

DORNOCH RAIL LINK ACTION GROUP

Hon. President Revd. Alistair Roy BDS

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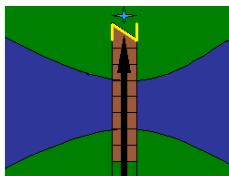
Dear Sir/ Madam,

30-11-08

Please find attached the response of the Dornoch Rail Link Action Group to the franchise extension consultation.

The details of our response are given below. We would nevertheless urge most strongly that rail is treated on a level playing field as road based transport, and that large scale action is undertaken to ensure the long term viability of rail as a means of transport for both passengers and freight on rural lines in the Highlands, particularly the Far North Line.

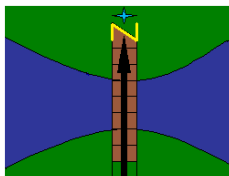
Consultation questions	Dornoch Rail Link Action Group responses
Q1 Which of the Priced Options do you think best support the delivery of Scotland's Railways?	Rolling stock procurement – increase in passenger use and expectations, in the light of increasing car comfort and availability, make this a critically important issue; Far North recast – we welcome the fourth northbound Wick train, although we ask that journey time reduction is made a priority to and from Caithness, please;
Q3 Which future Priced Options would you wish to see Transport Scotland develop?	Use of additional rolling stock for service strengthening – this is important on services on the southern half of the far North Line, the Highland Line and the Aberdeen line. Overcrowding is an issue, as is the provision of sufficient luggage space for long distance passengers. Even one additional carriage can make a difference.
Q4 Where should we concentrate our efforts on improving services, in particular journey times?	We ask that immediate and substantial effort is made on improving journey times on the Highland Lines, particularly the Far North Line. The horrendously slow rail services (one of which is to get 11 minutes slower in December) from Inverness to Caithness are a major hindrance to economic development and recovery post-Dounreay. In the short term, we ask that improvements on the existing Inverness- Wick line, to help capacity increase and journey time reductions, are given high priority. In the longer term, we ask that the Dornoch Rail Link is implemented as a major improvement, for reasons submitted to Transport Scotland with our studies on this project.
Q5 How can buying a ticket be made easier?	It is important that the Internet options for buying tickets are made as simple as possible, and that major discounts are made for advance travel. We ask that the same options are made



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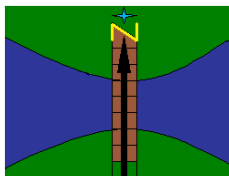
	available for passengers buying tickets over the counter.
Q9 How can we improve assisted travel at stations? In particular, please consider: disabled access; assistance for people with hearing or learning difficulties; staff training	It is critically important that rail travel is seen as inclusive as possible. This includes increasing availability of train services for wheelchair users by means of ramps, bridges, seats and proper toilets on both stations and trains.
Q10 Do you have any ideas for further 'Rail Links'?	It is important that bus/rail integration is improved and maintained as much as reasonably practicable. This is vital for rural areas such as the Highlands, particularly with fuel price volatility. Passengers need to be guaranteed availability of buses or trains for onward travel at interchange points. More park and ride facilities for commuter stations in the Invernet region should be provided, along with connecting bus services as stated above. The same applies for rail/ ferry connections, particularly on the Far North Line with regard to the Orkney sailings.
Q11 Which pilot scheme changes to fares should we make to encourage modal shift? Please consider:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The loss of passenger traffic at many North Highland Line stations is now a cause of very serious concern, with major decline being recorded at: • Thurso [-12%] : Wick [-11%] : Brora [-5%] : Golspie [-8%] : Rogart [-17%] : Lairg [-9%] over the 2004/5 - 2006/7 period [as supplied by the Office of Rail Regulator] • We most strongly urge that the bus fare concession for pensioners is extended to the Highland railways (particularly the Wick/ Kyle lines, and also the Inverness – Aberdeen/ Perth lines), or at least the rail travel captured within the Highland Railcard area, in order to reverse the decline we have recorded above. We also urge that free Highland railcards are issued on demand to residents of all ages in the Highland region, to guarantee affordability of reduced price rail travel. There has been a major reduction in passenger usage in Caithness stations over recent years, and this needs to be reversed. We feel that extension of the concessions as detailed above would enable substantial modal shift to increase rail passenger patronage. It is important that this is done for travellers south and east of Inverness as well as north and west. • We agree with the suggestion that reduced fares are available for families, students, servicemen, unemployed and disabled, and we ask that fares are reduced by at least 50% or up to 75% for these groups. • We also suggest that some emphasis is put towards increasing volume of traffic as well as the value of the fares received, as this ensures the viability and



