

SERA SCOTLAND RESPONSE TO SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT CONSULTATION ON THE SCOTRAIL FRANCHISE

SERA Scotland is the Socialist Environment and Resources Campaign with objectives of improved environment, social inclusion, conservation of resources and sustainable employment and business.

This consultation is wide ranging and at times difficult to understand the type of response expected.

The questions are answered in turn but a brief introductory summary is thought useful:

SUMMARY

S1 Franchise Extension:

While Scottish Government had to act quickly with respect to the franchise extension the Scottish People had a right to expect a certain input or consultation prior to the decision. First ScotRail may have concentrated on the specific parameters which earned their franchise extension and, indeed, it is not easy to run a railway under any circumstances. However, actual train users should have been given the opportunity to talk about trains being formed short, train toilets being continuously engaged at the end of the day, long queues to get tickets checked, etc., etc. An opportunity lost.

S2 “Squire Regime”: While it is suggested that First ScotRail is to blame for problems and deteriorating customer relations First ScotRail themselves have tended to blame the Scottish Government’s “Squire” regime. This “Squire” regime is intended to deal strictly with standards but results in unintended consequences for passengers. There is no discretion allowed about buying tickets on a train even if ScotRail were unable to sell one at the station because of the impositions of the “Squire” regime. You cannot keep your cancelled ticket as a receipt and you cannot have a receipt now because you should have asked for one when you bought your ticket, because of the “Squire” regime. Your train may have taken over an hour for a 20 minute journey and you may be late for your important appointment but we cannot let you through the ticket barrier because of the “Squire” regime. And so it goes on, a far cry from the old ScotRail. Who takes responsibility? It must be remembered that the railways won back customers in the 1980’s when directors like Chris Green made the public welcome, inviting them onto their own stations and their own trains. The unfriendliness now being shown to customers by First ScotRail and possibly by Transport Scotland is reminiscent of the 1960’s when the old British Railways was so successful in alienating its customers.

S3 Train Fare Escalator: The Road Lobby scared the Government into abandoning the “Road Fuel Escalator” despite it being well justified. On the other hand the Government is pushing the Train Fare Escalator harder and harder despite the damage to environment and social inclusion.

S4 Intermediate Stations: A serious issue is clouding the otherwise good news about rail re-openings and it appears to come from professionals in the railway industry and

in various levels of government. They do not like intermediate stations because, they claim, they discourage end to end passengers. So they attempt to stop communities getting their stations back unless they are very large towns or cities. An example is the proposal by West Lothian Council to re-open the Airdrie to Bathgate line with 4 intermediate stations. The intermediate stations were rejected and the rail planners wanted no intermediate stations whatsoever. They fought a strong rearguard action as Parliament insisted on at least some of the stations being built, after all, it was parliament money being invested. The problem is these planners are not interested in people who do not have cars. They expect everybody to drive to a station convenient for the planners. SERA Scotland believes nobody should have to buy a car before they are allowed to use a train.

CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

Q1 Which of the Priced Options do you think best support the delivery of Scotland's Railways?

The list of 28 options in the consultation document is most varied and many have already been implemented so it is difficult to decide which best supports the objectives.

SERA Scotland considers the priorities from the aspect of which options really bring transport services to excluded communities rather than further improvements to communities who have always enjoyed good transport and also which options make real environmental gains compared to those options which may be negative in their effect on our environment.

From this aspect re-opening Laurencekirk Station is the highest priority and more similar initiatives are needed which bring the railway back to communities.

Looking at general improvements we would consider "Use of additional rolling stock for service strengthening" as further. Our trains are almost always overcrowded at some stage of the journey and overcrowded trains lead to higher, not lower, fares. The system needs more rolling stock and more flexible rolling stock so, for example, one extra vehicle can be added where needed rather than having to double-up the train which is then considered too expensive.

The other options would generally be regarded as positive with varying degrees of benefit. Some are hardly of the significance to be raised in a Scotland wide consultation and some are rather circumspect. For example, the "Virtual branch line to St Andrews" appears to be more avoiding the issue rather than addressing it. What does it consist of? As far as SERA is aware it does not even mean a bus service connecting with trains.

Q2 Is our schedule for new service introduction right?

Good progress was made during the last administration. Some projects are now slipping. However, the concern must be not that some projects are taking a little longer but that too few new projects are being introduced into the planning process.

Q3 Which future Priced Options would you wish to see Transport Scotland develop?

