



RMT response to the Transport Scotland consultation on initiatives related to the ScotRail franchise

November 2008

The National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers (RMT) welcomes the opportunity to respond to Transport Scotland's consultation on initiatives related to the ScotRail franchise extension.

The RMT is the largest of the rail unions and organises over 10,000 members in Scotland. Our support for a publicly owned, environmentally sustainable and fully integrated transport network is well documented.

RMT was extremely disappointed that the Scottish Executive decided to extend the ScotRail franchise in contradiction to the publicly expressed position of the ruling Scottish National Party and without consultation with relevant stakeholders.

Our disappointment was compounded by the fact that the extension was awarded before the Audit Scotland investigation into the performance of the franchise had been able to hear from key witnesses, including the rail unions and the Scottish TUC. We understand that the Audit Scotland findings are due to be published on 28th November and look forward to reading their report.

Core Services (Question 1 to Question 4)

- The consultation document details a series of initiatives relevant to core services including;
- Extension of 15 minute frequency Edinburgh-Glasgow services
- Operation of Kilmarnock half-hourly service and re-cast Ayr-Girvan and Stranraer-Glasgow services
- Far North Recast (being late night Tain and fourth Wick service)
- Edinburgh, Fife and Aberdeen service enhancements including services to and operation of the new Laurencekirk Station

RMT welcomes these and other schemes designed to develop and enhance the rail network in Scotland. However, we do not believe that the introduction of new

services and routes should be dependent on the franchise extension terms agreed between Scottish Ministers and the First Group.

The £70million identified as being available to reinvest in the network should be set in the context of the £2.5billion (in 2004.05 prices) that will be paid to First ScotRail over the course of the franchise term.

In addition the revised franchise terms introduce a profit sharing agreement which only kicks in after profits exceed £27.247million a year. Furthermore the revenue sharing arrangements have been adjusted to allow First ScotRail to retain a greater proportion of income before the sharing arrangements begin.

Finally, First ScotRail made pre-tax profits in excess of £33million between 2005 and 2007 and made dividend payments to shareholders of £21million in 2007.

Connecting Passengers to People (Questions 5 to Question 11)

Despite some recent improvements there is still some way to go in terms of meeting passenger demands and aspirations. To illustrate the point, the spring 2008 National Passenger Survey found;

- 33% of ScotRail passengers were dissatisfied with station facilities and services
- 16% of ScotRail passengers were dissatisfied with connections with other forms of public transport
- 14% of ScotRail passengers were dissatisfied with the availability of staff
- 28% of ScotRail passengers were dissatisfied with the value for money for the price of the ticket

RMT has campaigned for many years for stations to be fully staffed from the beginning to the end of service. Additionally, the station environment should be fully accessible and welcoming; all too often stations can be poorly maintained and unpleasant environments, particularly at night and during the winter months.

The July 2005 National Audit Office report *Maintaining and improving Britain's railway stations* indicates that "Research by Crime Concern for the Department in 1996 and 2002 found that measures to improve personal safety would result in 11% more journeys by public transport, including 15% more by train and Underground". The research demonstrated that a staff presence, CCTV and good lighting were the three main factors which passengers found reassuring.

In July 2002 the Scottish Executive published *Women and Transport: Moving Forward* which sets out guidance and a checklist aimed at ensuring the policy makers and providers recognise the effect of their decisions in relation to women's' travel plans. The guidance clearly identified that the issue of personal security acts as a significant constraint on women's travel choices.

The report makes clear that CCTV should be supported by appropriate staffing levels and should not be seen as a solution in itself. It explains that surveillance measures are not sufficient to address women's safety issues and that staff should be provided on vehicles and facilities wherever possible. RMT would therefore recommend to the Executive that train stations are not simply 'halts' but remain staffed throughout the time of traffic and that there should be no extension of Driver Only Operated trains.

The issue of personal safety continues to be a factor once passengers have left the station. It is important that surrounding streets are well lit and that bus and train timetables/services are integrated to ensure that passengers can make their onward journey safely and securely. RMT would expect that the 2002 guidance

and checklist is being effectively monitored by Ministers in order to ensure that best practice is being applied.

In terms of ticket buying facilities research published jointly by Passenger Focus and South West Trains in October 2008 found that most passengers prefer to queue to buy tickets from a booking office rather than using a ticket vending machine. RMT supports proposals to introduce additional Customer Service Staff at major stations and the introduction of an additional ticket office counter at Haymarket station. Our view is that ticket offices should be fully staffed throughout time of service and Transport Scotland should resist any proposals made in the future to reduce ticket office opening times and/or close booking offices completely.

The value of having an established ticket office was revealed after the welcome re-opening of the Alloa-Stirling line. The absence of ticket purchasing facilities at Alloa station led to long queues of passengers forming at Stirling station to buy excess tickets. A ticket machine has now been installed at Alloa station. However, RMT would prefer to see a dedicated ticket office at the station in order to deal with passenger numbers which are exceeding projected demand.

RMT believes that the rail network should be fully accessible to people with disabilities and/or restricted mobility. Station infrastructure should be upgraded by introducing ramps and up to date facilities for passengers with hearing, sight and learning difficulties. Stations have to be adequately staffed to deal with passengers with restricted mobility and other special requirements and staff should be trained and sent on regular re-fresher courses to provide the necessary assistance.

The UK rail network has the most expensive walk-up standard fares in Europe. January 2009 will see rail users in Scotland facing an average 6% increase in

regulated (outside of Strathclyde) and unregulated fares. We do not believe that such a policy framework encourages rail use or helps promote social inclusion for the 32% of Scottish households that do not have access to a car¹. In consequence RMT fails to see how such large fare increases can be justified.

The December 2006 National Transport Strategy explained that a review was underway to develop a fares policy to encourage modal shift from road to rail. As far as we are aware, the review appears to have stalled.

RMT would therefore propose that work to develop a new fares policy is given a high priority during which stakeholders and the public can make proposals for reduced fares for disabled passengers, people on low-incomes, people with key worker status, group travel and families.

In terms of the options posed in Question 11 of the consultation document, RMT supports all of the proposed pilot schemes being rolled out to encourage modal shift and would also suggest that people with key worker status – paramedics, firefighters etc – should be included in the pilot schemes.

RMT has fully supported the extension of the bus concessionary fare scheme. However, the extension has left rural rail routes vulnerable to passengers deserting the train. Figures published by the Office Rail Regulation indicate that between 2004 and 2007 numbers have declined at Wick and Thurso stations by 11% and 12% respectively. We would therefore recommend that Transport Scotland brings forward a pilot scheme on the Far North Line which would allow bus concession scheme users to use the concession on the train. Such a move could help to address the decline in the number of passengers using the line in recent years.

¹ Scottish Transport Statistics 2007

The Future: looking forward (Question 12 to Question 25)

The Climate Change Bill currently progressing through Westminster includes the challenging statutory target to reduce carbon emissions by 80% from their 1990 levels by 2050. Currently around 25% of all carbon emissions are produced from the transport industry. Whilst rail has significant environmental advantages over other modes of transport, it is right that the sector works hard to improve its energy efficiency.

In our submission to the 2006 National Transport Strategy consultation, RMT called for early work to begin on the electrification of the Glasgow-Falkirk-Edinburgh line (including routes to Cumbernauld, Stirling and Dunblane). We would repeat that call now and recommend Transport Scotland begins discussions with Network Rail with a view to drawing up plans for the electrification of further routes in Scotland. The use of re-generative braking should also be rolled out across the country and the new rolling stock required for the Glasgow Airport Rail Link should be specified to the best possible energy efficient standards. Rolling stock should also be designed to ensure there is adequate provision for luggage given that the spring 2008 National Passenger Survey found that 20% of ScotRail passengers were dissatisfied with the space for available luggage.

The November 2007 TRANSform Scotland report *The Railways Means Business* explains how rail travel has significant advantages over aviation in terms of productive time during the course of the journey. Although the report focussed on journeys between Edinburgh/Glasgow – London, it remains the case that wireless internet technology could play an important role in encouraging business travellers and passengers attending seminars/conferences to make use of Scotrail services. RMT therefore supports the introduction of free wireless internet technology on Edinburgh –Glasgow services.

