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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: There are already too many interfaces in our rail system. Adding another would not help. It is my opinion that a single franchise is the preferred option.

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

Q2 comments: The current contract length should be the minimum. I have a preference for franchises to be longer than the current GB norm but this should come with scope for franchisee capital investment in capacity improvements and the removal of infrastructure bottlenecks. The Chiltern model is an example.

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

Q3 comments: Whatever risk mechanism is in place should be geared to increased passenger carryings and not result in higher fares. Rail fares are already ridiculously high.

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

Q4 comments: Similar to question 3. Profits should be reinvested in the railway and also used to keep any increase in fares below the rate of inflation.

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

Q5 comments: Proposals to provide investment in new train services and to provide or operate stations should be sought.

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

Q6 comments: There should be incentives related the improvement on the specification e.g. punctuality (note that punctuality should not be "improved"

by trains journeys being lengthened with excessive recovery time). There should also be a commitment to resolving on persistent areas of passenger dissatisfaction (e.g. communication during times of disruption).

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

Q7 comments: I have no thoughts on this matter.

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

Q8 comments: SQUIRE already exists. Presumably this can be modified to suit. See response to question 13.

Achieving reliability, performance and service quality

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

Q9 comments: Both – good performance should include measures to reduce rail fares without diluting levels of service as happens in other publicly supported industries (e.g. the water industry in Scotland).

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: Train performance should be related to the numbers of people travelling and the length of journey. There should be a matrix that includes the number of passengers affected by a delay and the length of the journey rather than merely the arrival time at the destination station. The performance regime should also expect that connections should be made rather than broken (as seems to be the case currently). The current performance regime is not fit for purpose as it puts the needs of the train operator and Network Rail before the needs of the passengers.

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

Q11 comments: See question 10 above.

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

Q12 comments: See response to question 6 - timetables should be devised that give the shortest possible journey times that are competitive with other modes and are able to be provided consistently. There should be a requirement that at node stations (including smaller ones such as Kilwinning,

Cumbernauld, Motherwell etc) the timetables should be written to include sensible connections to allow a greater range of journeys to undertaken. Train journey lengths should not be artificially inflated to provide a safeguard to the train operator being penalised for late running.

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: There should be one regime to cover all aspects of the passenger journey experience.

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

Q14 comments: A body independent of the train operators and Transport Scotland is required. The role of Passenger Focus should be enhanced to provide a more visible passengers' champion.

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 am not in favour of any relaxation on the present criteria.

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: There is a need to introduce more direct point to point rail services rather than reduce them. Additional services could include more Fife to Glasgow, Ayrshire / Renfrewshire to Edinburgh, Lanarkshire to Stirling / Perth etc. There are strong road based flows in these corridors so the demand for direct rail services does exist. There are numerous stations where interchange possibilities exist but current timetables prohibit effective connections. This should obviously be improved – see response to question 12.

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: There should be a minimum service provision including first

and last trains.

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

Q18 comments: I cannot answer this question other than it should give the passenger a frequent, reliable service in good rolling stock and be value for money.

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

Q19 comments: To improve passenger numbers whilst keeping fares down.

Scottish rail fares

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

Q20 comments: Rail fares are currently too high and have risen hugely over the past few years. The purpose of the policy should be to maximise the numbers travelling comfortably by rail and high fares should not be used to suppress demand.

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 to rise no higher than the appropriate rate of inflation. There should be incentives for reductions in fares in real terms as happens in other publicly supported industries (e.g. the water industry in Scotland).

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: See above for my thoughts on rail fares. Other modes of transport do not punish their passengers for improved infrastructure. We do not pay more in real terms to travel in an Airbus 320 today than in a Vickers Viscount in the 1960s. Car owners save money and travel time by taking advantage of the huge sums Transport Scotland has invested in the road network. Why should rail passengers pay increased fares for what is no more than routine maintenance and renewal of infrastructure?

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: There should be some differential between peak and off peak. This differential should not be punitive as travelling in the off peak may not be possible for many people despite changing work practices. The train operator should be encouraged to provide incentives for off peak travel.

Scottish stations

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

Q24 comments: I would not be in favour of station closures. There are existing stations where usage is poor. This is generally because there are few train services. There should be some kind of initiative in to looking at how this scenario could be improved with local stakeholders.

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: There are of course merits in third parties getting involved in the promotion of stations and services. Unfortunately the railway industry is so complex and inefficient that they would need to be very determined to progress matters.

