

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: The merits are that a single company is covering the whole country leading to more tied up thinking, the ability to reallocate rolling stock where required, economies of scale, simplicity from the passenger's perspective. Offering both the social and economic routes as a single package forces the franchisee to operate a decent service in the social areas to be allowed to operate the profitable routes. If the two are separate there could be a tendency to spend as little as possible on the social franchise while the economic franchise takes large profits.

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

Q2 comments: I support a longer franchise term, this offers incentives for the winning bidder to invest in capital projects. A longer franchise also gives the franchisee longer to settle into the franchise and make improvements towards their goals.

I would strongly support an extension scheme such as the 7 year initial term with 3 year optional extension if both parties are happy as used in the current franchise. This provides the benefits of a 10 year term in terms of improvements and attractiveness to potential bidders while also giving the government an option to terminate the franchise after 7 years. It also offers a point 7 years down the line where the franchisee needs to have impressed to retain the contract.

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

Q3 comments: I don't have enough knowledge to answer this.

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

Q4 comments: If the government takes on part of the risk of running the rail service then perhaps it is fair to take a percentage of the profit. On the other hand the franchise's main goal is to provide a train service, not to generate a profit for the government, perhaps more can be gained by leaving the full profits to the successful bidder and using this as leverage to obtain other commitments from the bidders.

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

Q5 comments: No view

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

Q6 comments: Offering financial rewards for good performance would offer value for money in my opinion. The franchise could be structured so that performance targets must be met to obtain the full amount of money. Be aware of performance metrics being abused such as manipulating timetables to increase punctuality.

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

Q7 comments: I don't have enough knowledge to answer this.

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

Q8 comments: I firmly believe that franchise commitments are a fundamental part of the franchise so breaking the commitments is to break the franchise. Severe financial penalties and possible loss of the franchise would be suitable sanctions. Companies who attempt to place a cheap bid and then go back on their commitments should be dealt with as harshly as is possible under current law.

Achieving reliability, performance and service quality

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

Q9 comments: I prefer incentivising good performance rather than penalising poor. Potential structure would be to offer 70% of the money available as a base line, 20% more for good performance and 10% more for excellent. Penalties should still be used for breaking franchise commitments.

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: No particular view.

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

Q11 comments: The 5 or 10 minute allowance before a train is classed as "late" is often mocked although I do see the benefit of separating slightly late trains and very late trains. Perhaps consider an additional metric of trains which really are "on time" ie. Within 1 minute of timetable.

Punctuality should be measured at every intermediate station not just the destination as this more closely aligns with passenger journeys. Adapting the punctuality metric according to the number of people effected/economic cost is a good idea but seems fraught with difficulties to implement and is probably more trouble than it is worth.

It appears to me that sometimes timetables are manipulated to add several minutes to the arrival time of the final destination as compared to what it should be. My assumption for the discrepancy is to manipulate performance measure and is an underhand trick.

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

Q12 comments: I favour reliability over journey times (no point in having a quick journey time if the train doesn't turn up). Punctuality up to around 95% and then improve journey times.

Consider more innovative ways of improving journey times such as express services which stop at ½ of the intermediate stations on one service and then the other half on the next service as is done with the Waverley to Queen St express.

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 SQUIRE system is a very good idea as factors such as train quality, announcements and cleanliness seriously impact the public's perception of train travel. It seems only fair to assess factors which the franchisee has control over.

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

Q14 comments: Nothing comes to mind which is as thorough as the SQUIRE 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: As a general rule I don't think that standing on a train is

acceptable at any time. Everyone pays for a seat and so everyone should get one. Standing tends to penalise people unfairly, for example trains get busier the closer they get to Glasgow Queen St so those who get on at Waverley or Dunblane will always get a seat and those who get on at Bishopbriggs will never get a seat.

From this point of view any “target” for standing time which is greater than 0 is in my view wrong. If a train is so full as to always have standing for some of the time then a more frequent service is needed or longer trains. I would accept very occasional standing for example after major sporting events, but not as the norm on a particular service.

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: I don't support this idea at all. Adding in an extra connection adds time to the overall journey (often around 1/2h) and reduces the reliability due to missed connections, etc. I would always favour a direct service over changing. This is especially true for people who don't use the train system regularly, having to make a change is a big disincentive to use the train at all.

The model that Lothian Busses uses in Edinburgh seems very sensible. Rather than using the traditional hub system where all busses meet at a hub somewhere in the centre Lothian runs a series of criss-crossing direct services from one side of the city to the other, sometimes via the centre, sometimes not. These generally means that with a short walk you can get a direct bus to your destination rather than having to change at a hub.

