

Rail 2014 – Public Consultation

I am grateful for the opportunity to respond to this paper. I am responding in a personal capacity and my response is not one made on behalf of my organisation. I have not responded to every question but only those where I consider I have a contribution to make. I have also made some comments on other paragraphs where specific questions are not asked.

Para 1.13. These do not show Network Rail's total income in Scotland which will include payments by Freight Operating Companies as well as property rental (eg to shops in stations). Inclusion of such income would provide a more balanced picture.

Para 2.10 In terms of capacity, the railway is very lightly used in night hours and there is considerable capacity for additional freight at that time even if not during the day.

Para 3.17 Although there is no specific question on this point this paragraph indicates that views are welcomed on it. There are a number of reasons why the break-up of the franchise into a range of franchises would not be a good idea. The aim of the Government is to provide a passenger-centric, cost-effective and, significantly, better integrated railway. This is laudable but would not be achieved through division of the franchises. Multiple franchises through the UK have resulted in a railway which is less passenger-centric and integrated than BR was since operators publish their own timetables sometimes showing trains operated by others, often not; a reduction in through ticket options as operators reserve the best ticket deals for passengers using their own trains and sometimes lack of cooperation between staff from different franchisees.

However, in terms of cost-effectiveness one really must question the wisdom of splitting the franchise into, say, three. First, each franchise would require its own management structure, immediately adding to costs. Secondly, branding would add additional costs. Thirdly, there are issues around train fleets such as procurement, interoperability etc. For example, were Edinburgh-Glasgow to become a separate franchise one possible development is that there would be a specific train fleet for that franchise. In the event of significant train failures, there would be questions of hiring in stock from the principal Scotrail operator with attendant transaction costs, whether drivers were trained on the different stock, whether they had route knowledge were trains to be diverted etc. It might also result in a small fleet which, should franchise arrangements change in future, would not necessarily be usable elsewhere. The specific fleet developed for the former small Gatwick Express franchise now merged with Southern illustrates this. The – relatively new – trains are now in store and while it appears that use may be made of some of their coaches in other train formations it appears that the driving units will be redundant. None of this could possibly lead to a more cost-effective passenger-centric system.

- Q 02 Paragraph 3.18 indicates that there is no conclusive evidence that longer franchises lead to greater investment but there is certainly strong evidence that this is the case. Notably Chiltern's long franchises has enabled investment in the Evergreen project which has led to the redoubling of the line between Princes Risborough and Aynho Junction creating in effect another main line to Birmingham along with fleet improvements and significant station developments at eg Marylebone, Princes Risborough, Birmingham Moor St etc and it is about to lead to the launch of an alternative service from Marylebone to Oxford. Virgin's long franchise also enabled huge investment in fleet of Pendolino trains and a complete step change in the west coast timetable. So my view is very clearly that longer franchises have produced significantly greater investment and that there is strong evidence to support this. I would suggest that 20 year franchises are actually appropriate for this purpose. Longer franchises also reduce the scope for political interference.
- Q 05 There is little doubt that open access operators have led to some passenger benefits in parts of England, providing frequent services, normally to London which the franchise operator was either not obliged to run or had withdrawn. Hull Trains and Grand Central's services to Bradford and Sunderland are good examples. This may have the effect of improving the franchisee's services and introducing fare competition but it is certainly more feasible where there is capacity. Given the more limited capacity on many parts of the rail network in Scotland it is not clear that there would be scope for internal open access operators. It is conceivable that there might be scope for cross-border open access services such as Glasgow/Edinburgh – Liverpool (which I believe is under consideration), Glasgow-Kilmarnock-Dumfries-Carlisle-Leeds-Sheffield-Nottingham-London, or even Aberdeen and Inverness to London should the East Coast franchise withdraw from those routes. It seems to me that there is most scope for open access operators in such situations were the proposals considered here for terminating cross border services at Edinburgh or in the event of an open access operator seeing a commercial cross border opportunity.
- Q16 As a general principle, no. If the aim is to encourage modal shift, direct journeys are important. You need to compare the experience of going by train with using a modern car. When making a journey by car, no changes are required. It is my strongly held view that requiring more changes of journey en-route even where same platform changes are involved, will significantly reduce the potential for modal shift and will drive current train users back to cars or on to planes for longer cross-border journeys. This is also the case in relation to cross-border journeys beyond Edinburgh.
- Q17-18 If the Government takes the social as well as the economic dimension of rail service provision seriously, then there needs to be some degree of minimum service provision requirement otherwise the operator could potentially run down or terminate services in rural areas (eg north of Tain on the Far North Line) or beyond Fort William on the West Highland Line. Scope should be given in the contract for the franchisee to develop new services in the sense of additional services on existing

routes, the provision of new routes on the existing network and the provision of entirely new services on re-opened lines. Incentives should be provided to reward such commercial endeavour.

