

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 as set out in the consultation document. However, the dual focus concept seems similar to the approach taken in the Transport Act 1968, which as I recall created a great deal of accounting complexity. I think a study should be made of the working of the Transport Act 1968 before any decision is made. My own view is to keep it simple as a single focus franchise.

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

Q2 comments: Seven years with a prospect if a three year extension seems a reasonable balance between having a period of stability and allowing the situation to be reviewed within a reasonable time if major changes are to be made (particularly if there are any thoughts of a vertically integrated operation in the future).

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

Q3 comments: Probably the so-called cap and collar where as I understand it small rises and falls in revenue are at the risk of the franchisee but a large fall in revenue would result in revenue support from Transport Scotland and a large rise in revenue would be shared with Transport Scotland.

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

Q4 comments: As Q3.

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

Q5 comments: That they do not disrupt the operation of the national timetable or unduly abstract revenue from ScotRail.

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

Q6 comments: By allowing the franchisee to retain the benefits of its own

initiatives, either through improving services or reducing costs, provided that core service levels and standards are met.

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

Q7 comments: I think a low figure should be set. Reading the consultation document, it seems that the cost of the performance bond is met by the Scottish Government anyway as part of the cost of the franchise and the profit goes to the banks. I do not follow the argument about the bond meeting the cost of re-franchising. If the franchisee fails financially, it is open to Transport Scotland to pay them to continue to operate the service as a management contract (as happened with GNER) until the new franchise is in place. Re-franchising would take place at some stage in any event. I think the risk of cost arising through early re-franchising should be treated as a self-insured risk.

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

Q8 comments: Financial penalties for not meeting targets. Disqualification for five years from future tendering for other franchises in the UK.

Achieving reliability, performance and service quality

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

Q9 comments: Incentivise good performance as well as penalising bad performance. Otherwise, the standard defined in the franchise will become the maximum with no incentive for the franchisee to do better.

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: Service groups are a good compromise. There may be specific factors affecting particular areas and these should be reflected in the statistics.

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

Q11 comments: By reviewing the elements of SQUIRE to ensure that what is measured corresponds with what is considered important by passengers.

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

Q12 comments: Time-keeping should be the first priority, but we should avoid the over-padded timetables seen in some parts of the UK where the actual arrival time (in the working timetable) is long before the published arrival time. This causes unnecessary confusion, particularly for those planning connections and those meeting trains.

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: Undoubtedly this is needed. It should be extended to include Network Rail.

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

Q14 comments: Use of mystery shoppers to assess aspects that cannot be assessed by inspectors, such as courtesy and helpfulness of employees.

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: 20 minutes as in London. This would allow more economical use of rolling stock by reducing the capacity needed during peak periods only. This would require to be linked with a campaign to encourage passengers to offer seats to those unable to stand for 20 minutes.

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: Absolutely not. For many – particularly older people, those with heavy luggage or prams and those unfamiliar with the rail network – the prospect of having to change trains would create a disincentive to rail travel.

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: These should be directed as I expect very few routes are profitable at off-peak times. We have seen the situation with buses when evening and weekend services are withdrawn by operators as unprofitable.

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

Q18 comments: Option 1 (minimum) which seems to me to be compatible with option 3 (targeted) as there should in principle be nothing to prevent Transport Scotland and ScotRail agreeing and funding extra trains. Maybe Transport Scotland should have a budget to fund additional services on a trial basis.

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

Q19 comments: Extra services should be given a discount on track access charges given that the track is already there and being paid for by the core services.

Scottish rail fares

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

Q20 comments: There should be a reasonable balance between rail-users and taxpayers, but taking account of the fact that non-users also benefit from the existence of the rail network in terms of reduction in traffic congestion and environmental benefits.

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 see no logic in making InterCity fares unregulated. The consultation document makes a mad assumption that all rail users could choose to drive. What about those who do not own cars? What about children? What about the difficulty parking in major cities such as Glasgow and Edinburgh? All routes need to be regulated. Unregulated tickets should also be available to give flexibility to the franchisee. The suggestions in the document (other than deregulating InterCity fares) are about right.

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: Be very careful about the 'RPI+3' formula given the hostile reception in January 2012 when this proposal was ultimately cancelled. I would prefer to see 'RPI+1' with more emphasis on using off-peak capacity by creative marketing and on efficiency savings.

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: Maybe 50%? Generally those travelling during peak periods are in employment and can afford to pay more. I suggest you conduct research in other areas, including Transport for London.

Scottish stations

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

Q24 comments: Any eventual publication should refer to PRINCIPAL and not PRINCIPLE stations. Basic standards of literacy might impress passengers and others. The criteria should be population served and interchange with other modes of transport such as buses.

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: Merits would be to provide a station where otherwise there might not be one, such as at shopping centres and airports. Issues would include fragmentation of responsibility and consistency of standards.