New services such as the Helensburgh to Edinburgh show the advantages of being able to get a direct train without having change in the hub.

Interchanges with other forms of transport however are very sensible and if they can be timetabled to meet up sensibly then even better.

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 government needs to direct frequency of services in the “social” part of the network otherwise there is little incentive for the franchisee to run frequent services. The “economic” part of the network could be left up to the franchisee to set most parameters, perhaps with some high level requirements/minimums from the government.

Journey times seem less important to specify on more rural lines but there could be benefits to setting journey time requirements on highly used commuter routes to focus the franchisee on running an efficient service.

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

Q18 comments: I favour targeted specification. Rural / Social routes probably need to be fully specified or close to it while high profit / economic routes may well be able to operate with no specification at all. I would favour some minimal parameters to be specified such as minimum frequencies and passenger capacities but leave these as minimums rather than fixed amounts.

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

Q19 comments: The operator should be able to make a profit where it runs a good service. If the operator is able to make additional revenue by running an innovate service then the contact should allow that.

Scottish rail fares

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

Q20 comments: Train travel comes under the banner of public transport and in general public transport has support from the state. The fares policy should attempt to try and cover some of the costs of running the service while also being competitive with other forms of transport. From the figures presented in the consultation document it looks unlikely that the full cost of running the network can be covered by passengers as people would use other forms of transport before paying the price that the fares would need to be (4x current price).

At the moment fares seem to be broadly competitive with petrol for peak time journeys. This makes them cheaper than taking the car when the full costs of running a car are considered (though most people only consider petrol cost when making this comparison). When two or more people travel by car the economics sometimes shift in favour of the car. I have little knowledge of what comparative bus prices are.

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: I would favour most prices being set by the government to ensure that they remain fair over different routes and they fare/subsidy ratio is what the government intended as it is them who have to pay the subsidy.

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: Really the fares need to be set in such a way that they are

competitive with other forms of transport and then the subsidy picks up the rest of the bill. I can't see any other sensible way to balance them unless they are to become so expensive as to be useless or the government decides that rail travel will be in essence free and paid for by tax revenues.

There is some merit in increasing fares (by a fairly small amount) on areas which have been recently enhanced. This would probably be widely accepted so long as the increases were relatively small. This shouldn't be confused with regular works to keep the railway up to scratch however.

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: I would say something like peak should be 50% to 100% more expensive than off-peak. This will in almost all cases not help encourage people to travel during off-peak times. The vast majority of people travelling during peak hours are going to work and have very little flexibility in when they travel, their only choice is to use the train or not.

To my mind one of the reasons that peak pricing exists is to separate out those commuting (ie. would otherwise be sitting in traffic jams as a single person in a car) from leisure users (travelling when roads are quieter, possibly multiple people in the car) and pricing the tickets at a level which is competitive with their alternatives.

At present the peak time band is quite wide, sufficiently so to make commuting to an office job off-peak impossible for most people. I agree with shoulder pricing being an alternative but undesirable due to complicating an already complicated system.

Perhaps shortening the peak period would paradoxically have more of an effect in reducing overcrowding. Section 5.4 in the consultation document states that the busiest trains on the Edinburgh – Glasgow line are those which depart between 7:15 – 8:15 and 16:45 – 17:45. The peak times are substantially larger than this, from first thing until 9:15 in the morning. In particular the fact that the very earliest trains are classified as peak seems to be an anomaly, these would seem to me to be the prime candidates for people actually being able to make a modal shift to. Perhaps moving the peak band to be 7:00-8:30 or something similar would achieve the goal of reducing overcrowding on the busiest of trains.

Another alternative is to differentiate routes, making the fast Edinburgh – Glasgow via Falkirk a more expensive option than the slower routes via Bathgate and Motherwell.

Scottish stations

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

Q24 comments: Very difficult question, it is clear that the stations are not

financially viable in their own right, but yet the lease costs at least are not massive in terms of the annual budget. I would lean towards keeping them open as the costs of re-opening a station appear to be massive by comparison to the costs of keeping existing stations open.

I don't think that stations in Glasgow should be closed because they are within a mile of another station. Adding around a mile to people's walk from the station is enough to make them stop using the train. My finger in the air is that most people's threshold for walking is between $\frac{1}{2}$ and 1 mile. Removing a station that is 1 mile from each of its neighbours would leave a large gap that people wouldn't be prepared to walk to. Section 1.3 in the consultation document states that Strathclyde is the "most used suburban network in the UK outside of London", I imagine that this is due to, in no small part, the high number and density of stations in Glasgow.

