

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:

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

The current 10 years seems ok, but ideally rail should be nationalised and not run for profit. But we are where we are and in a private market, so perhaps shorter may increase competitiveness but longer would increase long term investment, so balance between the 2 should be found.

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

Q3 comments:

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

I am disappointed that the consultation does not include the option to re-nationalise Scotrail, although I realise the Scottish Government does not have authority to do this at the current time. Privatisation of British Rail in the 1990s was a disaster and should never have been done in the first place, and this means we are where we are today, with UK rail services being among the most expensive in the world and among the most overcrowded and least reliable services in Europe.

Unfortunately due to the economic climate it would appear that some cutbacks will be necessary but I would hope that all parts of Scotland currently served can still keep some level of rail service even if this is somewhat reduced.

Perhaps the new Scotrail franchise should be run by a not for profit body until such time the Scottish Parliament gains powers to renationalise Scotrail, which should be done as a priority at the earliest possible opportunity.

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

Perhaps in the catering / cleaning but not in running services themselves.

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

Give people working for the railways a reason to take pride in their work and don't just take them for granted. And don't just consider the railways to be a money making business, some parts of the system will be profitable and some others no so much. Some other parts may

even make a loss but if people are relying on that service and need it then they should not have to suffer by having it removed.

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

Q7 comments:

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

They should be made to travel on their own rail services, quite often that ordeal would be punishment enough!!!

Financial penalties bonuses, and in particular salary / bonuses for senior management should be performance related. Ordinary staff should receive a share of any bonuses which will give them an incentive to do a good job, these should not just all go to the shareholders.

Achieving reliability, performance and service quality

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

Carrot is often better than stick, but how is good performance defined? Is it simply having what other countries would consider to be adequate service ie. having the trains run on time, being reasonably comfortable, not breaking down and not being overcrowded.

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:

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

I think sometimes the senior managers in charge of the railways should come out of their offices and spend more of their time travelling on the trains and talking to passengers and staff to see what things are like on the ground. This will be far more productive than putting complex and expensive mechanisms in place.

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

These are not necessarily conflicting aims.

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?

See response to Q11.

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

Q14 comments:

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?

I don't see how increasing permitted standing time could ever be thought of as a better use of existing train capacity. Surely that is just moving the goalposts and pretending that overcrowding does not exist. The permitted standing limit of 10 minutes just seems to be an arbitrary figure and I'd question if it even means anything. Quite often I have stood all the way between Aberdeen and Keith which is over an hour and nothing ever seems to be done about it, and if anything the trains are getting busier. Overcrowding on trains is a major problem, and where possible there should be longer trains. The increased carriage length on the Aberdeen to Inverness line is very welcome and it should be written into future agreements that this is kept. Perhaps it should also be looked into whether or not it would be feasible to run double decker trains in some routes in Scotland.

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?

No, I don't agree with this statement at all. The more connections a person has to make on a rail journey, the less likely they are to make that journey by rail in the first place. In particular something must be done about the woeful connections for stations along the Aberdeen – Inverness route to and from Glasgow and Edinburgh. It's completely unacceptable to only have 1 direct train per day from Elgin to Edinburgh which departs just after 5.30am and none to Glasgow at any time. The wait at Aberdeen or Inverness can sometimes be over 2 hours. It is also poor that so many journeys from Inverness to either Glasgow or Edinburgh are not direct and involve a change of train at Perth.

I would add that I feel it is quite inefficient to have 4 trains per hour (one every 15 minutes) running between Edinburgh and Glasgow, when they could run 3 trains per hour (one every 20 minutes which is a 5 minute difference for commuters in large cities, really not a big deal) with more carriages and that would free up capacity on the lines for other services coming in and out of those stations. It would also free up rolling stock and drivers that may be able to increase service in other parts of the country which would make a huge difference.

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?

The government should decide, at least the people have the chance to get rid of the government every 4 years if they perform badly or keep them if doing well, they can't do anything about the rail franchisee. As with other areas of public services, eg. the NHS, policing, education, government should set the objectives and the operators should implement. The government simply can't just wash its hands of any responsibility with regards to rail services.

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

Q18 comments:

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

Don't think we have to try to be too innovative in running our rail service, but we do need to put more of an emphasis on getting the basics right. Railway services in the UK would have an awful lot to learn from other European countries eg. Germany, Switzerland, Netherlands, Belgium, France. They don't do anything fancy or innovative, they just do it well.

