

David Grant

## 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:

As a pre-amble, I am happy for my name and comments to be made public, and to be contacted for more information, but my version of MS-Office does not seem to support tick boxes.

I suspect few benefits as Edinburgh to Glasgow is probably the only bit that could be economic

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

Q2 comments: Five years. After as few as one or two years the franchisee will tend towards minimising expenditure (witness the driver shortage dispute of 2011), although factoring in a residual value calculation might help to mitigate this.

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: 25% - 33% of any fare revenue above predetermined budget to pass to the franchisee.

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

Q5 comments: I understand this happens already with locomotive haulage for the sleepers, and that arrangement previously included some on-train operating staff on sleepers too. Some TOC's sub-contract on-train catering and cleaning. However, in the context of this question I fear it will only encourage those with "an eye to the main chance" in as much as they can see a quick profit out of it.

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

Q6 comments: Keep the main contract tight with an increasing scale of incentives for “above and beyond”.

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

Q7 comments: No idea.

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

Q8 comments: A figure of £X million PER ANNUM for original length of franchise, from parent company or lodged bond, written into the contract. GNER were allowed to walk away from the East Coast franchise too easily and with minimal penalty.

### **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: Aligned to routes

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

Q11 comments: Restrict the use of “charter minutes” between the last two stations of a route.

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

Q12 comments: Higher penalty for not running at all, than for running but arriving late

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, but primarily for train movement. There is no need for a squad of folk to be travelling and looking for one bit of litter on the platform at Thurso every month. Trust the staff there to do their jobs and have a periodic check once a year if necessary. Program these “random” checks on customer intelligence and feedback. Use the very intensive network of CCTV coverage to check on platform conditions.

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

Q14 comments: Contract with local authorities, local OAP groups, local Charity operations, etc to submit weekly or monthly reports on trains and stations (pass them two or four return tickets for local journeys) in return for a donation to their running costs and only send out the small in-house team where there is an identified problem.

### **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: Yes, 45 to 60 minutes is currently experienced, and tolerated.

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, it's no fun being detrained – even into a waiting room – in the dead of winter.

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: Left to Franchisee's discretion based on demand.

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

Q18 comments: I would go for full specification. I fear that targeted specification is only there to make the public believe they will receive something which then subsequently fails to materialise. However, I read between the lines in section 5.22 that this is a largely academic question as a decision has already been made. I would also be handy to know exactly what “modal shift” means in this context as it has been omitted

from the glossary.

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

Q19 comments: Allow them to keep all revenue generated from their innovative ideas. After all, Transport Scotland will have free use of them into the future from five years hence.

### **Scottish rail fares**

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

Q20 comments: Fairness! Think of it as an extension of Road Equivalent Tariff on the ferries – and take a good look at the anomalies that jump out of my spreadsheet (detailed below).

Anybody who works in the customer-facing side rail industry will tell you the fares manual is riddled with anomalies, a fact acknowledged in section 6.4 of the consultation paper. Transport Scotland is to be applauded for even considering tackling this as the stock response is that it is all too complicated. TS seem to be concentrating their attentions on instances where return tickets exceed the cost of component singles and in that regard I can only point them towards the far-north line between Inverness and Thurso. (see my spreadsheet, below) However, the fares “problem” is much bigger and deeper than simply the comparison of a return ticket versus singles.

Initially I was looking to highlight the “per mile” discrepancies on various journeys from Cupar, but as I started investigating I discovered a much bigger issue between stations within what used to be the Strathclyde Passenger Transport Executive (now taken back under the Transport Scotland wing) area, and the rest of Scotland. (Please note all figures for fares were obtained from the official ScotRail website, are for “peak” travel to work hours, and include the recent fare increase).

Here is my spreadsheet sorted into a decreasing pence per mile charge for a return journey. As there are literally millions of combinations I decided to mainly focus on 15 - 20 mile journeys as representative of a daily commute.

With the exception of trips between Glasgow Central and Paisley Canal, journeys in the east and north of Scotland are generally 25% - 33% more expensive (per mile) than journeys in the former Strathclyde Passenger Transport Executive area. One apparent exception to this is that journeys between Cupar and Glasgow Queen Street appear relatively cheap, but that has to be balanced against the fact that they are a dog-legged 88.25 railway miles each way (via Haymarket), whereas a direct road journey is only 65 miles. Using the road distance, the railway journey increases to 24 pence per mile.

The long term effect of annual percentage increases rounding up to the next 10 pence can be seen by looking at the fare for the 2.25 mile journey between Cupar and Springfield which is now 93.3 pence per mile, or £1.20 a mile for a single fare. A taxi might well be cheaper! Similarly, short journeys between Cupar and Leuchars or Ladybank also cost more than 40 pence per mile.

