

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 is much to recommend a dual focus franchise PROVIDED appropriate service levels are specified in BOTH categories. However the notion of further disaggregation of the current arrangements, which are hinted at in section 7 of Setting the scene, should be dismissed at the outset. So many of the problems associated with the UK railway system as it has evolved/morphed into its current configuration stem directly from the fragmented structure of post-privatisation railways in the UK; any further 'splits' would be to emulate the present situation in Presbyterian churches in Scotland -- a situation to be avoided at all costs !

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

Q2 comments: Hard to calculate a specific duration but should be long enough – and contain the appropriate conditions – to encourage investment by the franchisee.

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

Q3 comments: An appropriate mix of carrot and stick. And conditions which would avoid the likes of the National Express East Coast franchise collapse.

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

Q4 comments: Not close enough to the process to comment.

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

Q5 comments: Increased and closer participation with/by Network Rail and involvement of other 3rd parties along the lines of Community Rail Partnerships.

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

Q6 comments: Not close enough to the process to comment.

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

Q7 comments: Not close enough to the process to comment.

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

Q8 comments: Lessons to be learned from the National Express East Coast situation.

Achieving reliability, performance and service quality

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

Q9 comments: Both.

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: Should be aligned with actual routes and presumably this would happen as part of a dual focus arrangement.

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

Q11 comments: Ensure a more direct and EFFECTIVE route for passengers to communicate with both the TOC AND Transport Scotland -- i.e. feedback should not just disappear into the abyss or be met with the customary meaningless jargon and platitudes from some "Customer Service" Dept.. Some degree of penalty would require to follow-on from such situations to encourage the franchisee to maintain the specified standards.

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

Q12 comments: Reasonable timings should be agreed almost regardless of journey distance but a cap of 10 minutes should apply even on the longer routes.

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: It would seem to go without saying that such a regime be part of any franchise and this would seem to be adequately explained in sections 4.16, 17, & etc., of the discussion paper. It would also seem unreasonable to expect the franchisee to be responsible for factors outwith their control. Other mechanisms would, surely, kick-in to deal with, for example, failures on the part of Network Rail.

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

Q14 comments: Assessment of train quality should be part of Transport Scotland's remit. 2nd part : assessment of station quality : The suggestion in section 7.20 would seem to enable a more appropriate method of dealing with the whole issue of station management including their maintenance. A separate body to monitor quality of these functions would apply.

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: 10 minutes would seem to be a reasonable time even to permit crew changes where necessary.

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: Probably, but each location would require to be assessed separately before selecting the solution most suited to its particular situation i.e. a one-size-fits-all approach would be entirely inappropriate.

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: Regardless of which party decides on specific aspects of service provision, the appropriate level of LOCAL research should be carried out to determine the **actual**, and to assess the **potential**, demand before specifying levels of frequency, journey time & etc..

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

Q18 comments: Not close enough to the process to comment.

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

Q19 comments: At the outset, the government should include in their pre-qualification questionnaires the requirement that potential bidders propose innovative measures within their bid and that the bidders announce any measures in the current proposal which they consider would stifle or inhibit any such initiatives.

Scottish rail fares

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

Q20 comments: All fares should take account of the alternative means of travel on a like-for-like basis, i.e. building in an allowance for ALL the associated, and sometimes hidden costs of the differing methods of transport, e.g. for car users the depreciation factor ought to be included. Part of any proposed dual franchise should, presumably, take into account the unique factors posed by remote and under-used social services/routes. Crucially a balance needs to be struck so as not to prevent the franchisee from achieving financial targets, but at the same time not be prohibitively expensive to the point of discouraging rail travel by potential customers. In common with the rest of the UK, there is a perceived need to greatly simplify the current fare structure. In these days of instant-everything there is also a huge need to make the changing of reservations and pre-purchased tickets a much more simple and straightforward process. The present system is unduly cumbersome and can act as a disincentive to people choosing rail over other forms of transport when planning their 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: Again the introduction of a dual franchise would address just such a question. Obviously those classified in the social provision bracket would attract more government regulation and, consequently more support, than those in the likes of the Strathclyde area where a more intensive market place exists and where commercial considerations would dominate.

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: Bearing in mind worldwide experience in recent years; most advanced countries have, almost without exception, already invested in, and continue to massively increase, their provision of electrified high speed rail infrastructure. It would seem to be a realistic proposition that, until this country achieves similar levels of modern 21st century rail development, the balance of funding the network ought to remain with taxpayer subsidy rather than funding it through the fare box.

