

CROSS COUNTRY PASSENGER FRANCHISE RAIL CONSULTATION

Response from Transform Scotland to UK DfT

30 August 2018

1. Introduction.

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. Our diverse membership brings together public, private and third sector organisations from across Scotland. We are a registered charity, politically independent and strictly science-based. We are a registered Scottish charity (SC041516).

2. Summary of key points.

The Cross Country routes provide valuable connections across the rail network. As noted in the consultation document, the franchise serves seven of Britain's ten biggest cities and many university towns. These routes have great potential for further development as they compete with both the car and the plane.

The current franchise suffers from a 'one size fits all' approach. This lack of focus combined with serious overcrowding and poor on-board facilities makes it an unattractive option to many potential passengers.

The future focus should be on long-distance inter-regional travel. To capture market share from other modes on these routes, longer trains are required with appropriate seating and on-board facilities for inter-city and longer distance travel.

The current routes and service patterns are now in need of review to deliver on the above future focus, speed up services, and take account of new services to be provided by other operators.

Current services are very poorly marketed in Scotland; a revised and improved offering can exploit a large untapped market.

3. Priority for the new franchise 1: Focus on long-distance routes.

The primary focus of the franchise should be long-distance travel providing vital links between cities and regions and comfortable long-distance travel for those who prefer rail to the car and the plane. Indeed, a specific objective of the franchise, in line with wider government transport policies, should be modal shift to rail. We believe that there is a large untapped market given the right trains and on-board facilities. Even with the current offering, we believe that the quoted passenger figures underestimate the true loadings as the many short journeys and resultant overcrowding mean it is not possible to check many tickets en route.

4. Priority for the new franchise 2: Review routes and destinations.

The routes from Scotland are now in need of a recast. With Transpennine Express soon to provide direct journeys from Edinburgh to the north of England via the ECML, Cross Country trains from Scotland should be routed via Doncaster to reduce journey times. The option should also be considered to route some trains from Glasgow via Carlisle and the Settle-Carlisle line to Leeds. This would reduce the route mileage by 72 miles and make use of under-utilised capacity on this route whilst freeing up capacity on the ECML. The Settle-Carlisle line was built as a main line route and with appropriate route upgrades can again provide a high-speed route from Scotland to the North of England.

Consideration should also be given to routing more Cross Country services from Scotland to Oxford, Reading and the south coast of England. This would both reduce pressure on overcrowded London rail lines and tap into key markets either directly or with a convenient change of trains. Not least as a consequence of the ageing population, we believe that there is a real market for long-distance rail travel without the need to change trains (as long as the appropriate on-board accommodation is provided). Currently this market remains largely untapped.

One of the new routes that should be considered is through-trains from Edinburgh to Cardiff – thereby linking the capital cities of Scotland and Wales. The extension of Virgin Trains services from Scotland to Birmingham and onwards to London has proved popular – providing new direct connections between stations along the route. Similarly routing some trains to Wales would open up new journey opportunities.

The focus of the new and revised routes should be to tap into the inter-regional and long-distance markets and avoid short distance commuter traffic which should be transferred to other operators. This will help to improve journey times and enhance the on-board experience. In Scotland commuter journeys should be served by enhanced Scotrail services with Cross Country focussed on journeys to the south from the Central Belt and the Aberdeen corridor.

5. Priority for the new franchise 3: Put in place suitable rolling stock.

The current trains are wholly inadequate for the markets to which the franchise should be tailored. On-board accommodation and service compares badly with that on both the East and West Coast inter-city routes to London. Longer trains are required, with more comfortable and spacious seating, better segregation of different passenger groups, and much improved storage facilities for luggage and bikes. On-train catering in 1st and 2nd class needs to be radically improved and should be provided for the whole journey and not curtailed for substantial parts of the route as currently happens in Scotland. New trains are required and bi-mode should be provided where substantial parts of the route are 'under the wires'.

The current trains, suitably refurbished, should be cascaded to routes to which they are more suited and where there is lower passenger demand.

6. Priority for the new franchise 4: Revise and enhance marketing.

Marketing of Cross Country services in Scotland compares very poorly to those on the ECML and WCML to London. As a result, many potential passengers are not aware of the journey opportunities in the current network. A revised, and considerably enhanced, marketing offer would, in our view, allow a large potential market to be tapped.

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**Scotland's alliance for
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