It is not quite clear what range of options is under consideration. Given Question 1 refers to the priced options listed then does Question 3 refer to a much wider range of possible future options? SERA Scotland's main objectives are environment and social inclusion. Therefore re-instatement of services and stations for communities is the priority. For example a station at Plains on the Airdrie to Bathgate line, at Clackmannan and Causewayhead on the Stirling to Dunfermline line and re-instated local services and stations on the East Coast and West Coast main lines. For improvement to existing services a progressive programme of electrification, track capacity improvements and easing speed restrictions is required. A better and more welcoming attitude to passengers would be welcome and the "Squire" regime needs a re-think to make sure it is in passengers' best interests.

Q4 Where should we concentrate our efforts on improving services, in particular journey times?

This question is assumed to refer to existing train services. While improving journey times is important it must not be achieved at the expense of excluding communities by eliminating stops or not re-opening stations. Improved journey times should be achieved by easing speed restrictions, electrification, re-opening formerly closed direct routes, re-doubling previously singled tracks and re-instatement of passing loops and bay platforms. In particular, stopping patterns should be re-examined in terms of re-instating two tier levels of service. A return to a combination of local stopping services and alternating limited stop express services is required. Better availability and resources of passenger rolling stock is required to ease overcrowding and improve reliability. On reliability it is recognised that the Scottish network does often have diversionary routes which can be used in an emergency. Unfortunately it appears that these routes cannot now be used because train crew no longer have the "Route Knowledge". There is a cost to keeping this route knowledge up to date but in the past both nationalised and private railway companies made a particular point of keeping current this route knowledge. While SERA Scotland is not in a position to know all the details it appears that this is a failure which the franchise should insist is corrected. Similarly, much quicker rescue times are needed for passengers trapped in broken down trains.

Q5 How can buying a ticket be made easier? (over-the-counter services, ticket vending machines, staff to offer assistance, internet purchases, telesales, mobile phone ticket purchase, smart cards)

Buying a ticket was easy under the previous National Express ScotRail Franchise. The real question is eliminating the difficulties brought about by the "Squire" regime and the need to maximise revenue with travel time restrictions. Complex travel time restrictions must be avoided as these just discourage rail travel. More ticket machines are a great advantage but must not be used to force passengers to use them when inappropriate. A ticket machine used by passengers is very slow compared to one used by a skilled conductor on a train while it is travelling. Where there are staffed

ticket offices these should be suitably staffed or passengers advised to pay on the train. Some are very difficult to use. Can the example of Motherwell be given? This is frequently staffed by one person to provide local and long distance tickets. Local travellers need a ticket quick or it is not worth it. Long distance travellers buying in advance can take a very long time to complete the exact purchase they need and this leads to a serious conflict which “Squire” exacerbates. The Scottish Network with its rural stations will always require the ability to pay on the train. The mobile ticket machines operated by experienced staff are a marvel of practical technology. They should be allowed to use them without the bullying of the “Squire” regime. Similarly, passengers should be allowed to leave trains and platforms without having to queue for ages because they could not buy tickets. Ticket barriers are also restricting entrance and exits to stations and often refuse to validate perfectly valid tickets. Additionally either receipts should be automatically issued (which would be unnecessarily time consuming) or passengers should be allowed to keep tickets as receipt (a lesson from car parking tickets could be useful here). Internet and mobile phone tickets may be brilliant for some passengers and especially for seat reservations but the main issue is that of honest fare payers being delayed in order to catch a few fare dodgers and railway staff being given no discretion in dealing with situations in which the passenger is not at fault. The system now is not as passenger friendly as it was under the previous franchises.

Q6 To make best use of available space at stations, how should we balance the use between commercial outlets and other facilities that offer passenger benefits?

Make passengers the priority and commercial outlets subservient. There is something wrong with our transport management if they cannot see this. However, there is a concern that the more restrictive entry rules preventing the public visiting stations without a ticket will cause closure of some very good commercial facilities. The shop on the platform at Stirling could be an example.

Commercial outlets now appears to include station toilets. The railway attitude is that toilets are provided on trains, available to bona fide passengers. On larger stations toilets are necessary, if only to sustain commercial outlets selling food and drink and which can not, in practice, provide their own facilities. Almost unilaterally it was decided to make token financial charges for use of toilet facilities at stations, mainly to discourage undesirable activities. The token 10 pence charge became 20 pence and now 30 pence. This is really not acceptable that the charge is raised either just to increase receipts or to try to match the true commercial cost of providing the facilities.

