

Passenger Focus

Passenger Focus

5th Floor

Wellington House

39/41 Piccadilly

Manchester

M1 1LQ

I am responding on behalf of Passenger Focus (the independent statutory body representing the interests of rail passengers) to the above consultation.

The statement of policy complies with the requirements of Section 26 of the Railways Act 1993 and makes clear in high level terms Scottish Ministers' policy.

While the policy statement sets out the broad thrust of Scottish Ministers' policy we believe that there are areas that could still be addressed/clarified further.

In particular we find paragraph 8 (analysis of franchise tenders) vague. We acknowledge that this is a high level policy statement but the assessment of franchise bids is a major element of the process and would benefit from greater clarity. For instance; we note that the criteria listed are only "likely" to be included/used to analyse bids. This begs the question of under what circumstances would the four criteria not be considered? Equally, will other criteria be considered and if so, what?

When it comes to other potential criteria for analysing tenders, we believe that there is a need to focus on a bidder's past record in delivering services for passengers and, in particular, on delivering passenger satisfaction. The National Passenger Survey (NPS) carried out by Passenger Focus provides a robust set of data which could be used to achieve this

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We note that value for money is one of the criteria by which franchise bids will be assessed. It doesn't, however, state to whom value for money applies: is it for

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passengers or for taxpayers? The two are not necessarily mutually compatible – for example, maximising value for money for the taxpayer could lead to the franchise being issued on grounds of least subsidy or highest premium. This in turn has consequences for passengers as operators look to cut costs or services or increase fares and changes

Value for money is important to passengers. Research¹ by Passenger Focus into passengers' priorities for improvement found that improving value for money was the number one priority (out of a total of 31 different attributes). If, however, Scottish Ministers' are not minded to do so, then she should make it very clear to whom paragraph 8d applies – if it is only value for money for taxpayers then the policy statement should make this very clear.

We note that Scottish Ministers will be open minded on the contract model used paragraph 17.

While not part of the actual statutory statement we feel it would be very helpful if Scottish Ministers also took the opportunity to set out their approach to franchising as well as the process. We believe it is crucially important that franchising involves passengers. It is passengers who will be travelling on services and who will pay the fares - so it is right and proper that their views are taken into account when determining the future priorities for rail. We firmly believe that such engagement produces better results for both taxpayers and passengers.

As well as stakeholder engagement/empowerment we also feel there is scope for the franchising statement to commit to the principle of greater transparency. We believe it is important that the process is carried out in an open and transparent manner in which the reasoning/decisions behind the franchise specification are explained, justified and debated. It is important that passengers have access to, and awareness of, what is being negotiated on their behalf. Transparency generates greater accountability – the more that passengers and their representatives are involved in

¹ Passengers' Priorities for Improvements in Rail Services. August 2010. Passenger Focus
Transport Scotland, the national transport agency
Còmhhdhail Alba, buidheann nàiseanta na còmhhdhail

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the franchising process the better they can hold the operators to account for the service they provide.

We believe the policy statement provides an opportunity to address both these points.