Scottish rail fares

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

I would strongly disagree with year on year above inflation price increases on rail fares, we already pay far more than other countries for a service that is well below standards available abroad.

On ticket pricing I would say that there are too many different types of fares available and this can often be confusing for passengers.

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)?

All fares should be regulated to a certain degree, otherwise the rail companies will simply charge what they think they can get away with.

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?

No year on year above inflation increases. If fares go up by more than inflation one year, the next year they should either not increase or go up by less than inflation. On high increases to improved parts of the network, I do not believe that this would work and could put people off using it, the cost increase to pay for the improvement should be spread across the country.

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?

I would also say the price difference between peak and off-peak journeys and between advance tickets and those bought on the day is too great and should be evened out.

Scottish stations

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

Depending on local needs not centrally defined targets.

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?

As long as it doesn't cause any harm I don't see why not. I think particularly running of special football trains to Mount Florida and King's Park in Glasgow for Scotland football matches and Cup finals at Hampden should be reintroduced (old rolling stock could be used for these) and could be run by another operator than Scotrail. This would be of great benefit in reducing road traffic and managing the crowds on the way to and from matches and ensuring they avoid the city centre. (also passengers on ordinary trains would not have to put up so much with football supporters on the train).

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?

Ultimately one organisation should be responsible for the stations and the services (and also the track) as customers will have one common body to go to with any complaints. Far too often they just blame each other when they are all to blame for certain problems. That is not to say they should not be allowed to sub contract out some functions, but at the end of the day, that one body should have overall responsibility and be held accountable.

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

By having improved rail services and better facilities (not only open for 2 -3 hours in the morning then closing). In many cases, especially the north of the country the "local" station can be over an hour's drive away. Even where I live the nearest station is over £20 by taxi, so a bus service to the station from villages in our area would be very helpful.

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

I would like to see more "parkway" stations built at the outskirts of our major cities. I'd also like to see station built on the line near Edinburgh and Inverness Airports and a bus link from this station to the terminal, and Paisley St James could be adapted for this purpose too. I also think there should be a minibus from Dyce station to Aberdeen airport rather than people having to rely on taxis. I don't believe the GARL and EARL projects could ever be justified on cost basis but making it easier for rail passengers to get to airports should be committed to.

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?

Direct daytime services from north of the Central Belt to London should be maintained, possibly cutting services to / from Aberdeen from 3 per day to 2 and keeping 1 service to Inverness (however this could be the same train as the Aberdeen train going via Elgin) if cutbacks were seen to be unavoidable. Direct services Aberdeen to / from Plymouth and Penzance could be withdrawn as long as there were still reasonable connections at Edinburgh. I would also add that direct services from north of the Central Belt to London Kings Cross are vital not just in terms of passengers to / from London itself but also being able to easily transfer to Eurostar trains to and from France & Belgium, and from 2013 onwards the new Deutsche Bahn services via Channel Tunnel to Netherlands and Germany. All these will increase tourism / business travel by rail to Scotland and decrease our carbon footprint.

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?

Preferably not but financial constraints might make this unavoidable. If any direct service is withdrawn then the Scotrail connection to the north MUST be considered a connecting service and if the train from the south is delayed by a few minutes the one going north should wait. Far too often connecting trains are delayed, people can't get home or to their work and all the operators do is blame each other.

Rolling stock

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

Cheaper is not always better and sometimes spending less now can be a false economy in the long term.

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

It is completely unacceptable to only have one toilet on Intercity services, if that becomes blocked then people often have to wait several hours until they reach their destination. This seems to be quite a common occurrence on Scotrail. I also think some of the trains are very stuffy and not being able to open the windows to let some air in makes the travelling experience uncomfortable for passengers. I'd also ask please can the run trains at an appropriate temperature, ie do not have the heating on when it is a hot day outside and don't leave the heating off when it is -10C outside (like I experienced in winter 2010/11). I'd like to see introduction of compartments on trains, like they had up until the 1980s, this was a far more comfortable and civilised travelling experience for passengers compared to the conditions we sometimes have to put up with nowadays that you would sometimes consider to be unfit and cruel to transport animals in. They still use these type of trains in countries on the continent so why not here?

