

Consultation Questions

The answer boxes will expand as you type.

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: This adds to the already complex contractual formulae and increases the likelihood that the balance of power between the regulator and the rail franchise holder will shift further in favour of the rail company who inevitably have a more direct hold on all the operational data and who are massively driven to focus their most creative juices on the profitable areas.

Another problem will be the ever present subversive objective of the contract holder to keep finding ways of switching whole routes, and in some cases certain services at unprofitable times of day, into the 'social' category and then maximising the subsidy/support required to keep the services running.

The experience of this dual approach in the bus industry does not give cause for optimism.

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

Q2 comments Ten or twelve year contract, but with a vigorous public consultation and formal review in advance of a clear 'break-point' at year six, with the expectation that unless a number of preset targets have been achieved consistently by years four, five and six, then the second part of the contract will not be allowed to proceed.

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

Q3 comments:

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

Q4 comments:

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

Q5 comments: Initially, this third party option sounds attractive. But in reality it would often have to be planned and funded in advance by the public purse because the whole railway infrastructure is tailored fairly exactly by Network Rail to what is currently required to run the main passenger franchise contract and a limited number of freight services on some lines. If not in use, sidings,

crossovers, turnback facilities, signalling and overall track capacity are quickly cut back by Network Rail, operating under their own separate value for money constraints. This is already a major inhibiting factor in expanding freight traffic. Any new passenger service operating initiatives would suffer from the same problems and would generally require a long three to five year advance planning lead time and considerable investment in new infrastructure. Few third party organisations would be able to sustain a commitment for this length of time however brilliant their project or their long term vision – and even fewer would have access to the levels of finance required and the licence to risk 100% financial loss. The problems faced by Grand Central and Chiltern Railways in developing extra/alternative rail services, and the energy expended by the main franchise companies (eg GNER and Virgin Trains) to obstruct and delay the projects, amply illustrate other complicating factors. In another public transport sector, the fate suffered by the proposed cross-Forth Hovercraft Service from Kirkcaldy to Portobello over the past five years demonstrates yet more important lessons that can equally be applied to the passenger railway. (NB I would be happy to spell these out more fully if required.).

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

Q6 comments:

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

Q7 comments:

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

Q8 comments: Financial penalties should be linked to the targets for each individual service/route and levied every three months to make failures to achieve agreed targets relatively instantaneous. Performance against targets and any penalties associated with this (plus any bonus payments for good service) should be published and posted on each station for each line of route. Annual financial penalties are too remote from day to day operations and become somewhat meaningless, especially for front line staff.

Achieving reliability, performance and service quality

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

Q9 comments: Will need to do both -- and with considerable imagination and insight too. Also, as the central planner, overseer and regulator, Transport

Scotland will need to up its game by a very considerable percentage.

However the franchise is constructed, additional skilled staff and relentless vigorous management will be needed to maintain better overall control of the whole franchise process, or the franchise contractor will inevitably ensure that you remain 'behind the curve'.

Whatever criteria are finally agreed as targets and sanctions, it will be important for Transport Scotland to have direct up-front access to all the management information and financial data systems relating to the operation of the franchise. Given the level of public subsidy, it is not appropriate for the franchise contractor to treat any of the key data systems on fares income/ticket sales , or on expenditure headings

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:

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

Q11 comments: In developing the performance criteria and targets for each route, groups of passengers from each route should be involved in Focus Groups to ensure all relevant issues are drawn out and considered before final decisions are made by Transport Scotland. The main points arising from these consultations should be made available on line.

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

Q12 comments:

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: Whatever balance is decided, it is essential that all specified trains should be actually run. At present the rolling stock is so tightly scheduled that train delivery becomes very fragile. Recent strong winds and fallen trees have damaged a few Scotrail trains. There are no reserves available so a rolling programme of unpredictable early morning train cancellations has been implemented on routes all over Scotland. Sufficient reserve capacity is essential to avoid these disruptive cancellations.

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

Q14 comments:

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: Many of the trains are used to full capacity and beyond across the country in the morning and evening peak periods and, in some cases, outwith the peaks when trains are taken in for routine maintenance. The rolling stock position is already too tightly scheduled so that service delivery becomes very fragile. Please see answer to Q12 above. A small flexible reserve of trains is required to support all the scheduled services to meet surges in passenger demand and train failures. These trains would also be available to strengthen services on a planned basis when major events are taking place anywhere in Scotland. These extra trains need to be fully costed into the franchise contract and sufficient management expertise and time made available at HQ Control to ensure they are appropriately deployed on a day to day basis.

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: The current level of direct services should not be reduced. Many people will not travel by rail if they have to change part way through the journey. Indeed, through services should be increased, as has been the case recently from Edinburgh to Helensburgh with the A to B development. Additional Bus/Rail Interchanges would be welcome in many locations but Transport Scotland and the Local Authorities must be ready to fund subsidised contracts to ensure that the bus companies actually use the Interchanges.

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:

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

Q18 comments:

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

Q19 comments:

Scottish rail fares

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

Q20 comments:

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:

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:

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:

Scottish stations

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

Q24 comments:

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:

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:

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

Q27 comments: By providing a congenial and appropriately user friendly environment and having staff available on site for a significant portion of the working day. This can be supplemented by volunteer gardeners, etc from the local community. Also by making unused parts of station building available for a range of community uses. e.g cafes, bookshops, art/craft studios, small business offices, etc.

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

Q28 comments:

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: It is essential that all current long distance services from north of Edinburgh/Glasgow to England should be maintained. Many people will simply not travel by rail if they have to change trains partway. There needs to be joint discussion and agreement between the Department of Transport and Scottish Ministers.

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 See answer above Q29. Also, Waverley is again approaching full capacity. If more trains travelled through beyond Edinburgh dwell time in Waverley would be reduced and capacity enhanced.

Rolling stock

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

Q31 comments:

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

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:

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:

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

Q35 comments: Previous experience of troublesome passengers on certain routes at certain times.

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

Q36 comments:

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 provide a very valuable early morning link to central London from all over Scotland, and in reverse. They must be retained.

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: They need to be managed by one of the train companies and ScotRail probably remains the best option for this. However, the fact that ScotRail does not provide any of the locomotives to haul the trains, either in Scotland or South of the Border, does lead to some severe operational discontinuities on occasion. Also, there is no incentive for ScotRail to consider the development of additional/improved/different sleeper services to London or elsewhere in Britain or, indeed, to mainland Europe. The travel market is continually evolving but the Sleeper services have been static for the past 30 years.

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 appeal of the Sleeper services are just that – passengers can sleep comfortably all the way to London and back to arrive refreshed at the end of the journey – ready for a full day of work or leisure. No early starts and inconvenient waiting time at airports to achieve an early arrival time for meetings/visits.

We also find that the sleepers, arriving in Euston, link well with onward journeys to Europe on the Eurostar services, although diversion of the sleepers into St Pancras or Kings Cross would be an even better interchange.

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: