

Scott Wilson

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: It is particularly regrettable that EU law prevents the reintroduction of vertical integration by requiring the separation of the management of rail infrastructure and operation of passenger services into different organisations, and so lose the greater efficiency and economies of scale which such integration would bring about.

It is also unfortunate that the Scottish Government cannot, for the reasons you set out, operate the franchise as a state enterprise or enable or support other Scottish public sector bodies to provide rail passenger services. It is desirable therefore to put in place such arrangements as will get as close to the ideal as possible, while remaining within the current legal framework. It is to be hoped that, eventually, future constitutional changes might bring about a situation where the Scottish Government will be able to remove any such constraints.

In the circumstances, I would consider that it would be worthwhile investigating whether the passenger services could be run on a mutual / co-operative, not-for-profit basis, with any 'profit' being ploughed back into service provision and improvement. Alternatively, your second suggestion, of a management contract, where the party supplying the rail passenger services receives a management fee instead of taking its income in profit, would be preferable to the current standard GB –style franchise.

I would support having a single franchise of multiple service specification which would allow Transport Scotland, for example, to define services where Transport Scotland considers there is a social requirement for their existence, whilst also allowing the franchisee to determine and develop the service requirements of the more commercial inter-city and commuter network.

Having a single operator enables the provider to become firmly established to its customers / users and helps provide clarity of identity.

It should also be borne in mind that a line designated 'Social Rail' may well feed valuable traffic on to a line designated as 'Economic Rail'.

I therefore support the notion of ScotRail being run as two managed units based on Economic and Social divisions, under the same franchisee.

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

Q2 comments: Rail investment takes time to deliver – a particular example is the Borders Railway Project which has had a succession of projected completion dates so far. I believe that franchisees require time to design and

oversee the introduction of improvements and to receive any benefit from them so that they can continue to produce better value for money and a better service for the travelling public. **I would suggest a 20 year franchise period would be reasonable** – however Transport Scotland would. In the public interest, of course retain the right to apply sanctions against a franchisee which was failing in its performance obligations. This also takes into account the likelihood of constitutional change which will take considerable time to implement, and gives the franchisee some stability against that background.

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

Q3 comments: No comment.

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

Q4 comments: No comment.

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

Q5 comments: Any source of additional investment in the rail system, to promote enhanced rail services and facilities, should be welcomed. Preferably, at the end of a specified time period, these improvements would be incorporated within the franchise.

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

Q6 comments: By all means focus on output costs including those you have outlined. These should however be aimed at the interests of the passenger. 'On time' should mean 'on time' and not 5 or 10 minutes late. Provision of information has been greatly improved in recent years, but website ease of use could still be improved, and details of some services are difficult to find – for example, the former direct service which used to run from Kirkcaldy to Glasgow Queen Street and back, once a day and which is now change at Linlithgow on the way west and change at Polmont on the way back east. Difficult to find online and non-existent as far as I can see in the current printed timetable, resulting in a need for determination on the part of the intending traveller. More passenger consultation would be good too – at present the 'Meet the Managers' events, while welcome, don't take place often enough across enough of the network beyond the Central Belt. The incentive for the franchisee is that a happy passenger is a returning passenger who spreads the word about a good travelling experience.

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

Q7 comments: No comment.

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

Q8 comments: No comment.

Achieving reliability, performance and service quality

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

Q9 comments: Fines on companies (ScotRail or Network Rail) are counterproductive and I would suggest would simply be passed on to the passenger eventually. As I suggested earlier, punctuality should mean that a train is actually on time and not 5 or ten minutes late. To do otherwise is to prioritise the needs of the franchisee over the needs of the passenger. So it would seem logical to incentivise good performance rather than penalise poor performance. Companies do tend to care a lot about reputational risk, and while it may not be the only weapon to deploy when a franchisee fails to perform, it can be a useful one.

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: One system for the whole of Scotland.