Passengers – information, security and services

33. How should we prioritise investment for mobile phone provision and / or Wi-Fi type high-bandwidth services?

I would say that wi-fi access on trains is probably a low priority, I would rather have the money spent on having a decent rail service and protecting services than having wi-fi on trains. Please try and get the basics right first before the add-ons. Don't most people have 3G access on their mobile phones nowadays anyway? And when the train is busy there is very little space to take a laptop out to surf the internet or work online, and there is only mains power available in First Class.

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?

I'd also be against complete withdrawal of First Class carriages on trains, sometimes these are important for business users. However when the trains are busy then passengers should be allowed to use the first class carriage if it is sitting empty (this is probably more of a problem on Virgin, East Coast and Cross Country trains rather than on Scotrail). Perhaps this could be overcome if the price difference between first and second classes was reduced and passengers could choose to pay a small supplement on the train to upgrade to first class if they so wished, I know Virgin Trains used to do this upgrade for only £5 at weekends but don't know if they still do.

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

I would not agree with an outright ban on alcohol on trains, as I agree that governments simply banning things can often be counter productive. Any moves towards a "nanny state" should be resisted strongly. However I would agree with not allowing people to take their own alcohol on to trains and drinking it. People should only be allowed to drink alcohol purchased on board, and this should only be available on Intercity trains eg more than 2 hours end to end. If people are behaving in a drunken manner, the person operating the trolley / buffet car on the train could refuse to serve them.

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

I don't think it can be any worse than it is at the moment. Especially with regards to signage within stations. I recently travelled from Aberdeen to Cupar, changing at Dundee. There were no signs on the platform saying which platform the next train was leaving from, no staff to ask and I had to go into the main station concourse to look at the main board. Then I had to run all the way down the platform to the other end of the station, by the time I had done all this my connection was leaving within 2 minutes and just made it. Rail passengers need to be provided with adequate information within the stations, we are not all mind readers, and we do not all travel by the same service regularly and know where to go especially in an unfamiliar station. I had a similar experience in Aberdeen station trying to find the rarely used platform 6N, no signs to say where it was (or there were signs but on the other side of the ticket barrier). I had to shout across the ticket barrier to ask station staff who were too busy to help, thankfully another passenger helped me.

Caledonian Sleeper

37. Should we continue to specify sleeper services, or should this be a purely commercial matter for a train operating company?

Yes, please do not withdraw sleeper trains, especially those to Aberdeen and Inverness. Removal of these vital transport links to the north of Scotland would be a disaster, and put the message out to people in the south that the north of Scotland is "not open for business".

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?

Doesn't necessarily have to be part of Scotrail as long as somebody runs it. Perhaps if it goes to Kings Cross in the future instead of Euston, the Sleeper Services could be incorporated into the East Coast service which is currently nationalised, rather than being part of Scotrail.

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?

Sleeper Trains are vital especially for people travelling down to London from Inverness and Aberdeen as this offers a real alternative to flying down to London and staying in a hotel (and also for people coming up from London), which means business users can attend early morning meetings at their destination and get back up again the same day.

If any sleeper services are to be withdrawn then these should be Glasgow (easy connection to Edinburgh) and Fort William (too few passengers to justify?), but services to Inverness, Aberdeen, Dundee and Edinburgh should be maintained. A couple of changes to sleeper services to consider -

1 - Instead of train dividing and having separate engines / drivers going to Aberdeen and Inverness, why not have the same train going up from Edinburgh to Dundee then Aberdeen then Inverness (going via Elgin)?

2 - Instead of going down West Coast line to Euston, sleeper trains could go down East Coast to Kings Cross allowing much easier connections to Eurostar.

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:

Other comments

Please do everything possible to maintain suburban rail services in Glasgow at current levels, as this is probably the one area where rail services in Scotland can be genuinely praised.

As well as improvements to the Glasgow - Edinburgh services, in the long term, Aberdeen-Glasgow and Aberdeen-Edinburgh lines should be upgraded to allow 125mph trains to run on them. Until such time high speed rail reaches Scotland (which may be many decades away yet and may never happen) Newcastle to Edinburgh should also be improved to allow running 125mph trains. Can they please also revisit the in-cab signalling issue on the West coast Main line to allow the trains to run at 140mph as they were supposed to originally?

Electronic tickets should be available, eg people could choose to receive a QR barcode to their mobile phone rather than having to buy a ticket at a ticket office or a machine. They already had this 5 years ago on TGV services in France.