Railway distances are listed on the first page of every timetable in the Network Rail national publication so it should not be a huge task to flag each station in the fares manual with the railway distance between it and other stations.

As a starting point for the new franchise I propose that Transport Scotland sets a maximum fare throughout Scotland of 25 pence per mile for a single journey and 20 pence a mile for a return journey. This could be done by means of a comparison grid to sit on top of the current fares manual and, just before a fare was announced to a potential traveller it would be electronically “distance checked” and (if appropriate) reduced to the “standard per mile”, where applicable. I understand something very similar was done by British Rail up until 1964. Taking data (cautiously) from Wikipedia, I note that until 1964 there was a price formula of three (old) pennies a mile for second class and four and a half (old) pennies a mile for first class. *Source : Wikipedia.. Cooke B.W.C ed. (July 1964) “Notes and News : New fares structure” Railway Magazine (Westminster, Tothill press 110 (759):592.* Incredibly, if the three old penny a mile fare is fed into a UK C.P.I. inflation converter and brought forward to 2012 it translates to 19 (new) pennies a mile remarkably similar to the sample current fares in the Glasgow area. How then do we justify having such a variation in prices all over the rest of the country, and how did as simple concept as fares for travel become such a kaleidoscope of options and ticket types?

As already stated, this is a huge issue, and surely not something that a member of the public needs to catalogue to the nth degree? That said, where have the civil servants who should have been highlighting and dealing with this been hiding for the past fifteen years? I have done all I reasonably can by bringing it to the discussion table and now have to hand the baton on to the professionals.

In defining the franchise, Transport Scotland should also create a tapered increase arrangement aimed towards equalising fares across Scotland over a defined period of years, as there can be no justification for fares in the Glasgow area being 25-33% less per mile than those in the rest of the country or, indeed, those in the rest of the country being 25% - 33% more than those in Glasgow.

Station A	Station B	Railway Miles	Single Fare	Pence/mile single	Return Fare	Pence/Mile Return
Cupar	Springfield	2.25	£2.70	120.0	£4.20	93.3
Cupar	Leuchars	6.50	£3.50	53.8	£5.60	43.1
Cupar	Ladybank	5.00	£3.00	60.0	£4.20	42.0
Ladybank	Perth	17.75	£7.80	43.9	£13.90	39.2
Cupar	Markinch	11.25	£5.00	44.4	£8.80	39.1
Cupar	Dundee	14.75	£5.50	37.3	£9.70	32.9
Glasgow Central	Paisley Canal	7.00	£3.10	44.3	£4.80	34.3
Forsinard	Scorscalder	17.25	£5.80	33.6	£11.00	31.9

