



# DfT 'Future of InterCity West Coast rail franchise' consultation

## Response from Transform Scotland

26 July 2016

### 1. About Transform Scotland

- 1.1. Transform Scotland is the national alliance for sustainable transport, bringing together organisations from the private, public and voluntary sectors. We campaign for a society where everyone can have their travel needs met within the limits of a transport system that is environmentally sustainable, socially inclusive and economically responsible.

### 2. Introduction and General Comments

- 2.1. Transform Scotland welcomes the opportunity to comment on this important strategy document looking forward to the needs and opportunities on the West Coast Main Line (WCML) to the mid-2020s. Our comments are confined to journeys between Scotland and England and within Scotland. We have not sought to address the questions posed in an individual manner, but have responded under the headings set out below and trust that this clearly sets out our view on the issues upon which the DfT is consulting.
- 2.2. We initially offered comments on the West Coast refranchising on April 2011. Referring back to those earlier comments, much of what we asked for at the time remains to be delivered. However, it is pleasing to note that some aspects have already been delivered by the current franchise holder, Virgin Trains. In particular electric traction with tilt has been introduced on the Edinburgh and Glasgow to Birmingham routes. These trains have been extended to London, thereby directly serving many more destinations from Scotland, which has resulted in significant passenger growth on these routes. We also sought direct trains from Scotland to Liverpool; these are to be delivered, albeit by the TransPennine Express (TPE) franchise.
- 2.3. Looking ahead, it remains the case that this key rail route offers tremendous potential for modal shift to rail from both plane and car. It is a telling fact that people in the UK fly more per head of population than anywhere else in the world – including the US. This is dramatically borne out by the Glasgow to London route where still only around 25% of journeys are by rail. Even on the much shorter Scotland-Birmingham route, significant numbers of people are currently flying; additionally, the train also competes with the car on this route.
- 2.4. Given the urgency to cut our carbon emissions, reduce our dependency on oil, and to regenerate our towns and cities, the need to invest in rail has never been more apparent. Rail offers many advantages over other modes both directly to passengers and to society as a whole. For the business community, rail journeys provide productive travel time compared to flying. Compared to the car, rail offers passengers a more relaxed and substantially safer form of transport. The renewal of this franchise provides the opportunity to significantly upgrade journeys on the route as well as to serve new destinations both, directly and through improved connections.
- 2.5. Additionally, it is essential that during the timeframe of this franchise that the route is prepared for the introduction of classic-compatible services continuing north from phase one of HS2.

### 3. The Glasgow to London Route

- 3.1. For rail to compete with air, significant journey time improvements are needed on this route. The Pendolino trains currently running on the route are capable of 140mph but the required infrastructure improvements to allow this to happen have not been made. The duration of the franchise offers the opportunity to develop the route to both increase line speeds and line capacity. The franchise operator will need to work with

Network Rail to implement this change. It is essential that this work is carried out during the period of this franchise.

- 3.2. Service frequency also needs to be reviewed. The East Coast route to London now enjoys 25 trains per day, while the West Coast route has only 15 direct services. Additional services will allow stopping patterns to be adjusted to speed up journey times from Scotland to London by calling only at Carlisle and Preston – as was the case at the time of full electrification of the route in 1974. Additional services can then serve other key stations on the route to create a wide range of journey opportunities.

#### **4. The Edinburgh and Glasgow to Birmingham Route and Beyond**

- 4.1. As mentioned in the introduction, we welcome the introduction of electric trains on the Birmingham route and the extension of these trains to London thereby offering new direct journey opportunities. However, the journey time of around 4 hours is little faster than that to London. Since the remodelling of this route, significant passenger growth has resulted; we believe that the time is now right to increase frequency from both Edinburgh and Glasgow to hourly. As with the direct services to London, additional services will allow journey time improvements to be made while retaining a range of journey opportunities along the route.
- 4.2. We also note that a market has developed for travel from Edinburgh and Glasgow to London via Birmingham. In our view many passengers booking via this route do not understand the extended journey time involved compared to one of the direct routes. Whilst this may generate some short term revenue gains it will also feed into the perception of rail being slow compared to the alternatives and so is likely to be counter-productive to the overall rail offering. We believe that this route should be promoted as one offering destinations to Birmingham and beyond, but not as a direct Edinburgh/Glasgow to London route.

#### **5. Developing the Scottish Market**

- 5.1. Currently all WCML trains serving Scotland start or terminate at Glasgow Central or Edinburgh Waverley. To fully exploit the market for rail it will be necessary to serve additional stations in Scotland. Very few people travelling from Central Scotland (outside of Edinburgh and Glasgow) currently choose rail, preferring instead to fly or drive south. Serious consideration should be given to starting some WCML services from Stirling, making use of the current electrification programme in Scotland. The use of bi-mode trains would allow further penetration into Scotland with services starting/finishing at Perth, Dundee or Aberdeen.
- 5.2. These trains and additional ones from Glasgow could also serve Motherwell, a station currently very poorly served despite having a catchment area of some 650,000 population and good local road and rail links. To fully develop the large potential at Motherwell the station facilities will also require significant enhancement. A partnership approach with other operators, Network Rail and Transport Scotland may be the most effective way to deliver this enhancement.
- 5.3. In the south of Scotland, Lockerbie offers potential as a hub station serving the surrounding area and the TPE franchise has demonstrated that a better service will generate real passenger growth. Improved WCML services both south and north will facilitate further passenger growth at Lockerbie.

