

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 merits to this model proposed but I believe returning the railways to public ownership operated by a fully accountable public body set up by The Scottish Government reporting to Transport Scotland or the Regional Transport Authorities would be the best form of ownership.

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

Q2 comments: I understand the argument that operators need a longer franchise to invest in the railways but given the franchise model has largely failed to provide affordable fares or reduce public subsidy, the argument to bring responsibility back to public ownership is stronger than tinkering with the franchise model.

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

Q3 comments: As franchises are currently subsidised by the public, the Scottish Government should be the main stakeholder in the railways.

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

Q4 comments: All rail operations should be non profit, with any surplus being reinvested in the railways, reduce fares or to invest in other transport projects.

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

Q5 comments: The only role for third parties should be to rail passenger groups and trade unions.

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

Q6 comments: Removing the public subsidy to private operators who spend the money on shareholders, bonuses or investing in expansion overseas, i.e First Group in the USA.

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

Q7 comments: If the Scottish Government sets up a public operator, then it will be accountable to regulators and Freedom of Information legislation, but members of transport groups/trade unions and the public could sit on a rail passenger council or regional transport authorities to regulate performance.

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

Q8 comments: Ultimately if the Scottish Government were to bring public transport on the railways under its control, the voters could decide at a local and national level accordingly. Currently Scotrail owned by First Group is not accountable to the paying public.

Achieving reliability, performance and service quality

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

Q9 comments: Bonuses or financial incentives do nothing to further the public good and will not make the railways run any better, either an individual can do their job and take home a salary, or they fail to meet their responsibilities and action should be taken.

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: My own belief is large savings can be made within a small country that one system can deliver a strong service, integrated and connected with no 'postcode lottery' local politics present but the regional transport authorities could play a large role in connecting to other local services.

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

Q11 comments: The only passenger issues to be concerned with is cheaper fares. The service actually works quite well in Scotland but it is unaffordable out with local journeys and prohibits greater numbers using the railways.

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

Q12 comments: A journey takes as long as it takes within reasonable means but overcrowded trains during peak times could be addressed with more carriages.

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: If the service is returned to public ownership and management and employees working in the public sector, they will be public servants and rewarded with the same benefits and entitlements, regulated by Audit Scotland and other existing bodies to ensure a quality service.

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

Q14 comments: Ultimately the rail passengers and taxpayers can bring any issues to light through the regulator or local elected representatives.

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: Standing on trains is unacceptable as everyone pays the same fares, they should be entitled to a seat. Standing and cramped carriages causes stress and a poorer customer experience and should be avoided at all costs.

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: Reducing the numbers of direct services would be a backward step, there should be more direct services or 'express services' and breaking up journeys by transferring to other services is frustrating.

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: Ultimately the people who use the railways should be consulted more often but if the Government owns the railways and could be punished at the polls for poor performances then this places more emphasis on action being taken.

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

Q18 comments: It should be publically owned or at least not for profit. The only alternative option to public ownership would be a cooperative or mutual model but in my opinion this would be a missed opportunity if there was ever a chance a Government could decide to privatise the railways in future.

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

Q19 comments: Public ownership means serving the public first over profits, there should be no need to incentivise people to do the job they are paid to do.

Scottish rail fares

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

Q20 comments: Fares should be based at cost price with any surpluses invested back in the railways.

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 by government and commercial considerations should not come into it. Public transport is a public service and should serve the public good, boost business and tourism and help stimulate the economy, for the whole country.

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: The taxpayer subsidy is proof of failure of the franchise mode, the taxpayer should not have to pick up the tab if private operators cannot deliver a quality service with affordable pricing and investing in the system. Fares should be based on cost price taking into account overheads and perhaps a small portion for future investment.

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: Penalising customers for travelling during normal business hours is an immoral practice and should be ended. Unless there is a revolution in the business world, people will always travel during the peak hours.

Scottish stations

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

Q24 comments: Unless there is significant campaigns from passengers to close a particular station, stations should not be closed and ultimately more should be opened in more remote areas to make the service more accessible.

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: Local authorities or regional transport bodies should be able to promote or fund a local station or service but not commercial bodies unless this is a sponsorship not operational proposal.

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: The local authorities or regional transport bodies should be given a greater say in local needs for stations and partnership working could help develop this approach, joint management could work.

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

Q27 comments: If local stations are improved with greater facilities or opportunities with local businesses like restaurants or community facilities (SMEs only) there could be ways to encourage investment by providing low cost rents and improve the footfall in the local area.

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

Q28 comments: Obviously smaller communities and stations may have less facilities but a toilet, customer service desk and monitored secure waiting room should be a bare minimum.

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: Cross border services should continue north of Edinburgh but

if they are commercial operators they should come under the Scottish Government's jurisdiction and adhere to appropriate fares and conditions. Cross-border services are important for businesses and tourism and should be continued as direct services. But if Scotland's constitutional future remains unchanged beyond 2014 then Scottish Ministers should have joint control with the Department of Transport to allow for separate terms for running the railways in Scottish territories and devolve Network rail in Scotland if this has not already been put in place.

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: If the Department of Transport at UK level fail to agree to the terms and conditions set down under a publically owned Scottish railways service, then an Edinburgh hub may be feasible for Scottish connections. However, the number of services connecting the North and North East of Scotland to the hub would have to be increased.

Rolling stock

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

Q31 comments: If the railways are publically owned, this should be met by contracts to the private sector to produce the rolling stock required by tender but perhaps the Scottish Futures Trust using the NPD model could be considered.

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

Q32 comments: Toilets and Wi-fi on every service, catering facilities for journeys longer than 45 minutes.

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: Increase provision if possible but it should not be a priority over fare price.

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: There is no need for first class services on the majority of

services and definitely not for an hour or less. To have people packed into carriages and families and elderly standing while first class is empty is an embarrassment.

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

Q35 comments: A ban on alcohol should be considered on trains similar to buses but a separate consultation should perhaps be considered to look at the issues.

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

Q36 comments: Increase the use of text/email services and social media for travel updates and changes to timetables etc but provision in this area is improving.

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: The sleeper service is a good service and important for business and tourism and should form part of a publically owned Scottish railways service.

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: It should be included as part of the service and not separate. Both UK and Scottish Governments should help meet the costs of this service even if there is future constitutional change.

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: I have used the sleeper service once in the last year but found it a good service and in many ways better than the day time services, the staff are friendly and approachable and the journey comfortable, it should be available as far North as possible.

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: Reducing fares, increasing services and access to routes via more lines and stations will in itself increase train use and reduce carbon emissions. But any other measures will be futile if fares are not reduced through a public ownership model.