Helmsdale	Kinbrace	16.75	£5.60	33.4	£10.50	31.3
Lairg	Golspie	17.50	£5.80	33.1	£10.90	31.1
Cupar	Kinghorn	21.75	£7.20	33.1	£13.30	30.6
Cupar	Burntisland	24.25	£8.00	33.0	£14.50	29.9
Cupar	Aberdour	27.00	£8.80	32.6	£16.00	29.6
Altnabreac	Thurso	20.00	£6.00	30.0	£11.70	29.3
Fort William	Tulloch	17.75	£5.50	31.0	£10.30	29.0
Cupar	Dalgety Bay	29.75	£9.50	31.9	£17.00	28.6
Grahamston	Stepps	18.75	£5.90	31.5	£10.70	28.5
Cupar	Inverkeithing Falkirk	31.25	£9.80	31.4	£17.60	28.2
Dunblane	Grahamston	16.50	£5.40	32.7	£9.20	27.9
Musselburgh	North Berwick	17.00	£5.40	31.8	£9.50	27.9
Garve	Achnasheen North	16.00	£4.50	28.1	£8.80	27.5
Cupar	Queensferry	33.25	£10.10	30.4	£18.10	27.2
Cupar	Kirkcaldy	18.50	£5.70	30.8	£9.90	26.8
Edinburgh Waverley	Addiewell	18.50	£5.40	29.2	£9.80	26.5
Alness	Tain	15.75	£4.60	29.2	£8.30	26.3
Cupar	South Gyle	40.00	£11.10	27.8	£21.00	26.3
Glasgow Queen St	Camelon	22.50	£6.30	28.0	£11.70	26.0
Cupar	Dalmeny	35.00	£11.10	31.7	£18.10	25.9
Edinburgh Waverley	Linlithgow	17.50	£4.60	26.3	£9.00	25.7
Cupar	Haymarket Glasgow Queen St	43.25	£11.20	25.9	£21.00	24.3
Larbert	Neilston	21.00	£7.30	34.8	£10.20	24.3
Glasgow Central	Glasgow Queen St	11.75	£3.40	28.9	£5.60	23.8
Edinburgh Waverley	Edinburgh Waverley	44.25	£12.90	29.2	£21.00	23.7
Cupar	Dingwall	44.50	£11.20	25.2	£21.00	23.6
Inverness	Bridge of Allan	18.75	£5.60	29.9	£8.80	23.5
Polmont	Loch Winnoch	17.75	£5.00	28.2	£8.30	23.4
Glasgow Central	Stewarton	16.50	£4.60	27.9	£7.30	22.1
Glasgow Central	Woodhall	18.75	£4.80	25.6	£7.70	20.5
Glasgow Central	Motherwell	19.00	£4.80	25.3	£7.70	20.3
Lanark	Glasgow Queen St	16.3	£3.90	24.0	£6.60	20.3
Dumbarton Central	Westerton	16.50	£3.90	23.6	£6.60	20.0
Helensburgh Central	Port Glasgow Charing Cross (Ghw)	18.5	£4.60	24.9	£7.40	20.0
Glasgow Central	Hartwood	20.25	£5.20	25.7	£8.00	19.8
Balloch	Kilmarnock Dumbarton Central	19.0	£4.70	24.7	£7.50	19.7
Glasgow Central	Springburn	19.00	£4.60	24.2	£7.30	19.2
Glasgow Central	Springburn	24.25	£5.70	23.5	£9.30	19.2
Springburn	Dumbarton East Glasgow Queen St	19.0	£4.50	23.7	£7.10	18.7
Springburn	Ayr	18.8	£4.40	23.5	£7.00	18.7
Cupar	Tain	88.25	£20.60	23.3	£31.20	17.7
Kilmarnock	Ayr	15.50	£3.30	21.3	£5.30	17.1
Inverness	Ayr	44.25	£12.60	28.5	£14.40	16.3
Glasgow Central	Rogart	41.50	£7.50	18.1	£13.50	16.3
Inverness	Helmsdale	77.00	£9.70	12.6	More than 2 singles!	error
Inverness	Georgemas Jcn	101.50	£9.70	9.6	More than 2 singles!	error
Inverness		147.25	£11.90	8.1	More than 2 singles!	error

Inverness	Thurso	154.00	£11.90	7.7	More than 2 singles!	error
Inverness	Forsinard	125.75	£9.70	7.7	More than 2 singles!	error
Inverness	Wick	161.50	£11.90	7.4	More than 2 singles!	error

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: All fares should be regulated, but only at the maximum end.. The franchisee should be permitted to offer limited-term discounts and reductions where there is over-capacity that he feels could be turned into revenue. Please read this in conjunction with my answer to Q23 (I.e. do not have any difference between peak and off-peak fare)

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: Firstly, on commuter routes, make a charge for bicycles roughly equivalent to the amount of passenger seating that could occupy their “envelope”. Increase fares by a maximum of RPI, and preferably less. Passenger loadings are increasing so use this additional revenue from patronage to balance the books without forcing up fares willy-nilly.

I do not consider it acceptable to apply a higher increase for enhancements as this will not be reversed as the years go by and facilities start to show their age. An “enhanced increase” has already been applied to Fife fares (in the late eighties, I think) to cover the expenditure on new rolling stock at the time, and these fares have just increased by a percentage every year since.

It’s not the passenger’s fault that they were travelling over worn-out rails or in shabby stock last year. Did they get a commensurate fare restriction at that time? No.

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: Nil. Do not have any difference. Demand regulation by price is an outdated notion which has no place in 21<sup>st</sup> century public transport policy. Test out a flat

fare pricing policy on just one route in the new franchise and then study the passenger numbers. Here's an idea – do it between Edinburgh and Aberdeen.



## Scottish stations

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

Q24 comments: Beware pure passenger ticket figures. Golf Street has very limited services and apparently very few users, but when a train from Dundee happens to stop there, many passengers with tickets to Carnoustie will get off at Golf Street if it happens to be closer to their homes than Carnoustie, the next station down the line.

Before any station is proposed for closure, it must be offered a decent level of train services for at least a year to determine if there is a latent demand which is not prepared to work around just the two or three trains a day which stop at present, in the case of Springfield, for example.

