

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:

The cash flow mechanism does not appear conducive to enough economical elements. Consider revision of the network rail payment into a 'network existence' payment made direct (signalling, structural) and only charge to the franchise actual wear and electricity costs.

This may render a large number of services economically viable.

Subsidy could also be provided by buying 'shadow tickets' on routes as required. For example 20 imaginary passengers that arrive at Forsinard station at 7am every day to travel to Inverness.

Additionally there is no reason apart from wasteful branding that there needs to be a single franchise. With further central belt electrification it would seem more sensible to have SW services provided by the 'Northern' franchise extending from Carlisle to Kilmarnock & Stranraer as these will be the last remaining diesels south of Glasgow. It is plain that customers from Dumfries travel south not north, and this could give a 30 minute service if served from the south at minimal extra stock that would otherwise be at Carlisle.

Equally ECML local services might be best operated from the northern end, as there will be EMU based in Edinburgh, yet these can serve Morpeth etc.

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

Q2 comments:

15 – 20 years, although subject to a revoking mechanism.

This timescale is needed to allow the franchisee(s) to enact and benefit, or suffer, from the actions that they take.

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

Q3 comments:

The franchisee cannot be held responsible for external economic events, so

some link to GDP is needed, and also a break clause in the event of further moves to breaking up the UK or EU

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

Q4 comments:

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

Q5 comments:

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

Q6 comments:

Measurements need to be both automated and quantified, as opposed to derived from opinions and inspection by humans. Those setting the outcomes must be made very aware that they will get what they ask for, and to prevent the 'gaming' of the system through poor definition of outcomes.

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?

Q8 comments:

Link to managerial pay.

Achieving reliability, performance and service quality

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

Q9 comments:

Both. The payments should also be continuous, at present there is a 'no gain / no pain' zone which is allowing a culture of '9 minutes late doesn't matter'

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:

It needs to be tuned to each route or service group as requirements differ. A train to Kyle being 15 minutes late is less of an issue than it running at all, whereas a cancellation is less of an issue on a 10 minute service like table 226 or 228.

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

Q11 comments:

The issue of packing recovery time into the 'last mile' needs to be addressed. Train reporting is available at intermediate stops, and performance should reflect this. A measure at each 'average journey point' might be useful, and on a section-by-section basis.

For example an eastbound table 226 (Helensburgh – Edinburgh) might be measured for journey times between Helensburgh and Partick, then Queen St Airdrie, Bathgate and Edinburgh.

A table 229 (Glasgow – Aberdeen) might be measured between Glasgow, Stirling, Perth, Dundee and Aberdeen.

Consideration should also be given to connecting services, especially where high proportions make that connection, so that there is a penalty for not holding a connection and a 'credit' is given for any lateness on the connecting train.

This would be of greater importance if the comments in 5.16 and 5.17 were implemented

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

Q12 comments:

The report identifies the problem well, but I think the approach suggested above would address the worst of performance padding while setting a minimum speed based on say 1993 reference timetable might also be worthwhile.

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:

The current regime appears a wasteful bureaucratic nightmare that only encourages 'target tick-box adherence'.

Can the cost of inspections be published ?

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

Q14 comments:

A public-driven system based on reporting of defects by mobile phone / camera would give greater coverage and only require followup verification which could be provided by the responsible party. An analogy might be the pot-hole reporting system.

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:

The biggest problem with train provision is the use of low seating capacity trains on commuter routes. Glasgow & Edinburgh stations are short of train paths, so seats per path should be optimised. It is ridiculous to operate a commuter service with what would, in other parts of the UK, be regarded as First-Class only seating. For example compare a GE lines class 360 EMU to the class 380 EMU used on Ayrshire services. Both cover 40-50 mile journeys.

The standards for passengers in excess of seating are already developed for the London area, and are readily available.

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:

Potential passengers, who are the new business that it is desired to capture, will always view connections as a risk. It will be a long haul to get people to accept connections as being acceptable, and 59 minutes sat at Perth for the next train will be enough to make anyone take the car for ever more. For this to work the performance regime would have to include connections.

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:

The report views seem reasonable acceptable, with the addition of passenger

capacity as a specification line item.

The example shows the table 227 (WHL) needs more summer trains, and as such there will need to be a reduction elsewhere. At present a simplistic specification puts 4 car units to East Kilbride in mid summer. As such you might have the people who would be sitting in them on holiday at Fort William and standing on the train up there !

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?