Q7 How could the station environment be improved? (Lighting, seating, CCTV, visible staff presence)

In most cases station environments are fit for purpose. It would simply not be possible to sustain the Scottish network of stations if all stations had to be staffed all the time. In any case there are more attacks at staffed stations than unstaffed stations. Scottish authorities are to be commended on the widespread installation of CCTV monitoring which is the best way of making stations safe for all concerned. This should be extended to all stations. With good monitoring then station environments are

protected from vandalism and it becomes possible to provide better facilities without attracting undesirable activities. However, it does need action to be taken when required. It should not have to take hours for either the police or security staff to turn up when there is an incident nor should courts to turn a blind eye to railway crime. There should be not a single station that young people, sometimes of primary age, can use as a “Playground”, for their own safety’s sake as much as any other. While increasingly demanding “Safety” rules appear good they can be counterproductive in making stations prohibitively expensive to re-open. Better communication between passenger groups, regulators and elected representatives is required.

Q8 How could signage be improved at stations?

In general signage at stations is good, partly thanks to “Squire” regulations. Transport authorities should be alert to suggestions for improvements which should be obvious but frequently only occur to passengers who are strangers to a particular station. There is an issue on directions to toilets as public toilets are being eliminated and/or have limited opening times so signage becomes so involved as to be impracticable. While not a particular problem in Scotland direction signs to stations are often aimed at motorists and are unsuitable or misleading for pedestrians. Emphasise directions to buses from trains and vice-versa.

One signage or information issue is the train information screens on stations. These were a real advance for passengers when they were introduced and should be provided on even more stations not just large stations. However, they are often rendered useless, across the whole UK, by frequent interruptions to “Security” information. This is cosmetic and really does not improve security at all. Unfortunately for many people, especially older or poorer readers, by the time they focus on the train, the departure time and the platform number, the screen has changed to “Don’t leave luggage unattended” and seems to stay there for ages. Then the whole process starts all over again. Can Scotland not lead the way in getting rid of this stupidity? If there really is a security issue then additional screens should be put up which can concentrate on security announcements. The present situation just prevents passengers getting the right train.

Q9 How could we improve assisted travel at stations? – (Wheel Chair Ramps , light scooters, assistance dogs, hearing or learning difficulties, increased staff training, dedicated staff)

Other organisations may be better placed to champion those benefiting from assisted travel. Our information is that ScotRail and Network Rail Scotland are well organised in this respect. There is a concern that the design of some trains means the wheelchair ramp has to be stored in the wrong part of the train for easy deployment. Staff do seem reasonably well trained but there must be a limit to the qualifications and training ordinary rail staff (and bus drivers) must be expected to have. Staff treatment of those needing assistance only seems to fail when other parts of the system are failing and staff and management start to be overwhelmed. Clearly dedicated staff cannot be everywhere but the system appears to work although requiring prior notification. The system, and this is mainly Network Rail, must avoid

the situation where, for example in the Lockerbie bridge fiasco everybody agreed something had to be done but for several years nobody could agree to do it.

There is the other side of the issue which goes well beyond ScotRail. People benefiting from assisted travel have an extremely varied range of conditions requiring varied forms of assistance but almost all wish to be as independent as possible. However, like everybody else, when assistance is needed it is needed urgently. Providing for these needs has high costs which must be borne by the railway businesses which have to operate in a competitive environment. These costs overlap onto the rest of rail service provision, for example, a limited mobility compliant footbridge would cost over £1 million and involve increased environmental impact. Because these costs are not ring-fenced it could well prevent a station being re-opened which really benefits nobody. The standards required could be considered excessive. For example the bridge ramps must be at gradients not steeper than 1 in 20 while the public road leading to the station could have gradients of 1 in 7. Insisting on the very highest standards may well be counterproductive. Additionally many assisted travel problems have come about by increasing safety standards. Wheelchairs which could formerly be taken over track level crossings under qualified supervision is a practice no longer permissible and has, in some cases, resulted in wheelchair users being denied train travel completely. Demanding ultimate standards both puts people at risk and denies them mobility.

There appears to be a paradoxical issue that platforms are being heightened for easier boarding but trains are being built even higher! Consider if the problem is putting bigger engines under carriage floors or if the more sophisticated suspension systems could lower or level trains in platforms, especially if the tracks are canted.

Q10 Do you have any ideas for further 'Rail Links'? (Please consider the accessibility of: hospitals, bus station interchange, car parking, park and ride, traveline, walking routes)

Rail Links in general (A connecting bus was cited as an example): There are many links needing established. Two examples are Lanark to Carstairs and Leuchars to St. Andrews. In both cases buses do run between the two locations but do not connect with the trains. A user could arrive on the train and have to wait an hour for a bus or perhaps has missed the last bus of the day. At Carstairs a user could miss the only train of the day. Unfortunately it is against the law to run a bus to connect with a train as it is considered anti-competitive practice. Other bus companies can legally wreck any service by running spoiling services (for a short time) or taking the transport authorities to court where the authorities know they would lose. Without re-regulation bus links cannot work except in the rarest of circumstances. Unfortunately bus companies maintain their right to de-regulation, in action, in court, in financially supporting political parties and in winning train operating franchises.

Hospitals are a very serious concern but mainly because hospitals are sited according to land development values and not the needs of hospital users. This is a failure of government at all levels and not necessarily the railway authorities. However, there are examples where the railway businesses could have made a better effort rather than hiding behind "Railway difficulties". An obvious example is the new Wishaw Hospital built adjacent to a busy suburban railway but with no station. Carstairs State

Hospital considered rail links extremely important to their work but the railway authorities just ignored them and abandoned service stops there (National Express ScotRail later re-introduced 2 stops off their own initiative).

Bus station interchange: We have good examples such as Lanark and bad examples such as the long running dispute at Dundee. Various authorities just ignore government guidelines with impunity. Note that the spread of ticket barriers restricting station access could prevent good access to adjacent bus stations.

Car Parking/park and ride: Where practicable there should be adequate car parking for those who cannot or who chose not to arrive at a station by any means other than a car. The answer is to build stations closer to where people live so they can walk, cycle or bus to the station. Unfortunately there is now a tendency to build stations away from where people live but where there is space for a large car park. Some park and ride is necessary but the train service cannot rely on it. Even a 200 space car park, with all its construction and maintenance costs, only just fills one 3-car train. The train service depends on users who do not need to park at a station. Station car parks are really there to discourage anti-social parking.

Traveline: The connection with traveline is not understood. However, from quite pathetic beginnings traveline has developed into a very useful service helping people to use and interchange with public transport.

Walking routes: Walking routes to/from stations have major potential. Very little has been done, mainly because urban road traffic has priority, commercial development has priority, nobody really cares about rural issues and now restricted access to stations because of ticket barriers is causing more difficulties. To take bad examples Summerlee Museum is just a few steps from Coatbridge Sunnyside Station but to walk to it is a long, tedious route while, formerly, there was a shorter walking route from Motherwell Station to the Forgewood housing area but now this convenient northern entrance of the station has been permanently closed in order to enforce ticket checks. There are also good examples but there is major potential for improvements if there is funding to buy land, create rights of way and install effective pedestrian crossings.

Ferries: Traditional links with ferries should be maintained, e.g. at Stranrear.

Q11 Which pilot scheme changes to fares should we make to encourage modal shift? (Reduced fares for disadvantaged groups, Reduced fares at times of day/year, Annual season tickets, Geographical tickets, Other rail cards)

There is one real issue with fares and modal shift. The road fuel escalator, soundly based in environmental terms, was scrapped as being “unfair”. The Train Fare Escalator has grown and grown, forced on by this UK Government. Can Scotland be different? No minor cosmetic tinkering with railcards will reduce rail fares to reasonable levels.

There are two types of railcards. Those which train operators genuinely think help them because their owners naturally use off-peak trains, not always but for the majority of journeys. Then there are those aimed to help disadvantaged groups. The

first type are generally protected by statute because private train operators tend to rob them for short term gain. The others tend to be subsidised by the taxpayer to target disadvantaged groups but often benefit the well off while many ordinary people with much lower disposable wealth have to struggle.

While the benefits of railcards are appreciated it is difficult to envisage nearly everyone have one card or another and the few who miss out not being resentful. It is difficult to see how a “Low Income Person” railcard could be allocated or policed. If the Government could scrap the road fuel escalator for the rich and reasonably well-off then they could scrap the train fare escalator.

Statutory protection should continue, particularly for family railcards, and operators should not be allowed to dilute the conditions. A plea is made to extend child fares from 15 to 18 for secondary school pupils as young persons or student railcard have significantly higher fares or restrictions. It would be difficult to police. Partly young persons railcards were introduced to provide proof of age to avoid arguments about age claims.

It is understood that operators already have higher prices at peak times and also operate season tickets. It does appear that season tickets are rising faster than inflation and that peak fares are both being extended and becoming more complex in their validity. These are unfortunate trends which Scottish Government should oppose.

There is a case for certain geographical tickets where the competitive position of rail is relatively weak. It could be imagined that a Borders Rail Card would help make people rely on trains and any connecting buses as their transport of first choice. However, this railway has, unlike other forms of transport, to justify itself on a commercial case so fares are more likely to pitched higher rather than lower.

There is a campaign for a much larger discount for people over 60 using trains on the basis that people over this age travel free on buses. There is a campaign that over 60's should get an equivalent discount as on trains as on buses. This does not mean free train travel but if a bus fare of, say, £10 is free then the equivalent train fare should be reduced by £10. The case is particularly strong on some lines, such as the “Far North” lines where the over 60's are deserting expensive trains for free buses and the train services are being put at risk. The case against this is that many over 60's are much better off than the under 60's they sit beside and also that the completely free concessionary bus pass is ultimately not sustainable and was introduced out of a naive misunderstanding of how people use buses.

Overshadowing the above is that people do want to use trains, they do not need to be persuaded, and almost all trains are overcrowded for at least part of their journey. Cheaper fares just make overcrowding intolerable and unsafe. Therefore Scottish Government must fund more passenger rolling stock, preferably of a more standard, simpler and therefore more affordable design rather than the very complex but expensive trains which are presently being procured in insufficient numbers. The question was about encouraging mode change but most railcards are there to benefit the operator financially by discounting fares but not reducing total fare yield.

The Future

Q12 When travelling on the train, how could passengers' experiences be improved? (Balance between different seating and storage space, Up-to-date information, Helpfulness of staff, catering)

Coach seating balance: The present passenger rolling stock is quite good for passenger comfort compared to the rest of the UK but this is against the background of passenger train design in Britain having peaked around 1980. Motor cars, motor coaches and aeroplanes continue to improve in terms of passenger comfort but British trains have got worse, more cramped, noisier, more vibration and frequently no windows to see out of. Whether it is dark outside or whether passengers intend to read a book some 95% of passengers choose seats in a hierarchy of table seat, widow seat, facing direction of travel seat. The layout of trains does matter. With the scrapping of guard's vans, etc there is going to be limited space for luggage and bikes. With time we should be designing the same roomy, quiet coaches we had in the 1960's and 1970's without a noisy engine and fuel tank right under the passengers' feet but in the meantime things could be a lot worse. However, if overcrowding is going to continue then suitable handles will have to be fitted so people can stand safely along the corridors. As before the answer is a major build/purchase of a standard well-designed model of passenger rolling stock.

Doors: Better heating means that even on longer distance services the wider doors at one third and two thirds are often better than the single doors right at the end of the carriages.

Up-to-date Information: It is believed that, with the exception of the stupid interruptions on information screens, information is probably better than it ever has been. Some of the in-coach visual and audible constant repeating of information, enforced by disability legislation, can be occasionally misleading and quite annoying but it is difficult to see any alternative.

Helpfulness of Staff: Staff have almost always been helpful probably starting with the Chris Green, first director of ScotRail, in the 1980's. He broke new ground by welcoming people onto "Our" stations and trains. Unfortunately, a much more strict disciplinarian attitude by First ScotRail and Transport Scotland's "Squire" regime has reversed that friendliness and this reflects in staff attitudes when they are given no discretion in how they treat passengers. There appear to be more staff to passenger disagreements now than at any time since the 1960's

Catering: The present level of "Trolley" catering is a modern marvel. Trains that could never have hoped to have catering facilities now do so. Staff are good at their rather difficult job and there appears to be none (or very little) of the "Closing early for stock taking" attitude half way into the journey. The system cannot cope when, for example, there is a major breakdown but it is difficult to see what system could. The point of contention must be prices. Managements alternate between making them reasonably expensive to outrageous as they find passengers refuse to buy if prices are too high but cannot resist putting up prices once passengers start buying again. The franchise should specify affordable prices of a few basic items such as tea, coffee,

water and ordinary juice so that no poor person or family is embarrassed and prevented from getting some refreshment.