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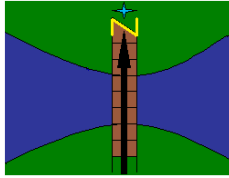
	usefulness of the railways to the communities they serve.
Q12 When travelling on the train, how could passengers' experiences be improved? In particular, please consider: seating/ luggage space; information; staff helpfulness; catering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> While we recognise that commuter services will need to provide seating for high volume, short distance commuter traffic, we ask that trains allocated to rural services provide sufficient luggage space for long distance passengers and tourists. Cycle spaces for up to 4 cycles per 2-car DMU, or 6 per 3-car DMU, should be provided on Highland services. We congratulate First Scotrail for making advances towards this on the rolling stock used on the Far North Line. It is also critically important for staff to be as communicative as possible in the event of a problem, delay or cancellation of a service, as passengers do appreciate being informed and are more likely to co-operate with staff in that case. Catering can be improved by the installation of a small buffet in long distance trains (as on the ex-Hull trains on the Highland Main Line), and we would ask that some allergen-free (gluten and dairy-free) foods are provided on all services where possible. However, in addition to the above, we urge strongly that clean toilets which work all the time are provided on all services in the Highlands. Retention toilets must be fitted as standard on all new rolling stock, and we congratulate Transport Scotland and First Scotrail on fitting retention toilets on the Class 158 DMUs on the Far North Line. We ask that the reliability of the air conditioning and heating is improved, as this is an issue during the summer months. We would also suggest that new or reconditioned diesel engines and gearboxes are installed on the Class 158 units, as engine reliability is a serious issue which needs urgent addressing. This has been done to great effect on the HSTs (I-C125) on the NXEC and FGW trains replacing the Paxman Valentas with MTU 4000 engines. As the 158 DMUs particularly will remain in service for an additional 15-20 years, we would advise that engine replacement be undertaken. The expense of fitting new engines will be more than repaid by the reliability improvements, reduction in delay penalty payments and passenger goodwill improvement.
Q13 Where should we concentrate our efforts in improving the Anglo-Scottish sleeper services? In particular please consider:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We recognise that the construction of a high speed line from Scotland to London may lessen the attractiveness of overnight sleeper services to and from Edinburgh/ Glasgow, although we feel that there will be a long term demand for services running from Aberdeen/ Inverness/ Fort William to London. The commercial and tourist value of these services cannot be over-stated. More specific



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<p>number of locations served; facilities on trains/ stations; overnight seats; catering; staffing</p>	<p>responses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Locations: we would suggest that Aviemore, Pitlochry, Perth, Gleneagles and Stirling are given guaranteed access to sleeper services at the least, in addition to other stations north of Perth on the HML; • Arrival and departure times: we ask that the current times are maintained, and that some adjustment is made to northbound Inverness services arrival times to make allowances for hold ups to let the Highland Chieftain or other services pass. We stress the importance of maintaining connections with services to Aberdeen and Kyle, and it would be preferable to ensure good timely connections between sleeper and Far North services, subject to capacity constraints on the Far North line; • Overnight seating and on-train facilities: overnight seating is a very useful and important alternative service on existing services and should be maintained. We would suggest that, when the sleeper rolling stock is renewed, that the provision of Continental style couchettes is considered in addition to seats and berths. Family berth compartments should be provided for couples with children, and we would ask for more disabled friendly berths. New sleeper trains should consider use of reclining seats for use on both daytime and overnight services, same as what's used for long haul flights. Adequate clean toilet provision is a must, and we may even suggest that ensuite shower facilities are put in first class compartments in new sleeper rolling stock • Catering: we ask for installation of Mk 3 catering and seating carriages on the sleeper services, with sufficient cooking and storage capacity to enable speedy service of a full carriage. We also ask for provision of more allergen-free (gluten- and dairy-free) foods on such services. One carriage may be removed from the Inverness sleeper portion to enable platform capacity constraints to be overcome, when using 23 metre length carriages in 15 car trains.
<p>Q20 How should the environmental improvement works budget be used to further improve our carbon footprint on the railways?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We would suggest that diversification of train power away from fossil fuel usage is a major priority. Hence, we ask for electrification of all the rail network in Scotland, with the use of 750V DC third-rail on the rural lines to cut costs and reduce susceptibility to weather extremes, in the long term. In the short term, we ask that all diesel engines are upgraded or replaced to improve emissions and reliability, and that some thought is given to use of hybrid rolling stock to reduce emissions per passenger on lightly used services. Drivers could even be trained to shut down



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	<p>unwanted engines on lightly used services.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• We support the idea of LED lighting to reduce energy demand, and also waste recycling. We would even suggest recycling bins on trains and stations, along with the use of recycled paper only for bags, cups and food packaging on trains.
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Please feel free to contact me on the heading address, email or phone number if you need to contact me for clarification. My mobile number is 07709-709111 should you require this.

Yours faithfully,

Mark W. Norton, Convener, Dornoch Rail Link Action Group (sent electronically without signature).