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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: None. There are enough players at the moment and if one company's trains is to compete / conflict with another's why stop there? Why not accept bids / auction paths individually to whomsoever is interested? If a station hasn't been used regularly and has no immediate prospect of being used it should be closed. If a train calls at a station and rarely handles a passenger the stop should be taken out.

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

Q2 comments: 25 years - enough to make potential bidders compete but also see a return on investment in rolling stock and stations.

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

Q3 comments: Any government support should be based directly on the numbers of passengers travelling on a train - empty train = zero support.

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

Q4 comments: None. Equally there should be no public subsidy of an unknown quantity of private profit.

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

Q5 comments: If this means open access trains running with no subsidy then it is to be welcomed - but not, if a success, for it to be incorporated subsequently into a franchise unless provided by the franchisee. Train paths / bids should be considered / auctioned individually.

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

Q6 comments: Year on year reduction of support - no blanket subsidies.

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

Q7 comments: No back end loading that allows a failed franchisee to take profit at the start of a term but walk away if times get tough or they have made a mess of it.

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

Q8 comments: No subsidy up front and nothing until they prove how much they did and how well on a passenger / train / route basis - no hidden cross-subsidies.

Achieving reliability, performance and service quality

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

Q9 comments: Performance doesn't need to be incentivised in a system which is a license to print money. A franchisee failing in one area should have any other franchises terminated to the extent that the public purse is not adversely affected - see Q7.

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: Actual routes, actual trains, right-time.

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

Q11 comments: Actual routes, actual trains, actual stops, right-time.

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

Q12 comments: Overall journey time starting station entrance boundary to destination station exit boundary needs to be measured, not just the length of time it takes a train to run. However, Journey times need to be sensible - trains take a lot longer to load and unload at peak times and diagrams need to be realistic.

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: Definitely. It should cover everything the franchisee is

expected to deliver not just minimum standards. The franchisee shouldn't be in a position to dismiss something which affects a passenger as not important / not required.

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

Q14 comments: Independent complaints register on-line.

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: Possibly - if the amount of "nobody on, nobody off" stops was reduced this could free up sets to be used on trains which are busy. Services should be planned so that everyone may have a seat.

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: No, people want at least some through trains. How about Renfrewshire / Ayrshire to Dunblane / Edinburgh?

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: Franchisee based on customer demand but see Q3 but subject to minimum service level specification.

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

Q18 comments: Minimum commensurate with foregoing answers.

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

Q19 comments: If franchisee "beats the deal" they keep all the cash.

Scottish rail fares

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

Q20 comments: Encourage available train capacity to be filled at all times with "walk-on" fares - not just pre-booked / on-line deals. No automatic inflation plus x% year on year fares "revisions".

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: Base single fares to be set on overall mileage and to be regulated with any other fares with a national description bearing a fixed monetary relationship.

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: Save money by not running empty trains. Fares on routes with no train service improvement should see no fares increased other than for inflation. The trend to run trains at all times of the day and night increases the cost of maintenance by reducing productivity.

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: Let the franchisee decide subject to Q20 and Q21.

Scottish stations

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

Q24 comments: Franchisee / open access operator to decide - see Q5.

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: None - they can't normally have the longevity to provide a year on year timetabled service. Franchisees will take any money they can get though! Part of Prestwick Airport Station roof has been tied down with ropes for a number of years now!

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 existing arrangement seems to work reasonably well at the moment. Franchisees only do things they're forced to through a contract / regulation. They have no vested interest in long term sustainability. Their main purpose is to take the passengers' money.

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

Q27 comments: Staff help passengers to understand the fares and can afford assistance directly especially when things go wrong.

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

Q28 comments: This smacks of minimalisation. The facilities at any station should reflect what can be supported by the passengers. Turning major stations into shopping experiences too often only turns them into passenger / pedestrian bottlenecks.

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 - see Q15 but only if an operator wants to operate commercially and if so, why should they be stopped politically or by another

operator taking up the path locally? Journeys without changes are generally quicker and help people with luggage. Platform occupation at "hubs" should be decreased, not allowed to be artificially excessive in order to offset occasional (but expensive) performance problems. Trains should be run through to a quieter turn-round to provide cross-city journey opportunities like they do in many places. If necessary, a minimum level service only should be specified by 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. Edinburgh is crushed enough as it is without adding to the problem. It would become another Birmingham New Street where passengers from the north of Preston now always have to change trains adding to platform occupation and congestion or face travelling via York. Consideration of this problem shouldn't be restricted to major "hubs". It applies locally too, for it is not unusual for the same set to be diagrammed to form what appears in the timetable as two separate trains A to B then B to C. Do you want people to get off and then get back on again or continue to keep a secret? In any event, turnrounds with local trains at e.g Glasgow (like Q12) are often only 6 minutes, much less than what currently transpires with cross-border trains at Waverley and hugely less than a passenger penalty of always having to change.

Rolling stock

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

Q31 comments: Specify national standards for decades - common systems e.g. trains which can couple to one another with mandatory financial involvement of franchisee. This maintains the possibility of "through running" as well as enables future cascades / cheaper refurbishments for other routes and franchises.

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

Q32 comments: Apart from what is mentioned in the consultation document section 9.17, there should be at least one toilet per set! Quiet coaches!

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: Franchisee should provide because this allows passengers to make alternative arrangements personally when things go wrong.

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: Franchisee / operator to determine and implement without subsidy.

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

Q35 comments: BT Police already have adequate powers to control the situation.

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

Q36 comments: At intermediate stations, trains shouldn't be shown "On Time" when they haven't even started the journey. The system only works when all is well. As soon as even minor disruption starts the messages become wrong or misleading. When major disruption arises it only adds to the chaos. As time passes, "On Time", "On Time", "Delayed" (sometimes / eventually), then "Cancelled" Station is the norm. Oh dear, too late now to have gone the other

way. Staff (where they exist) tend to know what it all amounts to and what the impact and options are. The system makes the problem worse for them because it either cannot or will not be shut off in favour of advice as to what is going on. When things are bad we need real people making regular announcements about the nature, cause, extent and likely effect of the disruption as meaningfully and locally as possible.

Here is an example of a routine circumstance when things are normal - A passenger boards the 1713 Glasgow Central to Glengarnock train with a pram. He / she is unfamiliar with arrangements. The train is shown as the "rear" train. (There are 2 sets comprising 6 or 7 coaches in the platform). He / she could check that all the coaches are going; but, after all, there was only one thing showing on the monitor at the buffers. But it's near departure time and it's best to get on sooner rather than later. There's an announcement about "this train being longer than platforms at certain stations". What's that about? (There is a notice on the wall of the train seeking to explain arrangements but they don't know it's there). Repeat scenario at Paisley Gilmour Street. Result - unable to alight at Glengarnock. The lesson is that it's too late to tell passengers unfamiliar with such arrangements once the train is running. Other operators show the lengths of trains on passenger information monitors routinely never mind all sorts of other situations. Worse, when a train is short formed, ScotRail rarely tell anybody at an intermediate station and so the train picks up delays along the route as passengers walk along the platform to squeeze in through the nearest available door.

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: Purely commercial matter - they might want to run through the Channel Tunnel without stopping at Heathrow or St. Pancras.

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: Yes. No option - a separate contract.

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: Earlier and later trains are being run nowadays but demand for the sleepers continues - subject to Q37 answer.

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: Diesel trains not to be run along a wholly electrified route? Wholly empty trains to be withdrawn from the timetable / contract? Better ventilation / heating of trains - many are either too hot or too cold irrespective of season. Flat wheels - some sets seem to run round for months with wheel flats. End of toilets flushing onto the track.