#### **6. Connectivity and New Destinations**

- 6.1. We note that Liverpool is now to be served directly from Scotland by the TPE franchise. Whilst this is welcome it still leaves many areas without direct connections from Scotland, as post-Beeching cuts, privatisation and subsequent re-mapping removed many direct services. Where they have been retained – such as those to Bristol and the West Country via Cross Country services – journey times have been extended and they are simply not competitive with the alternatives.
- 6.2. We believe that there is a real market for new services and improved connectivity to places such as Cardiff, Bristol and the Thames Valley. The creation of the ‘Northern Powerhouse’ helps to demonstrate a shift away from London, and that while London will remain a key destination, a growing market will emerge for other

destinations. Many of these may well be served by connections with other operators' services. We would wish to see the new franchise operator bring forward clear and simple plans for working with other operators to provide high quality interchanges and attractive through fares to places currently not well served from Scotland.

- 6.3. Imagination and lateral thinking is required here to build a market for rail through new direct services and co-operation with other operators.

## **7. Fares Policy and Timetable Information**

- 7.1. Current fares policy is confusing, both to regular travellers and infrequent train users. Headline walk-on fares attract media attention and are a soft target for the airlines to claim how much cheaper it is to fly. For the rail industry, this is a classic own goal which damages the image of rail as a viable alternative to flying or driving. To add insult to injury those paying top price walk-on fares are often unable to find a seat on the train, and are left with a poor image of rail which filters by word of mouth to a much larger group of potential passengers.
- 7.2. Clear fare information should be given through all sources and this should show the range of fares on offer, availability of tickets in different price brackets and timescales as to when tickets in different price brackets will be available. The ability to book well ahead is another key factor in helping rail gain more modal share; tickets for long distance journeys should be available between 6 and 12 months ahead.
- 7.3. Technology is constantly advancing and smartcard systems are now becoming the norm. We would expect the new franchise operator to offer the latest in ticketing technology and to seek to work with other public transport operators so that through-tickets to the passenger's destination are available beyond the rail leg of the journey.
- 7.4. With regards to timetable information, there is a need to provide passengers with all options available to them in a clear and easily understandable format. We would expect the new operator to work with TPE on the northern section of the WCML to provide comprehensive timetables and interchange options. To better serve key destinations not on the core route, as discussed in section YY above, we would expect to see the operator clearly show interchange opportunities and through-fare options. This equally applies to onward journeys within Scotland. Information provided through websites needs to be clear, comprehensive and easy to follow.
- 7.5. All operators gain from growing the market for rail and so co-operation within the industry will help rail to better compete with the car and the plane.

## **8. The Trains and On-train Facilities**

- 8.1. To cope with the growing market for rail, new trains will be required for the franchise. Running diesel trains long distances under the wires is not an effective use of infrastructure; we believe that there will be a ready market for the current diesel Voyager trains, and as such these trains should be cascaded on to non-electrified routes. A new generation of bi-mode trains capable of tilt and 140mph running should be sourced. This will allow those destinations not currently electrified to be served as well as new destinations. Such a strategy will be an essential element of growing the market and building the business case for HS2 services to Scotland.
- 8.2. On-train facilities now need to be radically overhauled. Whilst facilities for wheelchair users have improved, facilities for cyclists and those with pushchairs are not adequate for medium- to long-distance journeys. For cyclists we suggest that provision should be made for eight bikes per train.
- 8.3. General luggage space is woefully inadequate for modern day travel which has been transformed even within the lifespan of the Pendolino trains. Current unsuitable facilities for luggage lead to train delays, abuse of seating space, and general passenger dissatisfaction and discomfort.

- 8.4. For passengers themselves, the type of provision offered should take account of the different passenger segments who will be travelling. Whilst current 1st class accommodation appears to satisfy passenger needs, standard class fails to take account of the variation in passenger types and groups. Single travellers and couples generally prefer a different type of accommodation to family groups who in turn are unlikely to want to share accommodation with groups of football fans and stag and hen parties. There are examples on continental trains of better segmentation – in particular providing for families and for groups of business travellers who may wish to hold meetings/discussions while travelling. The accommodation to be provided on the new Caledonian Sleeper coaches gives an indication of how different passenger types might be catered for.
- 8.5. In terms of catering, given that these are long-distance services, we believe that there should be an appropriate mix of at-seat, buffet and trolley service on each train.
- 8.6. Wi-Fi is now the expected norm and we would expect all existing and new trains to be fully equipped with Wi-Fi with a strong and reliable signal.

