use the appropriate de-icer on metallic structures. Such a product is readily available under the Trade-name 'Kilfrost'. Future Station Leases need to reinforce this and perhaps the 'Squire' regime needs to include appropriate checks.

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

Q27 comments: much good work already appears to be happening via ScotRail's encouragement to groups to 'adopt a station'. More of the same.

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

Q28 comments: The proposed categories and rationale appear reasonable. Regarding facilities, the current facilities are generally adequate however more 'joined-up' information would be required at any inter-modal interchange stations which are developed.

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: In my opinion Cross-Border services should continue to go north of Edinburgh as they serve a diverse range of customers who may change to coach, plane or car if the facility ceased. It is also a very powerful statement of the size of Scotland and connectivity available when one is in England and witnesses the departure announcements of trains going as far north as Inverness, Dundee or Aberdeen. The comment in the report that the 'service capacity beyond Glasgow and Edinburgh on these cross-border trains is frequently underused' I frankly find puzzling. Any East Coast train that I have been on north of Edinburgh has generally been busy-with many customers coming from or going to the South. It must be clear the it is not just London that is important to Cross-Border customers but many other East Coast Stations which give good connections to many English destinations.

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: Waverley is already an effective hub but the downside to passengers who have to change from Cross-Border services to internal Scottish services is that connections are not guaranteed and the provision for luggage on Class 170 DMUs, which are the main train type for onward journeys to main cities such as Dundee, Aberdeen and Inverness, is meagre. A fares disadvantage is also likely to arise when another Operator is involved.

Rolling stock

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

Q31 comments: stop leasing and buy outright the vehicles which, in reality, will continue to be used in Scotland for the foreseeable future. A vital question which needs addressed is how to continue to provide appropriate trains for the Rural routes: West Highland and North of Inverness. The current timetable can only be operated by original British Rail Sprinter type trains, ie Class 156 and 158. These have low axle-weights and are 'kind' to the mainly jointed bullhead track system which exists. This permits them to run at a higher speed than other trains. This is managed by 'differential speed' signage. The Class 170 DMUs which form the rest of the Diesel train fleet have axle-weights almost 40% greater and would have to run at lower speeds if cascaded to Rural routes-giving an unacceptable increase in journey times. Life-extension and refurbishment of the Class 156 and 158 trains should be progressed as it is unlikely that any new-build passenger vehicle could achieve the optimum specification which the existing units possess. The alternative would be to renew the track over some 350 miles. This is unlikely to be achievable within a reasonable timescale or affordable when considered against other priorities within Network Rail's Infrastructure portfolio.

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

Q32 comments: trains for longer distance routes need adequate luggage space. Good work was done on the Class 158 fleet but the Class 170 fleet has meagre facilities.

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: Wi-fi is an expectation among many travellers and should be considered for all routes with journeys longer than, say, an hour.

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: this is difficult as the train fleet is made up of 2-car or 3-car trains in which the first class seating forms a relatively small part. Existing usage patterns should indicate the routes and services where demand for seating outweighs the commercial benefits of first class. However, as electrification proceeds in the Central belt, consideration should be given to utilisation of the diesel trains released for strengthening services to Aberdeen

and Inverness. This would assist the seating capacity issue and retain the first class.

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

Q35 comments: the current arrangements appear to work reasonably well and take account of events.

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

Q36 comments: when all is running normally the information available at stations and on-train is generally good. Improvements are still needed during 'perturbations' when staff often appear to have difficulty in getting accurate information to relay to passengers.

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 basic service specification needs to be given by Transport Scotland.

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 should remain an option within the ScotRail franchise. Separation would risk dilution of quality and would jeopardise the efficient and cost-effective maintenance of the fleet which, I understand, is mainly done at Inverness Depot, along with a significant number of ScotRail DMUs.

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 have been a regular user of the Sleeper for over 37 years. The appeal is that it 'does what is says on the tin' ie no hassle, have the evening at home and travel to arrive in ideal time for business or leisure in London. No early waking and dash to an airport to catch the 'Red-eye'. The reverse is certainly true for travellers to Edinburgh and Glasgow. The other destinations still appear appropriate, enable efficient use of the rolling-stock and serve a wide number of locations. Perhaps an in-depth survey of existing users is needed to properly assess this. Some changes should be considered to the route of the West Highland sleeper to take advantage of the new 'A2B' route. I would suggest that the train should call at Glasgow Queen Street Low Level, Airdrie, Bathgate and Livingston North in both directions and take some pressure off the Edinburgh/London service. This would also avoid the need to continue to provide connecting trains to/from Westerton and would remove the train from the E&G Main Line during the period when EGIP is being undertaken.

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: energy efficiency and emissions must continue to be addressed. I also have an oblique Environmental concern around the use of inappropriate de-icing materials. Rock-Salt continues to be used [almost universally and in generous quantities] on platforms and car parks. Regrettably it is also being used on metallic structures at stations such as footbridges, ramps and lifts. This is leading to premature corrosion of structures and equipment [and indeed parts of the trains due to tracking of salt on passengers' footwear]. Repairs and renewals will be require to be funded earlier than should have been necessary and all this will come out of the overall Transport Scotland allocation for rail. British Rail were well aware of this problem some 20 years ago and introduced a non-corrosive de-icing material for parts of stations. I would have thought that the Station Leases already reflected the need to use the appropriate de-icer on metallic structures. Such a product is readily available under the Trade-name 'Kilfrost'. Future Station Leases need to reinforce this and perhaps the 'Squire' regime needs to include appropriate checks.