

1. About Transform Scotland.

We are Scotland's alliance for sustainable transport. We campaign for walking, cycling and public transport to be the easiest and most affordable options for everyone. We are the only organisation in Scotland making the case for sustainable transport across all modes. Our diverse membership brings together 55 public, private and third sector organisations from across Scotland. Our members include public transport operators, local authorities and sustainable transport voluntary organisations.

2. Introduction.

In our response we offer comments on the railway in Great Britain and its place in society and the economy. We then focus specifically on the railway in Scotland and Cross-Border rail services. We are aware that a different approach is being adopted in Wales under Transport for Wales but make no specific comments on this. Whilst we mainly focus on the passenger railway we have included a section on freight and the ways in which the railway can help to develop the freight market.

3. The Role and Benefits of the Railway.

The British rail network connects major towns and cities across the land as well as connecting rural areas to urban conurbations. It is accessible to all on a turn-up and go basis and so meets the needs of regular travellers and those who only occasionally use a train. Most railway stations are in the heart of the communities that they serve and so can be major contributors to urban regeneration and community cohesion.

Rail is an extremely efficient means of transport – the steel wheel on steel rail interface developing very little friction. Added to this rail is a many times safer means of transport than the car and generates far fewer emissions per passenger than its main rivals – the car and the plane.

The growth in rail travel over the last 20 years clearly demonstrates rail's potential to be a major contributor towards the more sustainable travel patterns that we need to develop to tackle the challenges of climate change, urban regeneration and poor health resulting from local air pollution and inactive lifestyles. What is all the more remarkable is that this sits against a raft of government policies that have collectively created more unsustainable travel patterns and lifestyles. These include:

- A failure to create an integrated public transport network.
- The creation of car dominated out-of-town shopping, leisure and commercial facilities.
- Large scale housing developments ill-suited to be served by public transport.
- The failure to create safe and attractive active travel routes – so common elsewhere in much of Northern Europe.

- The on-going subsidy to road transport which fails by a large measure to meet its wider societal costs.

Current measures of the benefits of developing and expanding the rail network fail to take into account the wider societal and economic gains to be had from a more comprehensive network. Added to that there has been a consistent failure to accurately predict passenger numbers – in Scotland new rail lines and stations have consistently outperformed passenger projections and we are currently seeing that same in England at the new Cambridge South station.

In the rail industry itself there has been a clear lack of any long-term strategic plan to allow rail to grow and develop and therefore play a much bigger role in the transport challenges we face.

The conclusion from the above must be that a major change in the structure and governance of the railway is now required – one that recognises the potential that a well structured and managed industry can contribute to society as a whole.

4. A Railway for Passengers.

It seems self-evident, but requires re-stating: the passenger railway actually exists to carry passengers where they wish to go, at times they wish to travel, in a comfortable and easy to use manner and at prices they find attractive.

So, as is now widely reported all players in the passenger railway, including governments should be focussed on the passenger and ensuring that their journey is as easy and comfortable as possible. That this has not been the case is well illustrated by a series of examples:

- New trains built with cramped and uncomfortable seating.
- A pricing structure that allows the media to run stories of exorbitant rail fares so deterring many passengers who opt for the competitive modes of the car and the plane.
- Seriously overcrowded trains clearly not fit for the routes upon which they are being used.
- A failure to properly manage the interface at stations between passengers and trains leaving passengers confused as to where the train will stop and where to board the train, even which platform it will leave from – all resulting in delayed departures and a poor passenger experience.

Whilst some of these examples are the result of a failure within the railway industry to properly consider passenger needs others are a direct consequence of the current structure and governance of the railway.

5. Problems with the Current Structure and Governance of the Railway.

The current problems with late delivery of new trains and infrastructure projects serve to highlight the consequences of a 'stop-start' approach. This is the clear result of short-term and inflexible franchises and muddled and contradictory government policy. There is an absence of any consistent long-term plan for the railway, its development and associated rolling stock needs.

This short-termism also impacts on industrial relations within the industry as frequent changes of ownership and management are not conducive to creating a sense of pride and ownership amongst staff.

What is clearly absent is a guiding mind – a 'Fat Controller' – to develop and set long-term plans for the growth and development of the railway. The railway could and should play a much bigger role in the transport needs of the country as a whole and this includes much greater integration with other modes.

6. A New Structure Which Creates Joined-up Thinking and Long-Term Planning.

It is now clear that it was ill-judged to scrap the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA). Ministers & politicians cannot escape responsibility for scrutiny of railways but should not be setting short-term strategy, which of itself is then subject to frequent change. Equally the civil service, in particular at the DfT, is not equipped to plan and coordinate the running and long-term plans for the railway. Overall the industry is too fragmented with too many players.