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: There is an obvious need to try to even out the peaks of demand/ congestion but great care must be taken not to go too far down this line of pricing in order to avoid pricing people off the trains altogether. There remains an unavoidable core need for many people to travel during certain peaks and both management and customer-facing staff ought to apply some common sense when enforcing such a policy. For example, ticket barrier staff and on-train inspectors should be empowered to bring reasonable judgement to bear where an advance or off-peak ticket is presented at 09:15 on a virtually empty train!

Scottish stations

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

Q24 comments: The first requirement in any such determination is for the planners to recognise the fundamental difference between the needs of remote rural, predominantly Highland locations, and those of urban inner city situations. Current philosophy seems to focus purely on numbers; again a dual franchise focus would be more likely to take such factors into consideration or at least be able to recognise them.

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: Again I would refer you to the Community Rail Partnership model which operates with increasing success throughout the country.

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 answer to the first part of the question would be "one organisation" as postulated in 7.20 of the discussion notes. Not sufficiently au fait with the contractual options to comment on the second part of the question posed.

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

Q27 comments: Community Rail Partnerships.

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

Q28 comments: 1st part of the question is not understood – designated as what? However all stations should as a minimum provide : Waiting ROOMs i.e. not draughty bus shelters; adequate & regularly cleaned WCs; screens displaying train times/delays etc., and all larger stations should be staffed throughout the hours of arrivals & departures at that particular location.

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: Of course they should. The notion of terminating cross-border services at Edinburgh and/or Glasgow is preposterous, has come out of left field and could only have been dreamt up by bureaucrats domiciled in the Central Belt. It would introduce a massive disincentive to long distance rail travel and would probably lead to regular users, AND recent converts to rail usage from other forms of transport, to re-consider the benefits of seamless cross-border travel currently provided by existing rail services. And, incidentally, this approach would seem to be at odds with the GES – Transport Priorities as laid out at section 2.1 of the discussion document but, then again, such contradictions are not unique and are to be found throughout the entire document.

From the grammar used in the notes to describe the ‘Edinburgh Hub’ – introduced at a surprisingly early section in the discussion (at section 16 in Setting the scene) -- and subsequently and in much more depth in section 8, it would seem that the concept has been explored to a much greater degree than is warranted by any mandate from rail users to date, and certainly without consulting any elected bodies north of the Central Belt. In many respects, rather than displaying a “passenger-centric” ambition (as stated in Section 6 of setting the scene) this particular proposal represents a Central-Belt-centric concept and a particularly selfish one at that, offering absolutely no benefit -- the reverse being the case to an enormous degree -- to those who actually USE such services, i.e. a seeming discounting of the needs of the poor unfortunates who might actually want to travel seamlessly beyond the mecca which, in the limited and metropolitan vision of those who dreamt up such a scheme, Edinburgh represents. All further work on the (flawed) “concept” of an ‘Edinburgh Hub’ should be shutdown forthwith.

Cross-border services should be a matter for joint agreement between the DfT AND Scottish Ministers. Such co-operation should not be beyond the bounds

of reasonable possibility and should not be stifled by Scottish Ministers (and by extension TS) taking an insular approach to anything “cross-border”. Or by the seemingly increasing tendency within Scottish Gov/TS to “hunker down” behind Hadrian’s Wall. But perhaps, given some of the proposals floated in this consultation document, all cross-border services should remain in the remit of the Westminster Government. They, at least, have consistently recognised the needs of communities **beyond** the Central Belt.

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: Same question as 29 and same answer as given in 29. Although it should be added that it is blindingly obvious that “opportunities for Scottish connections” already exist under current arrangements at Edinburgh Waverley, Glasgow Central and other Scottish stations unless I am missing something very fundamental here.

Rolling stock

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

Q31 comments: Majoring on the “branding” of the fleet at the beginning of Section 9 seems to reflect a peculiar sense of priorities! The whole structure of owning/leasing rolling stock post-privatisation is a bit of a dog’s breakfast providing a gravy train for big lending institutions and imposing inflated costs on end users. The failure of some prominent ROSCOs in recent months serves to underline the fault lines in this particular financial model. Minds more informed than mine are presumably dreaming up alternative, more sustainable, options.

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

Q32 comments: There should be ample provision of WORKING and CLEAN toilets in any formation. Wi/Fi and power points, sufficient working space (i.e. generous provision of tables) should be a foregone provision nowadays. Seats aligning with windows and regular cleaning of windows -- especially on the tourist routes -- should also be included as a standard requirement in any franchise specification. The entire operation across the whole network – including both daytime trains AND overnight sleepers -- is crying out for a much more pro-active and enhanced approach to be taken to the provision of food and beverage. The demise of GNER standards in this respect is to be greatly regretted throughout the industry.

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 provision of mobile phone and Wi-Fi type services should reflect, and not lag behind current trends and levels of usage in society at large. The answer to the question as to how to prioritise such provision would then seem to be obvious.

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: The existing provision of 1st class services, where provided on Scotrail routes (as outlined at section 10.12 of the discussion paper), gives a mere nod to the concept of 1st class travel which probably explains the figure of 0.6% of ticket sales quoted at Para 10.13 of the discussion paper. The need to offer a more realistic and distinctive level of service on the longer and inter-city routes remains very important if the aim to attract more users from other forms of transport is a genuine aspiration.

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

Q35 comments: Common sense ought to be the default position on this issue. Apart from football specials, which are largely a thing of the past, trains originating from Dyce/Aberdeen probably pose the most problems in this regard (offshore workers letting off steam). The response to any instances of over-indulgence which impinge on the journey experience of other passengers, should be dealt with in a specific and focused manner rather than adopting a blanket approach to the disadvantage of responsible individuals who consume alcohol, i.e. those enjoy a pleasant drink without inflicting any harm or annoyance on their fellow travellers..

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

Q36 comments: by providing accurate and SENSIBLE on-board announcements. Some announcers just go through the motions and sound completely disinterested, some others embellish their “piece” as if on a Karaoke night out.

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: Yes, Scottish Ministers should continue to specify sleeper services and should take positive measures to ensure the future of the service. The second bullet point in section 11.7 indicates that quite clearly the author of this section does not understand the agenda of the passengers / customers who actually USE the service: Rule 1 in any survey of this sort = Know Your Customers. Section 11.8 would seem to be a statement of the obvious and aligns with what I and others have been attempting to suggest and encourage to Scotrail management at all levels for many, many months. Recent events would seem to have overtaken much of the thinking in the discussion paper including sections 11.9, 10 & 11 and the phraseology of questions 37, 38 & 39. The provision of funding of > £100 Million to replace the existing lifetime-expired sleeper rolling stock is to be greatly welcomed. This factor should provide a fresh platform (unintended pun) from which to move forward and make the many much-needed improvements which the current service is crying out to receive. The statement at 11.12 including the possibility to improve the longer-term financial performance of the service by “**removing** financial support” poses an interesting theory -- economists take note ! Massive scope exists to enhance virtually every aspect of the current service from marketing through to ticketing/reservations to the actual travelling experience itself including the provision of food & beverage and the general ambience provided in buffet coaches. Intensive training for customer-facing staff is a MUST: without this, all investment in “kit” will be largely wasted and the potential for a much-increased usage of the service be lost.

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: Such a service undoubtedly benefits from the synergy offered by being part of a much more extensive operation than could be provided by a separate operator. Past experience by operators attempting to offer a similar service re-inforces this conclusion.

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:
- The appealS of the Caledonian Sleeper Services are many and varied.

Again the phraseology of the second part of the 1st bullet point indicates an ignorance of the agenda of the users (and potential users) of the service on the part of the author. The answer to this part of the question is a resounding NO!

- The value of sleeper services to the destinations listed, the longest-distance destinations currently served by the sleeper operation is incalculable but, given an enhanced service, would be even more valuable and valued than at present. The destinations listed would seem to be the most appropriate ones but I'm sure that **adding** Oban (i.e. not dropping Ft William) would provide different and additional – not better – connectivity with the Argyll hinterland and the Inner & Outer Hebrides served by the ferries from Oban.
- Where does one start ! -- a bit of research on the part of TS into similar provision in other parts of the world would be a good starting point. I've written many and varied suggestions along these lines and would be pleased to forward them for discussion if invited. However any attempt to improve the service must be accompanied by a much more pro-active and positive approach to the branding and marketing of the service. Currently the existence of the service goes virtually unnoticed in the market place, even at the stations from which the service originates and terminates -- as an example of this, I defy most users of Inverness station to be able to identify where the Sleeper lounge is located. On the macro scale, shared experience with other regular users confirms that most people are unaware that the sleeper service even continues to exist in the UK, such has been, and remains, the virtually subliminal to promotion and advertising of the service. And the motives for this approach would be??

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: A drive towards more electrification of the network would improve the overall carbon footprint of the operation. And, manifestly, encouraging the switch of airline passengers to both medium/longer distance daytime trains, and overnight sleeper services, would provide national environmental benefits in this context at a stroke.