

CONSULTATION ON INITIATIVES RELATED TO THE SCOTRAIL FRANCHISE EXTENSION – HIGHLAND COUNCIL RESPONSE

1. Support “called off” projects.
Glasgow Central – Queen St bus link is important part of national rail network.
2. No comment.
3. Improved Sunday services, particularly on Highland Main Line where Sunday services are very sparse, and Inverness – Aberdeen line.
4. Journey time improvements and introduction of regular hourly services are both important to improve the attractiveness of the Highland Main Line and Inverness – Aberdeen line, in order to increase the attractiveness of these routes in comparison with the car. Our aim for Inverness - Edinburgh is for 2h45m journeys to be achieved.
The West Highland Line has a particularly slow speed between Crianlarich and Helensburgh, and this section is critical to the whole West Highland network. Some acceleration of services here would be highly beneficial.
5. All of these, but over the counter sales and customer services remain important in a region which is dependent on tourism and where many residents make infrequent journeys due to the distances involved. Such groups of people are more likely to require personal service than frequent travellers.
Many Highland residents live a long way from any staffed station, so telesales and internet sales are particularly important for them.
6. The prime focus should be on meeting the direct needs of the travelling public for ticket sales, journey information, etc. This should include information on connecting buses and ferries, and tourist information. Commercial outlets are desirable where they enhance passenger amenity.
7. All of the listed improvements are desirable and also a wider availability of left luggage facilities is important.
8. Clear and well positioned signing to station facilities and to nearby bus stations / stances. Maps showing locations of other facilities (signage could be useful if large pedestrian flow to the facility can be expected).
9. Several stations remain inaccessible to wheelchair users, or only one platform is accessible so that wheelchair passengers can depart but not return (or vice versa).
At many stations there is poor provision for people with limited walking ability. Platforms, such as at Inverness, are too long for some people to walk without a short rest, but seats have been removed from them. This provision should be reinstated, and should also include routes between car park, travel centre and platforms (as appropriate to specific sites).

The current metal seats are very cold and therefore uncomfortable, particularly for elderly passengers.

10. Interactive terminals for Traveline should be provided at large and medium sized stations.

11. Recent fare changes have increased the cost of morning journeys in Highland by around 10%, but these are not trains with peak loadings. The fare structure, and in particular the difference between “Anytime” and “Off-peak” fares, should reflect the pattern of loadings on the route in question and not simply follow a city commuting pattern on all routes. An example of a fares anomaly caused by the overly simplistic approach to “Off-peak” fares is:

Nairn – Aberdeen (0859 train) – cheapest return fare £35.60.

Forres – Aberdeen (0910 train) – cheapest return fare £18.20.

In this example the Forres passenger joins the same train – which is busiest as it approaches Aberdeen – 11 minutes after the Nairn passenger, but because it is in Forres after 0900, can use a cheap ticket which is not available in Nairn.

The Government has consulted on integrated ticketing, and expansion of this is to be strongly encouraged. Journeys in the Highlands & Islands could involve three modes i.e. ferry, bus and train where the cost of a through ticket should be less than the individual single fares. Typical examples are the Tarbert - Uig ferry followed by coach to Kyle of Lochalsh and then train to Inverness or Inverness to Scrabster by train/bus with ferry crossing to Stromness and bus to Kirkwall.

12. Improved luggage space on longer routes, including between seat backs. Higher proportion of seats at tables rather than “airline” layout.

13. On-train facilities are generally good although wider range of catering, including breakfast, would be useful. Better facilities at main stations served, including showers, would be a benefit.

14. Real time bus info display in stations.

Automated means of providing real time train info to connecting bus operators.

Stations to supply bus route/timetable info and sell bus tickets (if bus operators have an agency system e.g. Citylink).

Development of integrated ticketing as mentioned above.

Car parking for rail users to be free or nominal cost. In our area people can be encouraged to drive from remote rural areas to main stations (especially Inverness) for onward journey by train, but the cost of the station car park is a strong disincentive. Ideally, station car parks would be used for this purpose but arrangements could be made with other adjacent car park operators if necessary.

15. Wi-fi where feasible, especially on inter-urban routes.

All trains to have electric power sockets for phones and laptops.

16. Leisure and business, but particularly important for business. Much less significant for short journeys.
17. There is an increasing expectation of free or at least low-cost connection.
18. No comment.
19. No comment.
20. All of the suggested measures if implemented would considerably improve the carbon footprint of rail services.
21. No comment.
22. No comment.
23. No comment.
24. No comment.
25. No comment.

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