A new body independent of government and staffed by railway professionals with a thorough understanding of the railway and its place in the wider transport network is clearly required. A 30-year long-term plan for the railway should be developed. This must set a template for the development and enhancement of the network, linking rolling stock needs to further electrification and passenger growth. The design of rolling stock should be in the hands of the operators to maximise passenger comfort and convenience.

City Regions have a key role to play in planning transport needs going forward and in integrating all modes within their areas. This will require a high degree of devolution from the centre and there are models which exist in other European countries and around the world where this works extremely well. It leads to truly integrated transport networks, easy to use and understand with simple and comprehensive ticketing arrangements.

Society and population centres have changed dramatically since the Beeching era closures of railway lines. There are now many cases where the re-introduction of a railway service would contribute to local transport needs and help to create a more sustainable transport system. There are numerous such schemes in the pipeline all plagued by endless consultants' reports and complex appraisals, all costing large sums of money and yet showing very little progress. A long-term plan and strategic approach should set in train a series of additions to the network planned and co-ordinated by the industry. It should not be left to local groups to identify them and then have to indulge in constant and largely fruitless lobbying.

As part of this process there is a clear need for the railway to design infrastructure appropriate for the particular local circumstance and cease the practice of 'gold plating' and 'one size fits all' schemes. A 5 mile branch line with a line speed of 50mph does not need to be designed to the same standard as a 125mph main line railway. Another area where costs to the railway are inflated is at the intersection with the road network – namely at level crossings. There is valid concern at the danger posed here but there is a failure to take on board that this is almost always the result of illegal manoeuvres by road users. Funding for improvements should come from the highway authorities and not from the railway budget. It is a cost that should be borne by road users not the railway.

Finally, we turn to franchising. It is now widely acknowledged that the current system cannot continue. Franchises have been granted for which the infrastructure cannot cope and are in themselves of too short a duration to deliver sustainable benefits. The current glut of orders for new trains is symptomatic of a 'boom and bust' scenario in the train building industry. This is leading to serious delays in the introduction of new trains. A long-term infrastructure and train plan should aim to smooth out the building and introduction of new trains with the aim being a continuous flow of orders.

Leaving aside the politics of who should operate the train services, what is fundamentally clear is that the operation should be in the hands of experienced railway professionals. They must work closely with the infrastructure provider as part of a long-term plan to grow and develop the railway to satisfy passenger needs. However, within this structure there must be scope to innovate as circumstances change and develop.

What franchising has very clearly delivered over the years since privatisation is to guarantee railway services so that people can plan their lives around a service that they trust is here to stay. This is in marked contrast to the period of the Beeching era closures and what we now witness in the bus industry – especially in rural areas. This security of service must not be lost.

If a form of franchising is to continue then they must be for much longer periods with a close relationship with Network Rail and fit seamlessly within a long-term plan for the growth and development of the railway. An alternative would be for long-term concessions.

7. Ticket Prices.

Aside from structure, the other major issue to be tackled is ticketing. As already referenced, excessive prices for walk-on fares provide constant fodder to the media and adverse press for the railway. What is lost via this in terms of potential passengers surely far outweighs whatever short-term gains might be had from those paying these prices. Indeed, we have the bizarre situation where those paying most often cannot find a seat because the train is filled with those with cut-price advance purchase tickets.

Split tickets on certain routes can produce dramatic savings and online booking systems often fail to show the whole range of travel options available and ticket prices. This is a failure at both government and industry level and must be addressed.

Devolution to City Regions should allow for them to create their own fare structures as part of their developing integrated networks.

For inter-city, inter-regional and rural routes, fares should be smoothed-out to remove the current vast ranges for the same journey. They should be set at a level that encourages passengers to the railway and away from car and air travel. Pricing for single legs of journeys will allow passengers to travel more easily at a time of their choosing and in the type of accommodation they choose for each leg. Where there is rail-on-rail competition, operators should be free to attract passengers through a variety of pricing, on-board accommodation and journey times – provided this sits within a restructured overall framework.

8. The Railway In Scotland.

Scotland is often held up as a model of success where co-ordination, long term planning and development of the rail network is in marked contrast to that seen south of the border. Transport Scotland has worked more closely with those in the industry, has adopted a more flexible approach to franchises thereby ensuring additional rolling stock and services are introduced during the period of the franchise, and has continued with a successful electrification programme. It is generally acknowledged to be staffed by individuals who know and understand the railway. That said, we believe that there is room for improvement in both the powers held in Scotland and the degree of independence from Government.