Toilets: It is commendable that almost all trains now have toilets and that most are retention toilets allowing use in stations and on underground lines. It allows rail authorities to eliminate the problem of station toilets at all but the largest stations. There is anecdotal evidence that First ScotRail has been lax in keeping toilets working, a particular problem now with only one toilet per train set and elimination of connecting corridors. Also some newer trains automatically show a continuous “Engaged” sign when, in fact, they have automatically locked “out of order”, perhaps when the tank is full. This is doubly distressing for passengers and, while the train design is not the operator’s fault, should be addressed one way or another.

Corridors: Following on from the above, through corridors give many advantages, including to are protection and catering trolley receipts. Of recent years train designers have disapproved of corridor connections. It is understood that train crews prefer full width cabs and that nobody can be bothered connecting the corridors up when trains join. In Scotland some trains have connecting corridors, some don’t, some had them but were recently converted to eliminate them and the most recent order for new trains has them. Let us hope they are used. All trains should have through corridor connections.

Q13 Where should we concentrate our efforts in improving Anglo-Scottish sleeper services? (The number of locations served, facilities at trains or on stations, arrival and departure times, provision of airline type seats, catering and staffing)

The Scottish Sleepers should be a consultation in itself. The importance of this service to those who rely on it and Scottish Tourism cannot be over-emphasised. Their **economic, social and environmental** benefits are essential in supporting tourism, giving some areas their only through service to London and in providing an alternative to flying to London. Also, we must never, ever, forget the Tories who were determined to scrap every single one of the Scottish Sleepers while subsidising the one London to Plymouth sleeper because it served tory constituencies. Neither must we forget those Scottish individuals and institutions who, against seemingly impossible odds, took legal action against the hated Tory Government and managed to save two out of the six Scottish Sleepers. Nevertheless, the majority of the modern sleeping cars went for scrap or were sold abroad at scrap prices. That is the background.

Locations served: This is considered in two parts, north and south of the border and also is related to the lack of overnight no-sleeper trains. Clearly, the sleeper trains cannot stop at every station and it is felt that the majority of potential Scottish sleeper stations are already served, especially with the cut back in route options. However, this does raise the importance of connecting services or lack of them on the West Coast Main Line, the Dumfries line and also north of Aberdeen, Inverness and Fort William. If extra trains could ever be run then Cumbernauld, Coatbridge, Kilmarnock and Dumfries should be brought back onto the sleeper system. Carstairs, where sleeper trains are split and joined was refused as a public stop for many years but was included by National Express ScotRail. South of the border is a different matter. There are no overnight trains to Manchester, Liverpool, Birmingham, Bristol or the

West Country. This should be pursued although it will be difficult to either re-instate or win back the lost patronage. The situation also emphasises the importance of Carlisle as a sleeper stop for southern Scotland and the need for connecting local services.

Facilities on trains or stations: There is a limit to the facilities that can be provided, especially at minor stations. However, all stations should have information, especially at the vital unstaffed sleeper stops, and preferably a pre-posted information sheet for passengers who are unfamiliar with the train operation and, particularly as sleepers are reservation only, on train staff must be briefed and ready to help passengers at these stations. This has not always been the case and some of the train manoeuvres, usually in the dark, can be quite unexpected. Facilities for passengers with sleeper berths on trains appear as good as can possibly be expected. The seated section is often quite badly treated but it is a low cost option and restrictions must be expected. Because of the nature of service there must be discipline to prevent inappropriate or worse behaviour and this seems particularly relevant to seating section passengers. Reservations in the seating section must be supervised. On the other hand, without any tolerance of inappropriate behaviour, unreserved berths or seats should be available to turn up and go passengers on the understanding that there are no assured places.

Provision of airline style overnight seats: It is understood the seating sections are already reclining seats. It is felt that the strict separation of seating and sleeper berth passengers has been justified. However, we should have overnight travel to, say, Manchester or Birmingham, where a sleeper berth may not be practical and also the sleeper service is often the only possibility for very early morning or very late night travel on a more local basis. This has been excluded on the basis that it will involve real or imagined hassle for both staff and long distance overnight passengers. This should be re-examined. Long term, the aim should be to increase the number of sleeper train operations.