## **9. Stations, Facilities and their Role in the Community**

- 9.1. Compared to the East Coast Main Line, stations on the WCML have fared badly since privatisation. Stations should be at the heart of the community they serve, with high quality facilities for travellers and others who may be attracted to the station as a destination in its own right. St Pancras provides ample evidence of what can be achieved.
- 9.2. Stations should provide high-quality waiting and catering facilities and clear and accurate details of travel information, including onward connections. Left luggage facilities should be provided at stations – we note in particular that in places where these have been withdrawn it is often the case that adjacent car hire premises offer the facility at a nominal price. In other locations, left luggage lockers are available at nearby bus stations (Edinburgh) but not at the railway station.
- 9.3. Links to stations should aim to provide seamless interchange for those accessing the station, whether it is on foot, by bike, public transport, taxi or car. Whilst we would wish to see sustainable transport modes prioritised we also accept that car parking should be provided in sufficient quantity to attract motorists out of their cars.
- 9.4. All of the above will require the operator to work in partnership with Network Rail, other operators and local authorities. The outcome should be a station in which the local authority displays a sense of ownership and pride and sees it as a key gateway to their town or city.
- 9.5. Above all else, links from stations to town and city centres should be safe and attractive for those on foot – reversing the 1960/70s practise of driving a wedge between the station and the community by separating the two with a major road.

## **10. Infrastructure Improvements and Preparing for HS2**

- 10.1. As already indicated the new franchise holder will need to work with Network Rail during the period of the franchise to create more line capacity and improve journey times. This is essential to grow market share for rail and prepare the way for classic compatible trains running north to Scotland from HS2.
- 10.2. The WCML modernisation did not address issues on the northern section of the line and we are left with glaring examples of locations where the route is more like a 19th century railway than one fit for the 21st century. The single track 15 mph speed restrictions at Carstairs add as much as 5 minutes to journey times from Edinburgh to the south and significantly reduce line capacity. In road terms this would be akin to a motorway suddenly being interrupted by a section of unclassified rural byway – clearly unthinkable – and yet we have allowed this to persist on the railway. Other locations of note are the approaches to Carlisle and those to Glasgow Central, both of which add significantly to journey times. In preparation for classic

compatible trains running north from HS2, work will also need to be undertaken at Edinburgh Waverley and Glasgow Central stations.

- 10.3. The mix of freight and passenger trains running on the WCML is not currently well catered for and so line capacity is severely reduced. For freight more and longer passing loops are required and options must be explored for ways to make better use of diversionary routes such as the Settle-Carlisle Line and the Glasgow and South Western route. For passenger traffic, line speeds need to be increased so that the 140mph maximum speed of the Pendolino trains can be realised and other trains on the route can similarly run at their maximum speed for the majority of their journey.
- 10.4. Infrastructure work will inevitably lead to some disruption to normal traffic on the route. It is therefore essential that diversionary routes are upgraded to enable the railway to continue to function during planned work, and indeed during periods of disruption from extreme weather, which are increasingly likely to occur as we experience the consequences of climate change. We note that the Settle-Carlisle line suffers from a 60mph speed restriction and is currently closed by weather related damage. Similarly, the WCML itself was closed at Lamington during the winter and diversions via Dumfries and Kilmarnock were hampered by sections of single track which led to the cancellation of ScotRail services. Passengers do not like replacement bus services and all evidence suggests a significant loss of patronage to the railway during such periods. All efforts should be made to avoid this practice.

## 11. Summary

- 11.1. We believe that the WCML has huge potential for modal shift from the car and the plane to the train. The West Coast franchise renewal offers an ideal opportunity to develop more and faster services to enable this modal shift and prepare the way for HS2 services. In particular we would wish to see:
  - A sub-four hour journey time from Glasgow to London with more frequent and faster trains to enable rail to capture a much larger proportion of the rail/air market on this route
  - A wider range of destinations both within Scotland and from Scotland to be served by direct trains and through easy and convenient connections
  - The current Voyager diesel trains to be replaced by new electric bi-mode trains capable of 140mph speeds and with tilt
  - On-train facilities to be overhauled to create more space for luggage, bikes and buggies and to better segment different groups of passengers
  - Stations to become hubs for the local community with high quality facilities and seamless onward travel links
  - Clear and simple fare and timetable information to help grow the overall market for rail
  - Infrastructure improvements to improve line speeds and line capacity for freight and passenger trains, and to prepare the route for HS2 classic compatible trains
  - Upgrading of diversionary routes to create a viable alternative during times of planned and unplanned disruption.

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Transform Scotland is the national sustainable transport alliance, campaigning for a more sustainable and socially-just transport system. Our membership includes bus, rail and shipping operators; local authorities; national environment and conservation groups; consultancies; and local transport campaigns. Transform Scotland Limited is a registered Scottish charity (SC041516).

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