As earlier stated, a 30 year long-term plan should be created for the railway which acts as a template for the development and enhancement of the network linking rolling stock needs to further electrification and passenger growth. The railway can and should play a greater role in the sustainable transport needs of Scotland and should be truly integrated with other transport modes. Politicians should clearly set out long-term aims for a transport system which serves all and recognises the challenges of climate change, poor air quality, and the need to create a more sustainable society. However, it is important that this is then free from short-term political interference. This has not always been the case in the past when Ministers de-prioritised planned enhancements to the rail network, instead pumping large sums of money into expanding the road network - which in itself was contrary to the guidance in their own National Planning Framework.

The current Alliance between the franchise operator Abellio and Network Rail is leading to a more co-ordinated approach, and the policy of further devolution within Network Rail is to be welcomed. However, further operational powers should be transferred to Scotland – specifically those for infrastructure projects and timetable setting. Beyond that the transfer of further constitutional powers to the Scottish Government will allow for more freedom on funding the railway, its operation and the future needs of infrastructure and rolling stock.

Many of the comments stated earlier, in particular those under **'The Role and Benefits of the Railway'**, **'A Railway for Passengers'** and **'Ticket Prices'** apply equally to Scotland as do those on further devolution to City Regions. The recent publication of the Glasgow Connectivity Commission report clearly sets out the need for a City Region transport network for the city. In Edinburgh, plans have been approved for an extension to the tram network and further options are being considered. In our view both cities should be developing fully integrated City Region transport networks. This will require close co-operation between Transport Scotland and the new City Region transport authorities to ensure that heavy rail plays its full part in the City Region networks.

9. Cross-Border Rail Services.

Anglo-Scottish rail services provide vital connectivity between Scotland and England and extensions beyond the Central Belt enhance that sense of connectivity. It is important that in the devolution of further powers to Scotland these cross-border services are protected and integration with the ScotRail network continues to be a key aspect of these services.

There has been a history of withdrawal of rail long-distance services either because they didn't easily fit within a franchise model or were simply seen as too difficult to operate. A number of these have been recreated – mainly by Open Access operators. Further devolution of rail powers must not lead to a repeat, indeed by adopting a long-term strategic planning horizon, opportunities should be developed to enhance connectivity through growing the long-distance services.

10. Freight Services.

The current review of the industry, while focussed on the passenger railway, should also take into account of the future needs of freight and plans to enhance the network must bear this in mind. To develop and grow the freight industry, a long-term plan to create more capacity on the network is required. As for the passenger industry, a 30-year planning horizon should be the aim and government planning policies should be targeted at getting ever more freight onto rail.

Easy wins will flow from the creation of longer and equal length loops and electrification plans should consider the needs of freight to allow a transition to electric haulage for most freight movements. As traffic movements in our cities are transformed, there is a need to plan for city centre deliveries of rail freight – integrated with 'last mile delivery' by electrically-powered road vehicles.

By adopting a strategic and long-term plan for growth, the industry needs to move to a 'can do' attitude for developing the rail freight industry.

Conclusions.

1. The growth in rail travel over the last 20 years clearly illustrates the attractiveness and relevance of the railway in the 21st century. In the future, an expanded rail network can make a major contribution to a more sustainable transport system.
2. There is now a clear need for a major change in the structure and governance of the railway. A new co-ordinated approach is needed along with a 30-year plan for growth and expansion.
3. All players should ensure that the passenger railway is structured and operated to carry passengers where they wish to go, at times they wish to travel, in a comfortable and easy to use manner and at prices they find attractive.
4. The current franchising model is now not fit for purpose. It should be replaced by an operational model closely tied to the long-term plan for the railway with rolling stock and infrastructure enhancements planned as part of a rolling programme of improvements.
5. City Regions should be created to plan and implement transport systems where all modes are integrated to create a system that is easy to use with simple and comprehensive ticketing arrangements.
6. Ticket pricing should be fully overhauled to eliminate the current gulf in prices for the same journey and the need for split tickets. Single journey tickets will allow passengers greater freedom of choice.
7. The current model in Scotland is widely recognised as being much more effective than that south of the Border. However, further devolved powers are required and the creation of a long term plan for growth and expansion – free from short term ministerial interference.
8. Cross-Border rail services are vitally important to connectivity and should be protected and enhanced.
9. For freight services, there is a need for a long-term plan for growth and for government planning policies to be targeted at getting ever more freight on to rail.



Scotland's alliance for sustainable transport

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We campaign for walking, cycling and public transport to be the easiest and most affordable options for everyone. Our diverse membership brings together public, private and third sector organisations from across Scotland. We are a registered Scottish charity (SC041516).