Arrival and Departure Times: The consensus seems to be present times are the best compromise but a pity that the Inverness arrival cannot be made earlier, possibly by using a more direct route. It was, however, a pity when, a few years ago, there was a clash between some very well known regular users and high publicity advocates of the sleeper service and the operating departments wanting to bring departures from London earlier so that passengers involved in theatre and TV had to give up their support for the Scottish sleeper. It was a loss of publicity and advertising that mere money could not buy.

Saturday Departures and Sunday Arrivals: It is a concern that the sleeper service used to operate on Saturday nights but this was discontinued during the later days of British Rail. The discontinuation was not because of lack of demand but because of understandable operating and staffing difficulties. Many railways overseas operate sleepers on Saturday nights (even north America) and Scotland should continue to test the possibility of a re-introduction.

Catering: Given the restrictions on seating section passengers the catering for sleeper berth seems to be of an extremely well appreciated standard.

Staff: The difficulty of recruitment, motivation and retention of staff of sufficient standard and honesty is appreciated given the unsocial hours and the need to keep discipline and security while selling sufficient alcohol to satisfy commercial demands and give the sort of party atmosphere that tourists need.

Additional Point – Reservations: Without detailed information it is uncertain if difficulties are continuing with a lack of available berths on the sleeper or of difficulties with on-line booking and telephone booking at some of the minor stations. In previous years it has been frustrating to be told that the Scottish sleeper is not attracting enough custom but then when trying to make a reservation to be told it is fully booked or that the sleeper does not serve a particular station that it is patently obvious that it does serve.

Additional point – the Future: The future of the service must be considered in terms of funding and designing new rolling stock, what would the future be should high speed lines ever be built and how could the promised sleeper services to mainland Europe finally become a reality.

Additional point – Reliability: There have been frequent complaints about late, sometimes very late, arrivals especially at Inverness with people depending on a reasonably reliable arrival time not just for important appointments but even for such as carrying out surgery operations in hospitals. The problem being that it is a very long route for ScotRail and its operating partner to operate when, in modern days, there are not a whole series of engine sheds with spare locomotives and crews waiting along the route to assist with any overnight train in difficulty. More reliable arrival times are a priority.

Additional point – Advertising: Some consider advertising and publicity is good, almost overstating what is on offer, others believe that using the sleeper simply does not occur to many people and that a higher, more official level, of publicity is required.

Additional point – Safety. Despite the above comment the modern ScotRail sleeper service has a very good safety record. In generations past overnight sleeper trains were prone to overrun adverse signals and were vulnerable to fire.

Q14 How could we improve the travel interchange at stations? (Ticketing, Service Connections, Infrastructure waiting rooms, facilities inc. for cyclists, car parking, walking routes, disabled access)

Most of these issues have already been asked and addressed in previous questions. To recap:

The increase in revenue protection, ticket barriers, closed access routes, overbearing adherence to inappropriate “Squire” regime and refusal to hold connections is increasingly causing problems. Passengers with urgent connections, especially if already delayed by late running trains, should go straight through the ticket barriers. It

happens time and time again that staff, scared of disciplinary action, simply will not or cannot show any discretion. There are issues with revenue protection etc. but the operators and Transport Scotland MUST REMEMBER that rail travel was on a downhill trend the last time passengers were treated so badly. The change came when people like Chris Green opened the stations up and welcomed people onto what were, in fact, their own trains.

Car parking has been previously discussed and there can never be enough car parking for town centre stations but signage must be better. Where, for example, a supermarket has brought in lawyers to wreck previous understandings about car parks rail users must be advised clearly of where they can and can't park. Where pressure is on car parks the previous SPT policy of refunding car park charges against the train fares was to be commended. Now it is just another revenue source and no matter if the car driver is using the train or not. The real answer is to open more stations closer to where people live.

In general the increased frequencies of trains have made interchange more practical.

Q15 What should our communications connectivity priorities be?

Q16 Would wireless internet technology significantly benefit passengers? (for leisure use, for business use, short commuter journeys, longer distance journeys)

Q17 Would you pay for this service?

We are not aware of specific views on the above three questions. They are not leading concerns for many passengers and for people who consider them a priority then they must have what, for them, is already a good train service. The difficulties of providing connectivity and the good progress made so far are appreciated. It certainly helps, in terms of using mobile phones, that if a train breaks down it does not do so in a tunnel. It would appear to be a reasonable choice for operators, at least to date, to decide if wifi installation is paid for by the actual users or as a general benefit.