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: I think responsibility should probably lie with Network Rail as they have a longer term interest and own other parts of the rail infrastructure. Network Rail would have to be given the same responsibilities as ScotRail have at present, eg for removing graffiti speedily etc.

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

Q27 comments: Adopt a station is a good idea as long as the network operator retains overall control.

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

Q28 comments: I think these categories are artificial and fairly meaningless. Destination stations are also the starting point for the return journey and may need facilities for drop-off and pick-up. Tourist stations (such as Oban) are also used by local people, who may require parking facilities. Each station needs to be looked at on its own merits.

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, cross-border services should most certainly continue to run north of Edinburgh. These services provide benefits to people living north of Edinburgh and wanting to travel to destinations in England; and also bring tourists to Scotland. Despite what the Scottish Government might think, not all tourists want to go to Edinburgh. Both groups would be discouraged by the prospect of having to change trains *en route* and may well decide to fly or drive instead. Scottish Government accounting arrangements should not be placed above the interests of passengers. These services should not be seen as enemy invaders abstracting revenue from ScotRail, but as a valuable part of Scotland's transport infrastructure. If finance is a concern, then Transport Scotland should receive a proportion of any premium paid by East Coast or Cross-Country or – more likely – pay a proportion of the subsidy for these services. If there is a problem with ORCATS being based on numbers of seats rather than numbers of passengers, then ORCATS should be reviewed.

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, they should certainly not terminate at Edinburgh Waverley for the reasons stated above. By your logic, trains should terminate at Berwick-upon-Tweed and Carlisle with passengers forced to change and purchase new tickets!

Rolling stock

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

Q31 comments: Enter into partnerships with train operating companies in England and Wales to place larger orders in order to achieve economies of scale. There should also be increased fleet standardisation, especially with electric trains.

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

Q32 comments: Seats and luggage space on all trains. Toilets and catering facilities on longer journeys. There should also be space for bicycles wherever possible.

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: The cost of Wi-Fi and mobile phone coverage should be met by network providers and/or users. Otherwise, if the Scottish Government starts paying for (or subsidising) mobile phone coverage, logically it should pay for base stations elsewhere in the country where these have not been provided by mobile phone operators.

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: It would be fraudulent to sell first class tickets, encouraging passengers to pay extra to guarantee a seat, then to declassify first class accommodation at busy times, potentially leaving first class passengers standing (as seems to be implied in the consultation document). If the franchisee is benefiting from additional revenue from first class passengers, this should be conditional on provision of adequate seats for standard class passengers.

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

Q35 comments: Before any decision is reached, there should be a process of prioritising different forms of anti-social behaviour. Rowdy behaviour due to alcohol consumption on board the train is in my experience relatively rare. More prevalent is the placing of feet on seats and noisy 'personal' stereos. These issues should be tackled first, before an alcohol ban is considered.

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

Q36 comments: By ensuring that systems cope with disruption, take account of cancellations and suggest suitable alternative routes rather than just stating the time of the next train to the same destination. For example, the present system will say: 'The train to X has been cancelled. The next train to X is at (time).' This takes no account of the fact that there may be an earlier train to intermediate stations where some passengers may be intending to travel or that it may be possible to get to X by an alternative route. There is a huge reluctance to use live announcements during times of disruption when, for example, all the trains might be cancelled so there is no next train and passengers need to know how long the disruption is likely to last. The franchisee should be required to provide meaningful information during times of disruption and fined if they do not. Whilst weather and external factors can be an excuse for late running or cancellations, these should not excuse failure to keep passengers informed.

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: Sleeper services should be specified as I cannot imagine these services are profitable in their present form, calling at all the stations served at present. These services are valuable to those living on the routes served and for bringing visitors to Scotland. Unless specified, these services would inevitably be curtailed and might disappear altogether.

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: I suspect they should be part of the main franchise to allow sharing of drivers, staff and facilities, particularly at times of disruption. It would be perverse if a driver employed by the sleeper franchisee had to travel a long distance to take over a train when a local ScotRail driver was available.

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: (1) The appeal is to reach the destination first thing in the morning (to a lesser extent on the Fort William route) and to avoid getting up too early in the morning. (2) The value for Fort William, Inverness and Aberdeen and for intermediate stations (which you omit to mention at all in the consultation) is that these places cannot generally be reached in any other way, except by flying or travelling all day. (3) I cannot imagine that it would be practical to provide en-suite facilities in the cabins. Free showers should be provided at major stations for arriving and departing passengers. The suggested move from Euston to Waterloo International would offer an opportunity to provide improved facilities.

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: This is too technical to be answered by lay persons. I suggest that you consult the transport authorities in countries like Denmark and Sweden who are probably ahead of us in this area. Transport policy should certainly be directed towards encouraging the use of public transport rather than spending large sums of money on road and bridge building.