

Friends of the Far North Line

Response to Rail 2014 Consultation

Executive Summary

The Friends of the Far North Line draws Transport Scotland's attention to the following salient points in its response to this consultation:

- Hourly train services between Perth and Inverness, Aberdeen and Inverness and Tain and Inverness, with additional services between Elgin and Inverness and Inverurie and Aberdeen, all with improved journey times (Q19)
- Rolling stock appropriate for the route being operated (Q32)
- Continuation of through trains to England from Aberdeen and Inverness, including some enhancements to/from Dundee and Perth; reintroduction of trains between Inverness and West Coast Main Line locations (Q29/30)
- Continuation of sleepers and suggestions for economies in operation (Q37 – 39)
- Reintroduction of Motorail (Q19)
- Statutory passenger representation (Q14)

Consultation Questions

The answer boxes will expand as you type.

Procuring rail passenger services

1. What are the merits of offering the ScotRail franchise as a dual focus franchise and what services should be covered by the economic rail element, and what by the social rail element?

Q1 comments: We believe that there should be only one franchise or there will be a danger that the economical one will walk away with profits whilst the social one is always short of money. However, with a single franchise, there should be separate focuses for different types of service. There should be local managers.

2. What should be the length of the contract for future franchises, and what factors lead you to this view?

Q2 comments: If there has to be a franchise, then we believe it should be of either 15 or 20 years but with 5-year break points. Tangible improvements must be proposed and carried out, e.g., new rolling stock, improved journey times and/or frequencies, etc.. However, we do not believe that a franchise would represent best value for money for the taxpayer as the process has haemorrhaged money since 1994. We think that the TOC should be a not-for-profit company wholly owned by the Scottish Government. The funding

regime should be on a similar basis to the HLOS/SoFA process.

3. What risk support mechanism should be reflected within the franchise?

Q3 comments: If the TOC were a not-for-profit company, this would not arise. Otherwise, we have no comment.

4. What, if any, profit share mechanism should apply within the franchise?

Q4 comments: All profit should go back into the railway industry.

5. Under what terms should third parties be involved in the operation of passenger rail services?

Q5 comments: Third party involvement should be judged on its merit for each scheme.

6. What is the best way to structure and incentivise the achievement of outcome measures whilst ensuring value for money?

Q6 comments: A not-for-profit TOC.

7. What level of performance bond and/or parent company guarantees are appropriate?

Q7 comments: Again, not required for a not-for-profit company. Otherwise, we have no comment.

8. What sanctions should be used to ensure the franchisee fulfils its franchise commitments?

Q8 comments: In the event that a franchisee does not fulfil its commitment any “fine” should be a requirement to spend that amount of money on rectifying the problem. This money should remain within the industry and not go back to the Government.

Achieving reliability, performance and service quality

9. Under the franchise, should we incentivise good performance or only penalise poor performance?

Q9 comments: We expect that a franchisee should make a financial input to eliminate poor performance. Poor performance should not be tolerated. As above, any “fines” should be required to be invested to ameliorate the problem.

10. Should the performance regime be aligned with actual routes or service groups, or should there be one system for the whole of Scotland?

Q10 comments: The methodology should be the same for the whole franchise, irrespective of the type of service. Individual route statistics should still be published.

11. How can we make the performance regime more aligned with passenger issues?

Q11 comments: Passengers expect that “on time” should be on time and not up to five or ten minutes late at the train’s destination, which does not reflect missed connections, etc., at intermediate stations. The performance regime should revert to the pre-Charter definitions of Time, 1 – 5 and over 5 minutes late and performance time should be eliminated. It is also never helpful to passengers to miss out stops to pick up time, even though it aids service recovery.

12. What should the balance be between journey times and performance?

Q12 comments: Short journey times are important but Sectional Running Times and dwell times must be realistic. It’s no use speeding up trains if the timings can’t be achieved, but they should not be padded out unnecessarily. Good performance will follow naturally from this process.

13. Is a Service Quality Incentive Regime required? And, if so should it cover all aspects of stations and service delivery, or just those being managed through the franchise?

Q13 comments: Yes and no. It has possibly gone too far. For example, in the winter of 2010 – 11, the SQUIRE regime was marking stations which hadn’t seen a train for more than a week. In an ideal world, the industry should be required to carry out asset monitoring internally and there should be spot-checks.