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: I feel that this area is yet another example of an issue that is more complicated than it should be because of the way the railway is structured. Perhaps a partnership should be set up between Transport Scotland, Network Rail and the train operator. This organisation should have a common set of goals with shared and aligned objectives with no need for an adversarial performance regime.

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

Q27 comments: The current franchisee has a well developed adopt a station arrangement. This kind of thing should be expanded with local interest groups.

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

Q28 comments: I am not sure what is meant by designation. In comparison with elsewhere in Great Britain, it is my perception that ScotRail stations are amongst the best looked after. I am of the opinion that having staff at stations should be encouraged. De-staffing is a false economy, which in some cases leads to anti-social behaviour and puts people off travelling by train.

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 of course cross border services should go north of Edinburgh (and west to Motherwell and Glasgow). Any suggestion that these services should be curtailed at Edinburgh is foolhardy in the extreme. Generally, passengers are more likely to travel if a change of train is not required. This is more so for long distance services where quantities of luggage have to be conveyed. Scotland has already suffered the withdrawal of through services to various parts of England by the break up of the cross county franchise. I cannot understand why anyone should propose that this stupidity be introduced at Edinburgh. There is a case for Scottish Ministers to be more involved in the specification of the Scottish sections of all cross border journeys.

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: ABSOLUTELY NOT!! – see answer to question 29.

Rolling stock

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

Q31 comments: In general terms electric rolling stock is cheaper to operate and maintain and gives superior performance.

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

Q32 comments: Other than the electric suburban services in the Glasgow area Scotland is not well served by the current train fleet. The units used on West Highland, Stranraer, Kyle and Wick / Thurso routes are not fit for purpose. Trains should have more toilets and luggage space suitable for outdoor pursuits. On the inter city routes between the Central Belt cities and Inverness / Aberdeen trains are similarly poorly specified and are not up to the standard that should be expected for such services. The fact that the same trains are used for both suburban and inter city services means that they are not suitable for either role. It is expected that this is something that can be addressed in any forthcoming rolling stock procurement.

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: The provision of mobile phone / wifi services encourages people to travel by train and gives an advantage that certain other modes cannot provide. There is a strong case that more of the information held on internal railway IT systems should be made available to passengers. These facilities would give the train operator the ability to pass information to passengers more easily.

34. How should we balance the need for additional seating capacity and retain the flexibility of a franchisee to offer first-class services if commercially viable?

Q34 comments: I refer to my response to question 32. Trains should be provided that are fit for purpose for whatever routes they work on. This should include the provision of suitable first class facilities on inter city 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: The railway as a whole should clamp down on anti social behaviour whatever the cause is.

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

Q36 comments: For regular passengers, the information received during times of disruption is often poor. This is an area where significant improvements could be made. For less regular travellers, the presentation of wall timetables (especially at stations which have many trains per hour) can often be hard to read. Electronic displays which contain train running information should contain ONLY this information in a manner that is instantly available. In some cases electronic information is used to provide information about trains that are running in several hours time and six pages have to be scrolled through before information on the next train appears

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 trains should be specified as part of the ScotRail franchise.

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: As above - sleeper trains should be specified as part of the ScotRail franchise.

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

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

Q39 comments: Many of the stations served by the sleeper trains are not served by other cross border trains. The provision of early trains from say Glasgow Central Similarly if you arrive in Glasgow after midnight there is no means to travel to onwards (Friday nights excepted for some destinations).

Fort William, Inverness and Aberdeen are good railheads for sleeper services. There should be a requirement for well timed connecting trains to serve other

routes that connect with these locations. There may be some merit in providing a connecting service from Oban for the Fort William portion.

Rolling stock should be upgraded or renewed to match modern needs when existing stock is life expired. As discussed earlier passengers should not be punished by fare increases when facilities are modernised or updated.

Environmental issues

40. What environmental key performance indicators should we consider for inclusion in the franchise agreement or the High Level Output Specification?

Q40 comments: It is reputed that the Scottish Government will need to make serious policy changes in transport in order to meet its climate change targets. It is well known that rail travel can assist with these targets as per passenger kilometre, rail produces less than half the CO₂ of car passengers and a quarter of that of air passengers. I would expect that environmental performance indicators should be aligned to these climate change targets. However, in order to be equitable similar targets should be applied to Transport Scotland's road building activities and support provided for the development of airline routes.