Q19 comments:

Yes

Scottish rail fares

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

Q20 comments:

There is an error in the report in that it describes 'Advance' tickets as 'for travel on the day'. They are not, they are for travel on a specific train only, which is a major disadvantage to using them in many cases for more complex journeys.

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:

The basket approach should not be dismissed as a 'background' mechanism for fare control

A fare per mile per type approach would be sensible and may help to iron out some of the more controversial irregularities in the system.

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:

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:

The new structure should be careful not to include 'Advance' fares in the calculations given the higher restrictions on them.

Two levels of off-peak may also help, as used to be the case and still is under some UK franchises. Some peak load may be found on the first or last cheap train if fare differentials are too high.

Scottish stations

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

Q24 comments:

The leasing cost seems very suspect, and any use of that to justify a closure needs a full public audit. How much of the assumed cost is the real & avoidable cost that would be saved through the closure, and how much is an overhead applied to every station ?

Lowering this cost, for example by not lighting rural stations when the road outside is until anyway, may render them more acceptable in cost terms.

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:

Such proposals must also allow private build, not the over inflated costs generated by Network Rail.

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:

Comment 7.20 is flawed, why would it be in NR's interest to maintain a station at all ?

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

Q27 comments:

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

Q28 comments:

The report suggestion seems reasonable, although 'other' might benefit from a split either on high / low use or on mostly destination & mostly origin.

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. By integrating local provision with the long distance services it is possible to save on internal resources and provide through services at the same time. All cross-border services are far higher quality and capacity than any internal ones

I doubt that there is any significant **profit** extraction due to these services, for every long distance passenger on a Scot-Rail train (for which Scot-Rail get a slice of revenue anyway) there's as many local passengers travelling on long distance trains where Scot-Rail get a slice of revenue for doing nothing.

While UK services are clearly a UK matter via DfT in London, the Holyrood administration should consider supporting additional services reaching Perth & Dundee from the WCML.

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, there would be no obvious benefits to anyone relevant. Making everyone from the south change trains just overcomplicates journeys, adds time as connection allowance has to be added, adds congestion to Waverley as both passengers have to change platforms and trains await their return working.

This is an attempt to segregate UK and local services to the detriment of users.

Taking this view one might as well make everyone change at Carlisle / Berwick and be done with it. This appears to be a politically motivated concept with a view to simplifying passport control in the future

Rolling stock

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

Q31 comments:

Buy standard trains used in the rest of the UK. Why has the regional operator for Scotland used 3 car electric units that are special to it ?

Extra coaches are being bought in order to provide an abnormally low density seating layout.

Avoid pointless rebranding exercises and Gaelic on trains outwith Gaelic areas

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

Q32 comments:

Short commuter routes do not need WiFi or even toilets, compare say the Fife operation to Kent class 376 and London 378's.

The current mix results in inadequate provision both for commuters (not enough seats and end-door stock like class 158's) and long distance travel (in class 170 DMU which is a really suburban bodyshell).

Long distance should look to something like a class 444 environment on SW trains.

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:

Fully commercial basis only

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:

Much of the current 'commuter' stock provides what would be considered 'First Class' elsewhere in the UK for all passengers. A more specific split of fleet would be needed to achieve this objective, but perhaps on the same number of vehicles once short distance commuter services were set up with 2+3 seating.

If the trains were longer there could be first class AND more standard seats. First class is probably justified on city to city routes only, but the service provided by the local operator will always lag behind that on the long distance

services from London / Birmingham. As such more long distance services running through may be beneficial to the travelling public overall, if not the local franchisee.

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

Q35 comments:

It cannot be left to train staff to police this, it has to be a police matter. As such police resourcing is key.

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

Q36 comments:

Just get it correct on the existing channels, wrong information is worse than none.

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:

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:

Try both and see what the replies are

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:

Shared cabins is an issue to those travelling alone, and I would suggest a total change to the fare structure on the sleeper, to be more like cross channel ferries.

A berth in a 4

A berth in a 2 (as now)

A single berth (basic bed, basin & luggage rack)

A full-facility cabin (en suite, nicer bed etc)

Very early or late trains are only of use to those at the 'home' end of their journey, but this is indeed a trend in business behaviour.

Oban is an interesting idea, but Fort William is a likely destination for a car-less traveller. Could the services be adjusted to give Oban connections ?

Would summer demand justify a 3rd train, and a Saturday night operation of, at least, a Highland train ?

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: