Consultation on Initiatives Related to the ScotRail Franchise Extension

Response to Transport Scotland consultation paper
Sunday 30th November 2008

1.   Introduction

1.1   Transform Scotland[1] generally welcomes the franchise extension, both to provide a period of continued stability within the Scottish railway industry and because the railway in Scotland has generally been moving in a positive direction in recent years. First ScotRail appears to have created an effective working relationship with its partners in the railway and surveys indicate that passenger satisfaction and punctuality have improved since 2004.

1.2   However, Transform Scotland has considerable concerns regarding the way in which the award of the ScotRail franchise extension has been handled. There appears to have been a lack of transparency during this process and holding the consultation after the award has been made could be interpreted as tokenism.

1.2   There are, of course, developments that we would like to see that have not been proposed – some of these are as much in the domain of Transport Scotland and Network Rail as of ScotRail – but we believe that it is appropriate to include them as aspirations for the passenger railway service in Scotland.

2.   Train Environment

2.1   Scotland has a generally modern train fleet, but recent years have seen moves towards a small number of types of rolling stock which serve a wide variety of purposes. While this has clear economic benefits, Transform Scotland feels that, nonetheless, a number of more specific rolling-stock types could be employed on certain services and would have the added benefit of giving some lines a clearer 'brand identity'.

2.2   Proposals for future Improvements

2.2.1   Wi-Fi

Currently there are no Wi-Fi facilities on ScotRail trains, but Wi-Fi has been well received on the National Express East Coast services (some of which extend to Aberdeen and Inverness) and it would be of particular benefit in marketing rail services to business customers. Bus operators are clearly aware of the attractiveness of Wi-Fi and have installed it on a number of routes including the Glasgow – Edinburgh coaches, the Glasgow Airport express and the Edinburgh – Dunfermline corridor. We would like to see Wi-Fi facilities extended into the ScotRail train fleet, for all but the shortest commuter journeys.

2.2.2   Scottish Inter-City services

We would like to see the development of a distinctive train to serve the longer-distance services, in particular, those connecting Glasgow/Edinburgh and Aberdeen/Inverness. Although the existing multiple-unit stock is of good quality, it is 'regional' in character, and there should be a higher quality standard for these premier services with additional space for bulky items of luggage and cycles, and

---

[1]   Transform Scotland is the national sustainable transport alliance. We campaign for a more sensible transport system, one less dependent on unsustainable modes such as the car, the plane and road freight, and more reliant on sustainable modes like walking, cycling, public transport, and freight by rail or sea. We are a membership organisation bringing together rail, bus and shipping operators; local authorities; national environment and conservation organisations; local environment and transport campaign groups; and individual supporters.

better catering facilities. As and when additional rolling stock comes to be ordered, ScotRail should seek a true 'Inter-City' train for Scotland, allowing existing Class 170 stock to augment other, shorter distance services.

2.2.3   Rolling stock on scenic lines

Scotland has some of the most scenic railways in the world, and yet there is no special rolling stock to take advantage of this. In other places, such as Switzerland, there are trains which allow the scenery on particular lines to be shown to best effect. We would like to see designs for trains on scenic lines being developed as part of the long-term rolling-stock programme.

3.   Station Environment

3.1   Staffing

3.1.1   Having a staff presence in stations is important for a number of reasons: to advise passengers of services; to help passengers who need physical assistance; and to improve perceptions of safety as well as to sell tickets. Indeed, staffing is often needed as much at quiet times, to re-assure passengers, as at busy times. Clearly, it is no longer economically viable to staff all stations throughout the working day, but we would like to see the staffing of stations extended to the maximum possible, both in terms of the number of stations with staff and the period of time for which stations are staffed.

3.2   Use of station buildings

3.2.1   ScotRail has a legacy of station buildings from days when staffing levels were far higher. Notwithstanding what we have said above, we feel that leaving station buildings empty makes unstaffed stations still less inviting and so, where there are unused buildings, we would welcome their re-use in a variety of imaginative ways.

3.3   Stations as interchange points

3.3.1   Transform Scotland sees every station as a potential interchange point. Interchange is not just between railways and buses or cars, but also cycling, and walking as an important interchange mode in its own right. With this in mind, all stations should be provided with a network of walking routes providing convenient and direct access. All stations should have ample cycle parking and, ideally, local bus networks should serve stations and link with trains to connect areas and facilities which are not served directly by the railway. Where appropriate, car parking should also be provided.

4.   Services

4.1   Transform Scotland welcomes the improvements that are being introduced with the winter 2008 timetable, in particular the new hourly services from Edinburgh to Perth and Dundee and accelerated services to Aberdeen. We look forward to further improvements in future such as the half-hourly Glasgow – Kilmarnock service and the 'Caledonian Express' limited stop service on the Glasgow Central – Edinburgh via Shotts line.

4.2   Evenings and Sundays

4.2.1   Late evening services have improved in recent years, with many lines having extra weekend departures from the major centres near or after midnight. However, some lines, particularly in the Edinburgh area, would benefit from later Friday/Saturday night departures. (The last departures from Edinburgh are 23:07 to North Berwick, 23:18 to Bathgate, 23:33 to Dunblane and 23:34 to Newcraighall. The last train from Edinburgh to Glasgow via Shotts is 22:40 on a Saturday and 22:10 on a Friday.) We would also like to see later departures on the E&G Line, ScotRail's flagship service, where the last trains depart from each end at 23:30.

4.2.2 Sunday timetables have also improved with many branches and stations having had services introduced in recent years. However, certain Sunday services remain poor, such as Edinburgh – Perth, and the Edinburgh – Glasgow via Shotts line still has no services west of West Calder. Several branches such as Edinburgh to Newcraighall, Glasgow to Whifflet, Paisley Canal and Anniesland via Maryhill and certain intermediate stations between Glasgow and Barrhead have no Sunday service at all. Sunday is an ever more important day for leisure travel and we feel that the railway should increasingly move to a seven-day timetable.

4.2.3 Oban

Recent improvements to other rural lines have left Oban as Scotland's poorest served railway, with three trains per day in winter. Transform Scotland would strongly support the introduction of an additional year-round service between Glasgow and Oban.

4.2.4 Dunbar

Introduction of an hourly ScotRail service to Dunbar, rather than the present intermittent service provided by Arriva Cross-Country, would also facilitate a half-hourly service to the suburban stations east of Waverley, particularly Musselburgh, which now serves Queen Margaret University.

4.2.5 Glasgow – Perth – Arbroath

There is an opportunity for an additional hourly fast service between Glasgow and Stirling, where a gap presently exists in the timetable, giving relief to the overcrowded Glasgow – Stirling local services. This train could operate through to Perth, giving additional services to Gleneagles, and then as a local service through to Dundee and Arbroath, which would allow further acceleration of services between Glasgow/ Edinburgh and Aberdeen.

4.3 Network Expansion

4.3.1 Transform Scotland welcomes the expansion of the railway network and we look forward to the significant extensions that will come with the Airdrie – Bathgate link and the Glasgow Airport Rail Link. There are, though, some significant further extensions we would like to see. The extension of Edinburgh – Fife local services over the existing freight line to Leven would bring an important area back onto the railway network, and could be facilitated within existing timetable and rolling stock resources. The extension of passenger services over the freight line east of Alloa to Dunfermline, would create an important link between Glasgow and Fife, a possible new station at Kincardine and easier travel between Alloa and Edinburgh.

5. Ticketing

5.1 Concessionary Fares and Discounts

5.1.1 Transform Scotland would support a review of the current concessionary travel arrangements. The present Scottish National Concession scheme is particularly biased against rail travel, with some previous local authority funded rail concessions having been withdrawn since its introduction and others potentially being in danger. There is also research which has indicated substitution away from rail travel by those groups entitled to free bus travel. We believe that a 'revenue neutral' solution can be arrived at, whereby a discounted fare could still be charged for rail travel, but with a single set of rules applied across Scotland. There cannot be truly integrated Scottish transport policy and provision until this issue is addressed.

5.2 Buying tickets

5.2.1 Increasingly, customers are looking for a variety of methods of payment and options such as internet payment are becoming more widely available. However, there is no substitute for being able to buy

tickets 'over the counter' and this service should be as widely available as possible (see also 'Staffing' above).

5.3   Through ticketing

5.3.1   Transform Scotland strongly supports through ticketing between modes to enable public transport to effectively meet ever more complex travel patterns. In this respect, developments such as 'Plus Bus' and through ticketing to the Glasgow Subway (as well as metro/ light rail systems in England) are to be welcomed. Through ticketing should be available to the Edinburgh Trams from the outset. We would like to see the development of multi-modal ticketing (similar to the SPT Zonecard) across Scotland for regular travellers, day-trippers and individual journeys.

5.4   Smartcards

5.4.1   The success of the London Oystercard, and similar systems in numerous other cities, have demonstrated the popularity and ease of use of smartcard ticketing systems. Transform Scotland strongly supports the development of a Scottish smartcard, available for use across all modes of transport and would like to see a smartcard in the pocket of everyone in Scotland.

6.   Improving sustainability

6.1   Railways generally have a good reputation when it comes to sustainability, but this has declined in recent years as heavier vehicles, more on-board services (for example air conditioning) and necessary – but space-consuming – additions such as facilities for mobility impaired people have lead to significant increases in consumption of energy per passenger carried.

6.2   Electrification

6.2.1   Electric trains can significantly reduce their energy requirement through the use of regenerative braking, particularly on short distance trips with frequent stops. Increasing the extent of the electrified network is undoubtedly the best way of improving the level of sustainability of train travel, but it can only become truly sustainable through the use of renewable power sources. Transform Scotland would like to see a commitment to electrification beyond the current plans for central Scotland to cover all but the quietest lines, and for the additional power requirement to be derived from renewable sources.

6.3   Eco-driving, etc.

6.3.1   There will always be a need for lines where electrification is not justified. In these cases, methods of driving can be implemented which minimise fuel consumption and this should be the case wherever practicable. In the longer term, we would support the development of hybrid or other low-emission technologies which would allow the carbon footprint of non-electrified lines to come closer to that of their electrified counterparts.

6.4   Other waste

6.4.1   There are significant sources of waste which do not relate directly to the operation of trains, such as catering supplies and staff facilities. In this regard, ScotRail should seek to source all inputs into the service in the most sustainable way possible in order to further reduce the carbon footprint of railways in Scotland.

7   Conclusions and Recommendations

7.1   Transform Scotland is generally positive about the operation of ScotRail services by First, but we are concerned about the process through which the franchise extension was awarded.

7.2   The Scottish rail fleet is generally of high quality but installation of Wi-Fi and, in the longer term, more specialised rolling stock for specific lines would improve the attractiveness of train travel,

7.3   Stations should be staffed wherever possible, but where this is no longer viable, a variety of imaginative schemes can bring station buildings back into use. Stations should also be the hub of a local network for walking, cycling and other public transport.

7.4   Train services have improved but there are certain lines that would benefit from later evening departures and better Sunday services. There are also a number of additional services which could be introduced over existing lines, such as to Oban, Dunbar and between Glasgow, Stirling, Perth and Arbroath. Finally there is an opportunity to extend existing passenger services over freight lines to Leven and east of Alloa.

7.5   Ticketing throughout public transport needs to be made easier and this includes simplifying the rules for concessionary travel (and including rail travel throughout Scotland in some form), making the purchase of tickets as easy as possible, the introduction of through ticketing and a Smartcard system Scotland-wide.

7.6   The railway needs to make every effort to improve its sustainability. Extension of the electrified network is crucial but improvements in driving techniques for diesels and reductions of other sources of waste have an important part to play.