Q18 Where should the Edinburgh-Glasgow SmartCard pilot project take us? (What would be successful outcomes)

Success would be, as a pilot, for wider introduction, a means of reducing delay, inconvenience, cost and increasing flexibility of train use and connecting with other trains, other operators and other modes of transport. The general view is that a London type "Oystercard" will bring great benefits but there are major differences between London's tightly regulated and intense public transport system and the Scotland wide network. There are massive practical and human difficulties and the pilot scheme should address these and demonstrate the feasibility of various approaches. It is supposed that we should end up with flexible journeys, including last minute changes to plans, that are paid for almost like a car in that the fuel tank is filled up when it starts to get empty. It will not be easy as the present trend on ScotRail is for less flexibility and less convenience.

Q19 How best can we focus the franchisee on the options for delivering better sustainability?

This appears to be a contractual issue. If it is not in the franchise contract it has to be negotiated.

Q20 How should the Environmental Improvement Works budget be used to further improve our carbon footprint on the railways? (Electrification, waste recycling, time switch lighting, eco driving training, LED slight installation, non-traction energy improvements, other)

Without details of the budget it is difficult to respond. On most railway issues there usually has to be some pressing reason to prioritise sustainability investment. Addressing and balancing safety requirements, e.g. for more intense lighting, and sustainability is challenging. We still do not have any waste bins on railway stations, bus stations yes, railway stations, no. The very minor environmental savings made could easily be outweighed by the extra staff provision and space needed on trains. Some railways overseas do separate all waste. The given list of possibilities appears reasonable. We would consider electrification a priority in this respect. Beyond that we would recommend more flexible train units so we can avoid overcrowding (protecting the customer base and safety) without having to add unnecessary coaches and engines (because trains come in sections of twos or threes and each with individual engines and fuel tanks).

Q21 What should we consider in station and community regeneration?

Q22 What should we concentrate our efforts on the Station Community Regeneration Fund?

Better publicity on what is available and what has been achieved. Local people often see their stations either deteriorate or be refurbished without much in the way of exchange of information or exchange of views. There are the continuing issues of revenue protection barriers and safety. However, there are some good initiatives and more should be encouraged.

2014 Commonwealth Games

Q22 Where should we concentrate our efforts

Q23 What additional services or projects in furtherance of the Commonwealth Games bid commitments do you feel would most benefit the city during the Games period?

Planning and practice must be undertaken in advance to avoid overcrowding and running short (shorter than they should be) train formations. That means rolling stock is made available, including spare stock to cover for failures, and a supervisory system is in place to ensure that operators are providing and operating the rolling stock required.

Diversions plans to be in place for emergencies and in case there is insufficient capacity for both special games workings and regular workings.

Train operation in the UK has for many years avoided the transport of large crowds of spectators as the economic and safety aspects are very difficult to deal with.

It should be reflected on that the main games sites were well served by the suburban rail system until 1965 when they were closed. The adjacent Argyle Line was re-opened in 1979 and is the closest railway to the games site. The re-opening was made compatible with re-opening the adjacent London Road Line which would have served the games site directly as well as several other important permanent destinations. The route of this line was protected for a further several years after which, in a decision beyond comprehension, it was decided to allow house building on the line. While the line could have been partly re-opened there is the usual continual denial of previous unprofessional decisions. Even at this stage the re-opening of this line would provide an environmental and social inclusion legacy of the games. However, with the usual rate of decision making and funding for railways it is unlikely anything could be achieved in time for the games in 2014.

The real legacy will be sports venues but poor rail connectivity. It is envisaged that Dalmarnock station will be adopted as a rail terminal with shuttle buses operating for the relatively short period of the games. At present the level of service and connectivity on the Argyle Line is not really sufficient.

Broader Issues and Questions

Q24 What aspects of the Project Manager's role are priorities to ensure the successful delivery of projects?

There is insufficient information available to write a job description. However the challenge of achieving quick results in a railway environment is appreciated and the Project Manager's priority must be to eliminate those periods of inaction, delayed decisions and funding reviews which characterise late delivery.

Q25 Do you think that any of the improvements and enhancements proposed above will have either a positive or adverse impact on equality groups in terms of Age, Disability, Gender, LGBT, Race, Religion and belief?

All the projects will have a positive effect on all these groups except where the projects simply do not go far enough and delay otherwise achievable benefits. Expanding the train service is the priority and insistence on inappropriately high standards would disadvantage all groups including those very groups the standards purport to protect.

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