Q23 Given the questions raised in the consultation paper over the continuation of first class service in the new franchise it would be worth considering the re-introduction of off-peak first class fares in order to maximise first class revenue outwith peak business travel periods. There is nothing to lose and a considerable amount to gain.

Q27 There are a number of examples of Friends organisations supporting stations in England and Wales. The best example is perhaps the Friends of the Settle and Carlisle line who have made very significant improvements to the stations on that line. I am certain that the will is there for community volunteers on a number of routes in Scotland to assist in supporting their local stations and this needs to be encouraged by NR and the franchisee. The Adopt a Station scheme demonstrates this can work in Scotland although there is scope perhaps for encouraging developments on a line basis rather than simply on a community by community basis. Community Rail Partnerships which have been successful in England and Wales (eg on the Middlesbrough to Whitby line) ought to be considered in Scotland also.

Q29-30 The advantages to passengers of having through services considerably outweigh the supposed benefits of terminating cross-border services at Edinburgh. It is undoubtedly the case that rail would lose further market share between Inverness, Aberdeen and intermediate stations to London when efforts should be made to enhance the market share. The quality of Scotrailtrains currently operating Edinburgh – Aberdeen and Edinburgh – Inverness is far lower than those operating cross-border services in terms of capacity (3 coaches as opposed to 8 or 9 on East Coast services) and comfort. Indeed my own preference for travel to Aberdeen or Inverness from Edinburgh is always to use cross-border services where possible given the far better environment provided by InterCity 125s (Cross Country Voyagers are far less attractive). My own experience is that the cross border services are always very busy and I question the evidence presented that there are relatively few through passengers. Even given the various improvements at Edinburgh Waverley it is unlikely that changing trains would be an attractive option. The Scottish Government needs to recognise the value of direct connectivity with London not just from Inverness, Aberdeen and Dundee but Aviemore, Pitlochry, Perth, Kirkcaldy, Inverkeithingetc which the current services provide.

Q31-32 Current stock used on Scotrailexpress routes (largely Class 170s but also Class 158s on Inverness-Aberdeen) are not really suitable for such operations having limited capacity given demand, limited luggage storage and generally limited facilities. These trains are suitable for outer-suburban type work but the next generation of express trains need to be qualitatively different. Ideally the train should also have electric and diesel versions so that with the EGIP electrification of the Edinburgh-Glasgow line via Falkirk High it would still be possible to have a largely identical train

fleet which would have considerable benefits in terms of spare parts, maintenance etc. Express services should have first class accommodation, additional legroom, additional luggage storage, additional cycle storage and wifi. They should also be longer than 3 coaches which is usually inadequate for Edinburgh-Aberdeen services.

Q37-39

There is a strong argument for continuing the sleeper service given the benefits of early morning arrival in London and on the return routes at various Scottish destinations for business or leisure purposes. It is certainly worth investigating whether alternative service destinations such as Oban might be more appropriate (Oban did enjoy a sleeper service until the 1960s) if that destination provides greater connectivity for ferry services. I also consider that the Highland Sleeper is valuable for social and economic purposes and the service should not be reduced simply to a Lowland Sleeper. I do not consider it makes sense having the sleeper services operated under a separate franchise although consideration might be given to combining the sleeper service with the west coast franchise given they operate on the west coast main line. The Mark 3 sleepers are no longer fit for purpose and compare poorly to European overnight services such as City Night Line in Germany which provide ensuite accommodation. Ensuite facilities are certainly required for the Caledonian Sleeper and I would certainly pay more for that. My family would also be encouraged to use the sleeper. At present they refuse to do so because of the lack of ensuite facilities. So my view is that investment is required (and obviously both the UK and Scottish Governments have announced such investment) and I consider that patronage would improve with better facilities.