I note that Partick and Hyndland are within a mile of each other and so at least one of them must be on the list of 11 stations within a mile of another station. Station usage data¹ shows that for 2009-10 1.3M journeys started or finished at Hyndland and 1.9M at Partick. Section 5.15 of the consultation document shows them both in the top 5 stations in Scotland for interchanges. The lease costs of £208K/year of all 11 stations seems trivial when compared to the passenger numbers for just one of these stations. There is no rationale given in the consultation document for doing anything with these stations other than the simple fact that they are less than a mile apart, on that basis I firmly think that all 11 stations should be maintained.

1. <http://www.rail-reg.gov.uk/server/show/nav.1529>

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: No view

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: Tricky issue, the current system seems silly but I can see practical reasons why it might be the easiest option in reality. No strong feelings.

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

Q27 comments: No view

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

Q28 comments: Categorising stations seems sensible, no particular views about how it is done.

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. There are considerable advantages of direct train services. Adding in a change usually ends up adding around 1/2h to the journey and reduces its reliability (due to delays, cancellations, etc). The more changes there are to make the less likely people are to make a journey.

The current system that East Coast use of running trains from London some of which terminate at Waverley and some continue to Aberdeen, Dundee, Inverness or Glasgow seems ideal. This offers the same regular service from London to Waverley as all trains terminating at Waverley but also gives people further north the option of a less frequent but direct service.

It becomes fairly clear in the consultation document that the rationale for this is not improvement for passengers but actually because the implementation of East Coast's franchise means that they receive a disproportionate amount of subsidy compared to Scotrail for the number of passengers who use the services. This is a problem with the franchising system, not with running direct services. This should be tackled by addressing the deficiencies in the ORCATS not forcing passengers to make more changes, this is the franchising system at its very worst!

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: This offers no real advantages, see Q29.

Rolling stock

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

Q31 comments: Government taking ownership of the trains directly rather than using ROSCOs

Using cheaper forms or fuel (probably electricity)

Running longer trains which still only require on guard, one driver and probably use less fuel than running two trains separately

Scotrail currently has one of the highest standards of rolling stock in the UK, particularly for commuter services. This is an advantage and not one which

should easily be given up. I suspect that this is a major factor in Scotrail's satisfaction level being as high as it is.

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

Q32 comments: All trains should have toilets.

In general Scotland's routes are split into two categories, commuter and long distance. Commuter trains don't need a great deal beyond comfortable seats, luggage provision in overhead racks is usually sufficient.

Long distance services require the provision of some tables (groups of 4) and plenty of luggage space.

In general all trains should have information systems with the calling stations listed, they should be well sound proofed, they should be air conditioned and they should have comfortable seats (of the class 170 style).

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: Wi-Fi would seem sensible although it is becoming less of an issue as 3G mobile coverage gets better. No particularly strong view.

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: From the consultation document 1st class generates quite a lot of revenue. I don't think that converting 1st class to standard will solve the capacity problems in most cases as it isn't enough seats to make up the shortfall. I would leave it to the franchisee to decide.

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

Q35 comments: No view.

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

Q36 comments: In general travel information is very good. Where trains are delayed/cancelled providing more information about what to do (ie, wait for the next train, go to another station and change train there, give up and go home, etc) would be useful.

Caledonian Sleeper

36. 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 should continue in one form or another so probably it needs to be specified.

37. 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: No view about whether to split it or not. I think that it can stand as its own entity if that is deemed to be preferable.

38. 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: The appeal is that the travelling is done at night so it doesn't eat into your time. You can spend the evening doing what you want and wake up first thing in the morning at your destination. Being able to get to London for first thing in the morning without having to lose your evening the night before and pay for a hotel is another advantage.

The value of Fort William, Inverness and Aberdeen is that they are 3 large terminuses for which the intermediate stations cover a huge amount of Scotland. I don't have enough information to know if other stations would be better placed as terminuses but the idea of running a service to the outer reaches of the Scottish network is sound.

The current facilities seem to be sufficient. I would be unlikely to pay more. The only thing would be a lounge/bar for standard class passengers, particularly on the Inverness/Aberdeen/Fort William services which leave earlier in the evening.

Environmental issues

39. What environmental key performance indicators should we consider for inclusion in the franchise agreement or the High Level Output Specification?

Q40 comments: No view.