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: A builder might want a new station only a short distance from an existing busy one. They, and other third parties, might offer some up-front finance, only to disappear, be taken over, or go into administration when the hat is passed round for ongoing running costs. I am not totally against such involvements, but they need to be regarded with a fair degree of scepticism, all the more so when, like Newburgh, they also propose to “borrow” some of the train stops from the next station up or down the line to fit in with the south of Perth end-to-end journey time limitations.

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: Seems sensible. A full repairing lease with any capital investment and/or residual values agreed by the landlord to a pre-defined formula.

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

Q27 comments:

I have read “support” in the context of “use”, but I understand it can also be used in the context of “nurture and care for”. Perhaps you should have had two questions and two answer boxes?

Visitor access to platforms is one of the main things which were omitted from the current franchise. I understand it is well-nigh impossible to see a loved one onto a train at Dundee due to the authoritarian attitude of the ticket barrier staff and no platform tickets are available. Even restoring platform ticket availability at large stations would be a mo

in the right direction.

There is a clear case for consistency in the imposition (or not) of parking charges at rural and commuter stations. Why should one station charge £1 or more a day and another one a few miles away be free? Termini are obviously a different situation.

Where parking places are regularly fully occupied (e.g. Inverkeithing), and there is sufficient land (e.g. Inverkeithing), build a multi storey car park and finance it out of a daily or season parking charge.

The Scottish Parliament also needs to be more supportive of rail transport at the consumer level. They issue a pensioners national travel pass that covers free transport on every bus, but does not even offer a token fare reduction to the person who prefers to travel by train. As a starting point this could be offered at less-busy times only to avoid inconveniencing commuters.

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

Q28 comments: None at all. Ridiculous suggestion. Needless red tape and meaningless designations.

### **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: Yes, cross border services must go north of Edinburgh. Whilst some of them are quieter in one direction, do not underestimate the contribution they make by taking the pressure off ScotRail services when full. I have a letter in the house from the MD of Virgin Trains (operator of the Cross-Country franchise in 2003) stating that the early morning Dundee to Penzance service had, until Edinburgh, the heaviest passenger loading of any train they operated in the UK. Similarly, the southbound East Coast services from Aberdeen to London in the morning and afternoon are well patronised. Does ScotRail have the capacity to absorb these additional passengers?

I am also concerned about the capability of Transport Scotland to be both an impartial judge and jury on this matter. They have conceded in the public consultation document (sections 8.4 and 8.5) that cross border trains to Dundee, Aberdeen and Inverness “create off” some of the non-operator specific revenues from these lines which would otherwise all fall to ScotRail/Transport Scotland in the event of these cross border operators withdrawing from the routes. Is a body which would benefit very substantially in a financial sense from a particular outcome, competent to make that decision? I think not. That said, however, Scottish Ministers, after deciding to retain the cross-border services should take responsibility for specifying them. My reasoning for this is that the

Department of Transport has displayed earth-shattering incompetence in sitting back and allowing (if not actually encouraging) the withdrawal of the 07:35 Cross-Country service from Dundee – which has caused such consternation to commuters in Fife – despite it being a detailed requirement of their current Cross-Country Franchise Commitments agreement with Arriva Trains. (See page 7 of franchise Service Level Commitment document).

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<http://assets.dft.gov.uk/publications/rail-passenger-franchise-agreement-arriva-cross-country/axccommitment2.pdf>

Whilst Scottish Ministers are specifying these ongoing cross-border services, they also need to consider the establishment of a regular “stopping” service between Edinburgh and Newcastle, taking in most of the East Lothian commuter stations and stations between Berwick Upon Tweed and Newcastle Central. This would also give Dunbar an equivalent level of service to places like Prestonpans and Musselburgh.

30. Or should the cross-border services terminate at Edinburgh Waverley, allowing opportunities for Scottish connections? And if so, what additional benefits would accrue from having an Edinburgh Hub?

Q30 comments: No, they should not terminate at the Waverley. This would bring in huge inconvenience and lead to a loss of passengers, in my humble opinion.

## **Rolling stock**

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

Q31 comments: Eliminate the ROSCO middleman by the Scottish Government buying the sets and writing their use into the current and future franchises. Aren't train manufacturers willing to show confidence in their product by offering fully maintained/cleaned/repaired hire agreements to Transport Scotland? I thought that was how Bombardier operated their Voyager fleet which is in use with Virgin Trains and Arriva Cross-Country?

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

Q32 comments: Realistic charging for bicycles should be introduced on commuter routes. If north of Edinburgh cross-border services are scrapped then luggage space becomes a huge issue on internal Scottish services. Otherwise, I feel there should be toilets, air conditioning, first class accommodation on commuter routes, and catering on longer journeys.