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

Q11 comments: Through greater passenger consultation – perhaps offering a regular e-mail / text facility, as well as in direct consultation and feedback sessions such as the ‘Meet the Managers’ sessions.

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

Q12 comments: Wherever possible, journey times must be comparable to express bus or car travel, so that the railway is competitive. For example, Perth to Edinburgh by car is about an hour – an hour and 20 or 30 minutes by train as the direct line via Kinross is no longer available (indeed it has the M90 built on top of the trackbed in Glenfarg – a tragic case of lack of foresight). Where routes are circuitous, then major efforts have to be made to combat this – either by building diversionary routes or shortcuts – it’s done for roads so why not for rail – or speeding up services wherever possible. So an attractive timetable is needed – if a newcomer to rail sees it’s going to take 80 or 90 rather than 60 minutes to get to his destination by train, the chances are he’ll go by car. An accelerated timetable needs excellent performance – so the journey time and the issue of performance must be linked. No point in a timetable without performance – and excellent performance is what the franchisee must strive for.

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: No comment.

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

Q14 comments: No comment.

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: Perhaps up to 15 minutes, but no longer than 20. My own rush hour experience is on the Waverley/Haymarket/Fife line. I realise that a ticket of course does not entitle to a seat, but with the annual substantial fare increases, the inability to find a seat for a substantial part of a journey means the passenger is getting less value for money.

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: Greater incidence of having to change trains has implications for the elderly or infirm and families with young children, burdened with luggage or pushchairs / prams, as well as being unattractive to able bodied passengers by extending the journey time. Interchange stations like Perth or Dundee would need to be improved in terms of waiting facilities – neither is a place to wait long in winter. Haymarket can become uncomfortably crowded.

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: By the franchisee – as the consultation paper suggests, they are closer to the customer / passenger. Passengers should have plenty of opportunity though for input on their own particular services.

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

Q18 comments: No comment.

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

Q19 comments: No comment.

Scottish rail fares

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

Q20 comments: A passenger should feel that their fare offers value for money. It needs to be competitive with car costs over the same journey – which often, especially if you're car sharing, it isn't. While I can see that a 20% differential might attract people to use the off peak periods more for travel, perhaps it would be worth introducing the equivalent of an airmiles scheme for regular travellers and not just for business class. After all unless your employment is flexible and you can travel to work outside the peak periods, you will always be penalised with higher fares for factors outwith your control. The fares regime is still confusing and does need clarity. On the website, the passenger is confronted with an incredible range of fares which can vary widely for no apparent reason. So clarity and fairness should underpin the fares policy. After all, passengers are taxpayers too. It would be good to extend the zone system around Scotland, and have tickets interchangeable between rail, bus, ferry and - dare I say it – tram services. Look at The Netherlands, for example – they've been doing it since the 1960s!

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: No Comment.

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: As for the balance between taxpayer subsidy and fares – until the financial regime introduced by the privatisation process is drastically reformed, it will continue to be imbalanced. Cut out the ROSCOS for example and remove one lot of middlemen. Integrate the infrastructure provider with the provider of railway passenger and freight services. And so on. You get my drift.

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: See answer to Question 20 above.

Scottish stations

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

Q24 comments: Obviously usage is important. My own local station is Springfield in Fife. It has a weekday service of 3 northbound and 2 southbound trains. It has no parking facilities but has upgraded lighting which burns merrily all night and often all day too which must skew the running costs a bit. Such a skeletal service is not calculated to increase patronage. There is no local effort to promote usage. I recall asking for a single from Dundee once and the booking clerk didn't know where it was. My point is that there are probably several of the low used stations quoted which might benefit from an increase in numbers of trains stopping (and I don't mean an hourly service throughout the day – just a couple more at peak times so a commuter has a realistic choice – and maybe one in the middle of the day say) and some promotion. You never know...and a time switch on the lights so that some power costs are saved.

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: No comment.

