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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 The “economic rail” element would include all lines that are run at a profit and generate a premium that is paid to the government. The “social rail” element would be any route that requires a subsidy to run and is run purely for reasons of social or environmental benefit.

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

Q2 The current franchise length is OK.

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 If you split this into the “economic rail” and “social rail” elements, to incentivise good performance, the franchisee should be allowed to keep any profits they make over and above a pre-determined premium on the profitable “economic rail” routes. On “social rail” or subsidised routes, any profits should be offset against the subsidy, to reduce the burden on the taxpayer.

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

Q5 Open access operators should be encouraged to create new services where none exist at present, but would be required to be self-funding, taking no subsidy from the government. It is assumed that such services would not compete against subsidised routes.

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

Achieving reliability, performance and service quality

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

Q9

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 Routes that serve a specific need, for instance those connecting with ferries, should be judged on their ability to meet that need. So yes, the performance regime should be aligned with actual routes.

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

Q11

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

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

Q14 Customer feedback.

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 Many trains are already overcrowded at peak times. Standing for more than two stops is unacceptable.

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 Why would you do that?

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 In the majority of cases these should be a commercial matter for the franchisee. They should have the freedom to react to customer demand (whether it rises or falls) as they see fit according to the data available. There is a case for specifying that services designed to connect with other modes of transport (eg. Ferries) must do so.

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

Q18 The contract specification should be a minimum requirement. The franchisee should have the freedom to run services in excess of the requirement to maximise profits.

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

Q19 The franchisee should have the automatic right to run additional services (beyond the franchise specification), without seeking approval from the government, on a commercial basis. All profits made on such services may be kept by the company.

Scottish rail fares

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

Q20 Fares are the primary means of funding the railway. Subsidy should be provided only where there is a recognised need to run a loss-making service, for instance lifeline rural services, or where there is a desire to encourage

more people to use the railway to reduce car dependency. In such case the fare should be set at less than the cost of the equivalent car journey.

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 Services requiring subsidy (for instance rural “lifeline” services) should have their fares set by the government (who is after all, paying the balance). Unsubsidised fares should be set on a commercial basis by the franchisee.

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 See question 21. If a service is well patronised and profitable, then 100% of the cost should come from the farebox. If a service is deemed a “lifeline” service or subsidy is desirable to promote modal shift or social mobility, then a higher proportion of subsidy should be offered.

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 Peak fares should be set at commercial rates by the franchisee to maximise profit (noting that too high a fare could actually damage profits by reducing custom). This is a matter that will require market research by the franchisee.

Scottish stations

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

Q24 Market Research. My own opinion is that if a settlement has enough people in it, there should be a train station. Take Cumnock, for instance, which has no train station (it once had 2), with a population of 9300 and high levels of deprivation, it is a prime candidate for a station rebuilding.

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 Where a station connects to a port or airport, there is an obvious argument for the port authority funding a station (Prestwick Airport being a prime example). Perhaps there should be a "passenger facility grant" on the lines of the freight facility grant to assist developers connecting ports, airports or large housing or shopping developments to the rail network. In conjunction with this, there should be requirements at the planning stage for developers to provide railway connections where such a development is likely to generate an unacceptable amount of road traffic. The Loch Ryan port development at Cairnryan is an obvious example of a development where a railway connection should have been built, but wasn't, with the result of increased road traffic.

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 Its probably easier if one organisation (Network Rail by default, and where there are more than one TOC resident, ie. At intercity stations) manages the station. Where there is no Network Rail presence on a station, it should be acceptable for ScotRail to carry out maintenance, so long as there is some dialogue between ScotRail and Network Rail over costs and methods of work.

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

Q27 The "adopt a station" scheme is a good idea and should continue.

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

Q28 With new technology, it should be at least possible to provide a ticket machine at unmanned or part-time manned stations, except where there is increased risk of vandalism. Of course major town stations such as Ayr should

remain manned full-time.

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 Ideally yes, because they prevent overcrowding on ScotRail trains by taking some of the load. If Scotrail were to take over the intercity services north of Edinburgh, they would have to procure extra rolling stock.

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 This would not be an ideal option as it would require additional rolling stock to cover for the services that weren't continuing north.

Rolling stock

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

Q31 The franchising system makes it undesirable for franchisees to purchase rolling stock outright, so this is a tricky conundrum to solve.

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

Q32 As a bare minimum, all trains should have provision for bicycle racks, luggage racks and toilets. Services connecting to ferries and airports (which by definition cater to tourists with large amounts of baggage) and those going to tourist destinations in the highlands, such as Aviemore and Fort William must have sufficient luggage space for passengers with large holdalls or rucksacks. Services where the longest journey is over 2 hours should have tables and snack provision. Services where the longest journey is over 3 hours should have a proper buffet.

Passengers – information, security and services

33. How should we prioritise investment for mobile phone provision and / or Wi-Fi type high-bandwidth services?

Q33 Such provision is most important for business users, so should be a priority on commuter services, and particularly for services with first class accommodation.

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 This should be a commercial matter for the franchisee.

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

Q35 I would be wary of an outright ban, but it may be beneficial to stop the selling of alcohol on trains and at stations when there is likely to be increased anti-social behaviour, for instance when carrying fans to football matches.

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

Q36 Travel information is adequate at the minute, but there are occasions when automatic announcements and displays are out of use, when train

crews must be trained to make announcements themselves to ensure passengers don't miss their stop. I was on a train tonight when some passengers wanted to get off at Barassie, but no announcement was made that the rear coach wouldn't be at the platform and the doors wouldn't open. So they missed the stop.

Caledonian Sleeper

37. Should we continue to specify sleeper services, or should this be a purely commercial matter for a train operating company?

Q37 The sleeper is a very useful service and should 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 I see no advantage to separating the Sleeper from the rest of the Scotrail franchise. However an alternative would be to make it part of either the West Coast or Cross Country franchise (these being other cross-border services)

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 The Caledonian sleeper is a more environmentally friendly alternative to short-haul flights to London.

The current sleeper service is excellent, but Oban and Stranraer are other destinations that should be considered for sleeper portions.

Environmental issues

40. What environmental key performance indicators should we consider for inclusion in the franchise agreement or the High Level Output Specification?

Q40 Reduction of road traffic should be a key target for Scotrail.