## **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: No answer, as I am the last man in Scotland who doesn't have a mobile phone.

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: Cap first class at its current percentage of train seats, but allow it to continue.

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

Q35 comments: I wouldn't worry too much about making a case one way or the other as the Scottish Government will ban it anyway, as they do.

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

Q36 comments: Where and when staff are on duty at local stations, allow, and encourage, them to announce “hot changes” over the tannoy as the news comes in. On late running trains, text the conductor or ticket examiner with updated connection information for them to announce 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: Yes, sleeper services should continue to be specified. If they were left open as a commercial decision they would be shut down tomorrow. I am interested, however in your suggestion to run the Lowland sleeper to Edinburgh only. I am assuming that is driven partly by lighter passenger loadings to Glasgow. Why not go ahead with that, but beef the operation of the Lowland sleeper up to 18 trailers, designating 10 for Euston and 8 for somewhere in the West Country – Plymouth sounds good – with the split/join happening somewhere in the Birmingham area.

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: Here’s a novel idea though. Tender the whole of ScotRail including the sleeper as one franchise, but oblige the successful franchisee to seek a sub-contractor for the sleeper, either as a whole, or just the railway haulage and operational aspects. If a sub-contractor comes forward, and is acceptable to both parties, the saving from that part of the original franchise bid is split 50/50 between the franchisee and Transport Scotland. Whilst the sleeper service on its own would not interest the major players, there might just be a smaller freight or open-access operator who would be willing to contract for the operational side of the business.

39. We would be interested in your views in the level and type of service that the Caledonian Sleeper Services should provide. Including:

- What is the appeal of the Caledonian Sleeper Service, and if there were more early and late trains would the appeal of the sleeper services change?
- What is the value of sleeper services to Fort William, Inverness and Aberdeen and are these the correct destinations, for example would Oban provide better connectivity?
- What facilities should the sleeper services provide and would you pay more for better facilities?

Q39 comments: The sleeper is a valuable option for early morning arrival in central

London or Edinburgh/Glasgow. Scottish destinations should be maintained as currently served.

The on-board facilities are fine, if somewhat spartan.

## **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:** I have no comments at all to make about environmental matters, but I will use this space to provide some further thoughts on the consultation paper since your omission of any space for general comments is either a sign of very poor planning or an attempt to stifle further debate.

Unless I have severely misunderstood Question 5, I am astounded that you took the time to flag up options for greater railway integration on several occasions, most notably in Sections 2.14 through 2.19, without then asking for a view on this situation as part of the consultation. For what it's worth I am against integration of the train operating and infrastructure sides, mainly because Network Rail have already taken huge steps in terms of efficiency over the past five years and evidence of further progress down that road emerges regularly. To "devolve" the Scottish arm of Network Rail from this improvement process at this stage would be, I think, a mistake. You also have the risk of an "inexperienced" rail operator winning the franchise bid and not having the depth of expertise to integrate the infrastructure side to best advantage.

Mention is also made in Sections 3.8 through 3.17 of the possibility of micro contracts, regions, routes - call them what you will. I would speak out against that idea on the grounds of waste and duplication of resources. Where there is one large franchise the franchisee can (if he so desires, for example) teach his train drivers to drive every type of rolling stock that is on his books. He can then pool all the drivers into one link with say sixty active turns and five spare to cover training, sickness etc. Then, if a driver calls in sick somebody can be allocated to that turn from the spare resource. The larger a pool is you can allocate proportionately less spare cover and still be fairly confident of running all the trains. When, in contrast, you subdivide everything down to small teams, you need a crippling level of redundancy built into the pool to be sure that two or three sick drivers one morning are not going to throw the whole operation into disarray.

I was also very surprised to see no mention, or debate, in the consultation paper of the level or definition of non-compliance/performance days in terms of franchise KPI's. Given that the declaration on a non-compliance day can have a major effect on the level of season ticket discounts, I had expected the chance for the travelling public to give opinions.

And finally, can we please have an end to all this nonsense about putting up bi-lingual place-name signs at stations. There might just be a case for it in traditional Gaelic speaking areas, but that's it. There is surely no need to spread this practice right up the east coast. I have driven in Wales and know what a nightmare it can be trying to decipher a bi-lingual direction sign on a roundabout when you are not even sure if Ebbw Vale will be on there at all, or rolled into something generic like "The Valleys". If we don't nip th

practice in the bud at railway stations then that is what the Scottish motorist will undoubtedly face in the not too distant future. There is also the small issue that if you put two Gaels in a sack and ask them for the “correct” Gaelic spelling/translation of a place they will often differ in their response.