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: Preferably the stations should be owned by the body which is permanent – nowadays that would be Network Rail – which, as the consultation paper says, would have an interest in maintaining its asset. Ideally of course, that would be the same vertically integrated body which provides train services.

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

Q27 comments: Promotion would help local communities take an interest and a pride in their local station – after all, it is a privilege to be connected these days to the national rail network. It is indeed gratifying to see how many communities do support their local stations either through the adoption scheme or by running a business from the station buildings, and so bringing life back to underused or disused facilities.

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

Q28 comments: No comment.

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. There is more to Scotland than the Central Belt. Of course services from south of the Border should continue to go to Stirling, Perth, Dundee, Aberdeen and Leuchars for St Andrews. It is ridiculous to suggest otherwise.
Indeed, ScotRail should be able to run services south in addition to the Caledonian Sleeper – why should it be other companies which have all the daytime Anglo Scottish traffic? After all it does operate services still to Carlisle and Newcastle.

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 comment. See answer to 29 above.

Rolling stock

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

Q31 comments: Getting rid of ROSCOS would help. Could the Scottish Government not lease the vehicle direct to ScotRail without this unnecessary profit orientated middleman? Government funds it anyway.

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

Q32 comments: In general, the current level of facilities on most ScotRail services is good. Toilets could be better maintained on busy services but I appreciate that is difficult. Similarly the trolley service is a non-starter at peak times. I don't suppose the return of a proper buffet car is an option. It would be good to have on the Highland Line, say, or the Galloway Line to Stranraer, which badly needs a shot in the arm.

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: No comment.

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: In BR days, on crowded trains, in my experience, the guard would just wave passengers in to the underutilised first class sections which were usually empty. Once the congestion had eased, there would be no need for non-business class passengers to remain there and they would be required to return to standard class. If there is a commercial incentive for the operator to retain first class / business class, then that should be permitted under the franchise agreement.

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

Q35 comments: Passenger comfort and safety, as well as staff safety. While it is perfectly possible for passengers to enjoy a quiet drink without subjecting the rest of their fellow passengers to loud and obnoxious behaviour, it's often the case that the opposite is true. An alcohol ban would be one way of dealing with this. An alternative might be to restrict drinking to one particular coach but that would only be practical on longer formations than the 2 or 3 coach standard set.

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

Q36 comments: Difficult to say – my experience is that if the train crew is aware of whatever is causing a problem, they pass that on to the passengers. Sometimes the train staff do not receive the information they need though, so presumably better procedures for contacting trains are needed. Otherwise, ScotRail already has a wide range of ways to contact passengers direct through electronic means.

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: The sleeper service should continue to be specified.

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: Ideally the sleeper service should continue to be part of the ScotRail franchise – albeit a specialised division of the ScotRail operation.

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 Caledonian Sleeper is a unique travelling experience, and, especially for visitors from overseas, a great way of arriving in Scotland for the first time. In an era of bland train units and equally bland hotels, the service offers something different. And that's eminently marketable. More early or late trains would not detract from its appeal for such travellers. But it's not all about a throughback to a gentler age of railway travel - from a business point of view it has considerable advantages over a scramble for a flight from Heathrow or Gatwick – relax or work on the train, have a good night's sleep and arrive refreshed.

Inverness and Aberdeen, besides being city destinations in their own right, are also jumping off points for the Northern Isles as well as their own hinterland and points north. Oban might well have better connectivity than Fort William, being an important ferry interchange for the Western Isles, but perhaps that is one issue that should be consulted on in the Western Highlands – there should however continue to be a West Highland Sleeper railhead, whether Fort William as at present, or Oban.

The consultation paper refers to provision of en suite facilities and I would think that nowadays that would be expected by sleeper passengers, who would expect to pay for upgraded 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: I'd support the three principles outlined in the consultation paper being embedded within the requirements from future contracts for rail passenger services and outputs provided by Network Rail.