

While your official forms for the public rail consultation are extremely long and ask many questions which are entirely outwith my competence to comment on, I would like to pass my opinions on to you on a couple of important matters.

1) Through services to London from the Highlands.

I believe that it is essential that through services are maintained, and that the idea of forcing passengers to change at Edinburgh would be a retrograde step. In Europe, inter-country train travel is routine, and England has through services to France, and may well be extended. Rather than severing Scotland from England's rail-system, long-term planning to improve direct rail links to other parts of the UK and Europe should be made. On a more personal note, I live in Perth, and my parents live in London. As they get older, and have some health issues, they will not travel on a train that is not direct, as the thought of changing trains, platforms, hauling luggage, looking for platforms, fear of missing connections (etc) is prohibitive. Direct rail links are simply an essential part of a cohesive rail system, which is faster for business, more attractive to tourists, and useful for less-able travellers.

2) The Caledonian Sleeper

The provision of sleeper services should be a non-negotiable absolute requirement for any Scottish Rail Franchise. The Highlands suffer from their distance from London and Europe, culturally and financially as well as practically. This gap can either be bridged by quick air-travel (which is both unpleasant and unsustainable) or by rail travel during the night. It is not simply a matter of providing jobs in remote locations through subsidies - rather that many people are enabled by this service to live in The Highlands and spend significant sums of money there, even if their work is located in London or beyond; because of this service. The value of this service might not be immediately apparent in simple ticket-sales; but the value to the economy of Scotland as a whole is surely worth many-times the relatively small subsidy which is required to maintain it. Personally, on many occasions needing to get to the South of England, such as for a recent family funeral - I had two options; fly or sleeper. Without the sleeper train, I would have been on a plane. I would like to see development of the sleeper service in a couple of ways (i) extension of the non-sleeper facilities on the train. I am more than happy to sit up all night, if I can get to London cheaper! I don't have the money for the sleeping berths, and the 'bargain berths' are well publicised but NEVER available when I need them. If I could travel Perth-London-Perth really cheaply at weekends, I would do so a lot. (ii) Make the train more accessible. I had to travel from Perth to Dalwhinnie recently - at exactly the time the northbound sleeper train was heading that way, always with a spare seat or two! I was prevented from buying a ticket and boarding this train - as it doesn't collect passengers at Perth, only drops them off! As a result, I drove alongside the train I wanted to be on - all the way up the A9.

I would be grateful if you would feed these responses into your processes.