14. What other mechanisms could be used for assessing train and station quality?

Q14 comments: Partially answered within 13. There seems to be no provision for a statutory organisation to represent passengers’ interests. This is essential and it needs to be more than the current one person who reports to London.

Scottish train services

15. Can better use be made of existing train capacity, such as increasing the permitted standing time beyond the limit of 10 minutes or increasing the

capacity limit? What is an acceptable limit for standing times on rail services?

Q15 comments: The rule in England is 20 minutes in peak hours only; off-peak passengers should expect a seat. We believe that the same should apply in Scotland.

16. Should the number of services making use of interchange stations (both rail to rail and rail to other modes) be increased to reduce the number of direct services? What would be the opportunities and challenges of this?

Q16 comments: Passengers do not like changing, especially the optional market, families, the elderly, those with disabilities and passengers with luggage. Many of these categories of passenger find large stations intimidating.

17. Should Government direct aspects of service provision such as frequency and journey time, or would these be better determined by the franchisee based on customer demand?

Q17 comments: Government should specify minimum levels of services and approximate times of first and last trains but not be too prescriptive. The TOC must both be allowed to respond to changes in passenger demand and be required to do so and be permitted to adjust the timetable accordingly without undue interference by and delay from the Government. Innovative ideas should be rewarded and not be treated by Government as “not invented here”. User groups should be encouraged to participate in the iterative process.

18. What level of contract specification should we use the for the next ScotRail franchise?

Q18 comments: Less rigid but must encourage innovation.

19. How should the contract incentivise the franchisee to be innovative in the provision of services?

Q19 comments: The Government should require the franchisee to progress, with Network Rail, the introduction of hourly services between Perth and Inverness, with sub-3 hour journey times between Inverness and Glasgow/Edinburgh; sub- 2 hour hourly services between Aberdeen and Inverness (with half-hourly trains at either end); and hourly services between Inverness and Tain with an all-stations journey time of less than an hour. The franchisee should be encouraged to link services through connecting stations where this will result in economies in the use of resources. We also believe that the new franchisee should be asked to consider whether Motorail services could be reintroduced between Scotland and England. Options at

the Scottish end should be Inverness, Aberdeen and a location in the Central Belt; options in England should be the north-west, the Midlands and the London area.

Scottish rail fares

20. What should be the rationale for, and purpose of, our fares policy?

Q20 comments: To encourage rail travel and, especially, modal shift.

21. What fares should be regulated by government and what should be set on a commercial basis? Do your recommendations change by geographic area (the Strathclyde area example), or by type of journey (for example suburban or intercity)?

Q21 comments: The *Highland Railcard* should be retained.

22. How should we achieve a balance between the taxpayer subsidy and passenger revenue contributions in funding the Scottish rail network? At what rate should fares be increased, and how feasible would it be to apply higher increases to Sections of the network which have recently been enhanced?

Q22 comments: This is a political decision.

23. What should the difference be between peak and off-peak fares? Will this help encourage people to switch to travelling in the off-peak?

Q23 comments: On the Far North Line, there is no need for a difference.

Scottish stations

24. How should we determine what rail stations are required and where, including whether a station should be closed?

Q24 comments: FoFNL has discussed some of the stations named and has concluded that they should be retained.

25. What are the merits or issues that arise from a third party (such as a local authority or local business) being able to propose, promote and fund a station or service?

Q25 comments: Advantageous if they mean that otherwise redundant buildings will be used. They should, however, provide facilities for rail ticketing and information.

26. Should only one organisation be responsible for the management and maintenance of stations? If this was the franchisee how should that

responsibility be structured in terms of leasing, investment, and issues relating to residual capital value?

Q26 comments: We do not believe there is a need for any change.

27. How can local communities be encouraged to support their local station?

Q27 comments: If there were local managers with local knowledge, this could encourage adoption.

28. What categories of station should be designated and what facilities should be available at each category of station?

Q28 comments: Why should there be any categories other than staffed and unstaffed? Facilities should be provided in accordance with use and location. All stations should have covered waiting accommodation which should, where possible, be heated.

Cross-border services

29. Should cross-border services continue to go north of Edinburgh? In operating alongside ScotRail services, how do cross-border services benefit passengers and taxpayers? And who should specify these services, the Department of Transport or the Scottish Ministers?

Q29 comments: They most certainly should go north of Edinburgh. As in answer 16, passengers do not want to change. There needs to be a reappraisal of whether the Aberdeen and Inverness trains are running at the right times. For example, we believe that the southbound *Highland Chieftain* should run around an hour later and the northbound an hour earlier. East Coast now has more HSTs than heretofore so it is possible that there could be more trains running north of Edinburgh. Perhaps there is scope for an additional Perth service and a Dundee train? Extensions of both East Coast and Cross Country services north of Edinburgh could help to address capacity issues in the peaks. We also think that there should be an appraisal of whether a *Clansman*-type service via Mossend could be restored from West Coast stations including Birmingham and maybe Manchester. Both Aberdeen and Inverness should be considered as potential destinations. Aberdeen and Inverness services to and from England should form part of the overall service pattern north of Edinburgh as they are south thereof and not be additional to it. Could there, perhaps, be joint services on the lines of the NIR/IR *Enterprise*? Could EC hire in crews from the ScotRail franchise to reduce costs? There may be scope for economies when IEPs are introduced.

30. Or should the cross-border services terminate at Edinburgh Waverley, allowing opportunities for Scottish connections? And if so, what additional benefits would accrue from having an Edinburgh Hub?

Q30 comments: They should most certainly not terminate at Edinburgh. A hub may be a nice theory but cross-platform connections are unlikely to work. Edinburgh Waverley has some open platforms and many which are not; several of the platforms involve crossing the footbridge. What quality of rolling stock would operate these connections which would replace through trains currently formed of mark 3 stock? Who would police the connections? Currently, the standard arrival time at Edinburgh by fast trains from King's Cross varies between xx.22 and xx.26 on Mondays to Fridays and xx.31 on Saturdays. The Aberdeen trains depart between xx.27 and xx.30 so already do not make a connection and the Perth and Inverness services depart at xx.32 to xx.42 so several of these don't make connection either. There would need to be a recast which would have to be reassessed at every timetable change and would be at the whim of East Coast Main Line changes and directions from the Westminster Government.

Rolling stock

31. What alternative strategies or mechanisms could be used to reduce the cost of the provision of rolling stock?

Q31 comments: We believe that the rolling stock should be the property of the Scottish Government and be leased to the not-for-profit TOC at zero cost.

32. What facilities should be present on a train and to what extent should these facilities vary according to the route served?

Q32 comments: The rolling stock should be appropriate for the type of service being operated and the journey times. Every train should have a working toilet. Express routes should have a trolley. Other journeys over an hour should also have trolleys. On rural routes and at quiet times on other lines, the guard should operate the trolley. A new train for Scottish InterCity routes is needed which should have the ambience of a mark 3 vehicle. A new train for rural routes is also needed. The specification should include: one toilet per coach; good leg room; no more than 4 seats abreast, aligned with windows; good luggage, bike and disabled space; efficient heating and air conditioning; vestibule doors; sufficient exit doors. Where First Class accommodation is provided, there should be adequate separate luggage space for those passengers. Replicating or improving on private motor car comfort levels should be the aim. Existing trains should include the same facilities as for new stock. In respect of services to and from England, will the Scottish Government be able to specify its requirements to the DfT, particularly in the provision of luggage and bicycle accommodation? Virgin West Coast, East Coast and First TransPennine Express are all inadequate. Provision must be made for the Land's End – John O'Groats cycle traffic.

Passengers – information, security and services

33. How should we prioritise investment for mobile phone provision and / or Wi-Fi type high-bandwidth services?

Q33 comments: This is a commercial decision but provision of these is of limited use if it is not possible to get a signal.

34. How should we balance the need for additional seating capacity and retain the flexibility of a franchisee to offer first-class services if commercially viable?

Q34 comments: First Class should be retained where revenues can be obtained. This revenue should be higher than if the space were used for standard class seating. Passengers like *Weekend First*.

35. What issues and evidence should be considered prior to determining whether or not to ban the consumption of alcohol on trains?

Q35 comments: This would penalise law-abiding citizens. A ban would have to include the lounges on overnight trains. Would this apply whilst the trains are in England and would it be legally enforceable? Existing byelaws are adequate but must be enforced.

36. How can the provision of travel information for passengers be further improved?

Q36 comments: Better geographical knowledge. 24-hour information staff: it's of no use them starting work at 06.30. Publicity materials need to be supplied to tourist information offices and hotels, etc..

Caledonian Sleeper

37. Should we continue to specify sleeper services, or should this be a purely commercial matter for a train operating company?

Q37 comments: Should be specified by Transport Scotland.

38. Should the Caledonian Sleeper services be contracted for separately from the main ScotRail franchise? Or should it be an option for within the main ScotRail franchise?

Q38 comments: As part of the main franchise.

39. We would be interested in your views in the level and type of service that the Caledonian Sleeper Services should provide. Including:

- What is the appeal of the Caledonian Sleeper Service, and if there were more early and late trains would the appeal of the sleeper services change?

- What is the value of sleeper services to Fort William, Inverness and Aberdeen and are these the correct destinations, for example would Oban provide better connectivity?
- What facilities should the sleeper services provide and would you pay more for better facilities?

Q39 comments: **Bullet point 1:** More early and late trains would not necessarily change the appeal of sleeper services. The sleepers save a day's travel. Even when HS2 opens, it will still not be possible for some passengers to arrive at their destination early enough if their journey involves having to travel through London, Glasgow, Edinburgh or other Scottish city.

Bullet point 2: Is there, perhaps, a case for alternating between Fort William and Oban, with three nights to and from each? We do not know the statistics of supply and demand nor where passengers' origins and final destinations are. How many passengers are unable to obtain bookings because the trains are full?

Bullet point 3: En suite facilities sound a nice idea until the logistics are factored in. They would reduce capacity by around a third and would require much more water and waste storage. Free washing and showering facilities should be provided at terminals and at the other major towns and cities served. Catering should be improved both on the trains and at the terminals such that it should be possible for passengers to obtain a full dinner and/or breakfast, possibly by means of a voucher exchangeable at a nearby hotel or restaurant. The existing lounge cars need to be better stocked so that they do not run out of items so early. Provision must be made for the Land's End – John O'Groats cycle business.

We have a number of ways in which we believe there can be economies made in the operation of the sleeper services. These are:

1. Highland sleepers to split and join at Carstairs

This would enable the class 90 which currently works the Highland sleeper to work the Edinburgh portion of the Lowland sleeper. (If 2 below were adopted, this would be the Glasgow portion if the locomotive was at the London end.) The Fort William portion's seating vehicles would run from and to Edinburgh via Cobbinshaw, attaching and detaching at Carstairs. In addition, it would be possible for the Fort William portion to run via Queen Street Low Level, thus eliminating the need for the Westerton connection. The northbound train would arrive at Fort William earlier, possibly in time for a Mallaig connection. The northbound Inverness portion would wait at Stirling to fit in with the requirement for an Invernet service into Inverness. The southbound Aberdeen portion would call at Falkirk Grahamston in lieu of the Inverness portion which would no longer run that way. (There would be a need to cover the "parliamentary" curves in the Cowlares area by other means.)

2. The trains to run in push-pull mode whilst electrically powered

This would eliminate the need for additional locomotives for ECS workings. Each set already has a seating vehicle in it and this could have a driving cab

added. As there would now be no need to provide for a locomotive each end, both the seating and lounge vehicles could be mark 3s rather than mark 2s, thus replacing the capacity lost by the installation of a driving cab.

3. Eliminate guards

Each train has a lounge attendant and several sleeping car attendants. SCAs already inspect sleeping car passengers' tickets; the only passengers who need the guard for this are in the seating vehicles and one of the SCAs could do this. Travelling Post Offices ran without guards: each was required to convey at least one member of staff who was suitably trained to carry out the duties of a guard in emergencies, which hardly ever arose.

Environmental issues

40. What environmental key performance indicators should we consider for inclusion in the franchise agreement or the High Level Output Specification?

Q40 comments: The Friends of the Far North Line believes that all lines which have an hourly, or better, passenger service should be electrified as well as diversionary routes and connecting chords.

**Friends of the Far North Line,
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