

Rail 2014
Transport Scotland
Buchanan House
58 Port Dundas Road
Glasgow G4 0HF

Dear Sirs,

Having been alerted to the consultation under way I am writing in particular to express my views on the future of Cross-Border train services between England and Scotland, and I do so as a passenger who regularly uses the Cross Country service between Leuchars and Cheltenham Spa and the East Coast line between Leuchars and London.

Question 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?

To preface my answer I would point out that passengers and taxpayers are not distinct groups; for the most part they are one and the same.

In the age when it is possible to travel on a direct service from England to a number of cities in Brussels and France it is surely backward thinking to entertain the possibility of curtailing cross-border services within the UK. Passengers and potential passengers think in terms of a Britain-wide network and service. They want to be able to travel from the distant north of Scotland to the deep south of England and the far west of Wales in the quickest and most comfortable way with due consideration for the environment. They want more direct routes not fewer and it should be entirely possible for rail companies to operate an integrated service cross-borders.

Cross-border services are long distance journeys made by a diverse travelling public including families, the elderly and travellers from overseas. At the extreme limits direct journeys will take as long as 8 hours on the East Coast line and 13 hours on the Cross Country service excluding time spent travelling to and from stations of departure and arrival. Any time involved in changing trains is a great inconvenience and increases travelling times, particularly if connections were missed due to delays en route. I am sure no one would be prepared to guarantee connectivity. Also, on these long journeys many passengers will travel with luggage. For the many elderly and frail passengers changing trains is inconvenient and an intimidating prospect.

There is some suggestion that the cross-border services under-utilised. I am sure that this is no more true of the cross-border services than it is of every other train and bus service. In any event, in my travelling experience there are often times when standard class passengers have to stand crushed in carriages or sit on the floor between carriages.

The elderly and vulnerable tend to travel first class and are prepared to pay much higher ticket prices for the sense of space and security offered. If the first class service with reserved seats was

not available over the entire journey fewer would be inclined to travel. Personally I have reduced my long-distance motoring journeys in favour of train travel but if cross-border services are terminated at Edinburgh I will revert to travel by car which in so many ways is more convenient and cheaper.

On the question of resilience of service during periods of bad weather I do not believe that Scottish franchisees will provide a service north of Edinburgh any different to that of cross-border services. The cross-border services are currently the remit of the Department of Transport and should remain so despite the nationalist fervour north of the border. This proposal in fact smacks of devolution machinations.

Question 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.

If, as the consultation document says, “satisfying passenger needs must be paramount if the transport business is to succeed”, and “improving journey times and making train services more attractive thereby encouraging people to use the rail network with a particular emphasis on reducing journey times to increase patronage” then cross-border services should not terminate at any hub within Scotland. As far as the travelling public are concerned I can see no benefits accruing from having an Edinburgh hub.

Most members of the public, including myself will feel they have insufficient expertise to answer most of the 40 questions in the consultation document. The following are my comments on questions 9, 27, 35 and 36.

Question 9

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

Good performance should be a given, it is simply fulfilling a contract. To make incentive payments in these circumstances is akin to the ludicrous suggestion that individuals should be paid for simply arriving at work on time every day. Certainly poor performance should be penalised when it is within the compass of the service and should be clarified in contracts.

Question 27

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

By the provision of adequate car parking which is either free or with charges as low as possible. Improve ease of access and have helpful informed staff.

Question 35

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

Passengers need neither to smoke or drink alcohol on trains. Smoking has been banned for the safety and comfort of the travelling public and alcohol should also be banned. Obviously it would be helpful if legislation were in place to back this up.

Question 36

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

Communication is important particularly with regard to delays, cancellations and other changes. The front-line staff whether on board or in stations need to be kept better informed – I am sure they would appreciate this, and they need to be conspicuous in force when unforeseen events occur.

Finally, I have to comment on the poor publicity about the consultation process. To quote from a reader's letter in the St Andrews Citizen local paper “a notice on the north-bound platform at Leuchars station is so inconspicuously sighted that only passengers alighting at the rear of a north-bound train in daylight would see the invitation to “give your views”. It seems that poor publicity is endemic in most consultation processes!

I hope these comments will be helpful and given due consideration as they encompass the views of many local people with whom I have spoken.