



Consultation on Rail Priorities

Response from the Highland Rail Partnership

The Highland Rail Partnership is a not for profit company funded by:

Argyll and Bute Council, English Welsh and Scottish Railway, Forest Enterprise Scotland, Freightliner, Friends of the Far North Line, Friends of the Kyle Line, Friends of the West Highland Line, Great North Eastern Railway, Highland Council, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, HITRANS, Keith & Dufftown Railway, Moray Council, Perth and Kinross Council, First ScotRail, Strathspey Railway Company

The aim of the Partnership is to develop the passenger and freight railway. Our recent achievements include:

- Tain Commuter
- Beaully Station
- Extra West Highland trains
- Wick/Kyle Sunday services
- Arrochar Commuter
- Invernet
- Lineside loading of timber
- Return of road salt to rail

The HRP area is defined Helensburgh and Gleneagles north, Keith west. The organisation is based at Lairg Station in Sutherland.

HRP is currently a co-sponsor of the Highlands and Islands Room for Growth capacity study and the H&I Rail Demand Study.

Background

“The findings from this consultation will be used to guide the strategic priorities for rail within the National Transport Strategy which is being developed over the coming months. A draft of that strategy will be published towards the end of the year. We expect these findings to help guide Network rail in prioritising their own work on the Route Utilisation Strategy for Scotland, which they are developing over the next 6 to 9 months. In parallel, ARUP will be completing Part 2 of the Scottish Planning Assessment in November, providing updates of the likely demand for rail over the next 20 years and pointing to issues that will need to be addressed if the network is to meet this demand. Together these pieces of work will allow the Executive to finalise the strategic framework for the rail network, express this in terms of outputs that Network Rail should deliver in the future, and that the Office of Rail Regulation can cost.”

Response

Question 1

a) *Following the delivery of the current major projects, should we change the focus of investment in the railways to concentrate on securing the benefits from the existing network, or are there further new benefits that rail could achieve?*

a) After the major projects delivery we agree that efforts should be directed towards enhancing the existing network. There are few major gaps across our area with perhaps the exception of a direct line from Perth to Edinburgh. However there are opportunities for minor infrastructure improvements which would allow additional capacity through journey time reductions and increased traincrew and rolling stock availability. See 4a).

b) *Would you like to see current rail resources used in different ways? Please be specific.*

b) It would be useful if some element of funding for minor infrastructure works could be devolved to the Regional Transport Partnerships. This would allow local prioritisation with benefits being considered in their widest context.

Question 2

a) *Are there measures that could be taken to attract new customers to rail, and to encourage more people to use the train instead of the car?*

Rail services can increase ridership by employing the following measures:

- 1. Journey time reduction**
- 2. Frequency**
- 3. Rolling stock quality**
- 4. Yield management of fares**

1. Journey times have not decreased significantly in recent years. In some cases they have increased due to the performance regime and additional safety measures.

2. Many trips are daunting because of the poor frequency of service. The current rural route provision of c. 3 trains per day is no longer acceptable.

3. 156/158 stock is not always suitable for journeys of up to 5 hours on the rural routes. 170s represent a step change in quality which people have come to expect.

4. Fares can represent an artificial barrier to increased ridership, though often it may be the perception rather than the reality of high fares. With improving mobile communications real-time last minute discounting becomes a useful tool in uplifting revenue.

a) Is reliability and punctuality of services still the top priority for passengers? If not, what do you consider is the top priority?

Reliability and punctuality are still key. In order to combat the convenience of the private car the railway must offer consistent service. It is extremely important on routes that are predominantly single track that rolling stock and infrastructure performance do not deteriorate as the knock-on effects are magnified. On routes with low frequency a cancellation or failure can mean an entire day wasted as connections can no longer be made.

c) What is the top priority for freight customers? Are reliability of access to the network and the timeliness of services also the top priority for freight customers?

Security of access to the network is key, with certain routes in our area already out of bounds to modern locomotives. The entry costs for railfreight are already high. Reliability is one of the few commercial advantages that rail has over road. Rail freight can deliver in very tight windows, as the Mossend-Inverness Safeway service proved.

a) For cross border passenger services, should the priority be a quick journey to the final destination (eg London, Birmingham and Manchester) or the ability to stop at intermediate stations?

Quick journey times to the major centres are a priority in order to compete with air services. However, the market to cities off the air network is worth developing.

e) If reliability and punctuality of services is the top priority for customers, should we generally only allow changes to the network that provide a net benefit to customers in terms of better reliability and punctuality?

The goal of zero effect on punctuality and reliability must not preclude innovation and experimentation. Now that the Executive funds both services through the franchise and infrastructure outputs, a non-adversarial system could be developed to replace performance penalties.

e) Are there opportunities for a different, and more appropriate, approach to fares setting in particular areas of Scotland or for particular rail routes, or for particular types of passenger?

Rural routes north of Glasgow and Inverness offer discounted travel through the Highland Railcard to local residents. This successful scheme reflects both the infrequency of service and the often shorter equivalent road journey. Flexi fares and ScotRail Apex tickets also offer excellent value for money. There is an opportunity for ScotRail to develop further intra-Scotland products such as network railcards that give discounted or even unlimited travel.

Question 3

a) How should we prioritise services on different routes, where the fixed network is close to capacity and choices have to be made?

Differential services can run on the same route if stopping patterns and perhaps the type of rolling stock is varied, yet still provide meaningful journey opportunities from the secondary stations. The current stopping pattern at Blair Atholl is the antithesis of this.

b) Should the general presumption for Scotland as a whole be to prioritise according to current and anticipated demand for the service i.e. what will give the maximum benefit to the economy?

Services across our area have a significance much greater than their immediate economic benefit would suggest. The rail network in Scotland provides social inclusion including travel for health and education purposes.

b) Do you have specific regional priorities that might differ from this? For example, are there particular routes or services in your region where you believe the predominant role should be to meet social inclusion or environmental objectives, rather than to grow the economy?

The region's rail services have many different roles including:

Business travel to Central Belt

Connections to Hebridean and Northern ferries

Daily/frequent peak hour travel from local station to regional centre for work and education

Travel to access healthcare, particularly by the vulnerable

Tourism into the area

Tourism as part of a car-free day trip

Leisure trips to the regional centre

Leisure trips to Central Belt

Many of the above allow people to remain in a community and yet still access goods and services available to those concentrated in the regional centres.

b) Do you consider that the priorities for specific routes should vary at different times of the day or during different seasons?

No, all our routes must continue to offer services that cover different markets, as passenger numbers start from a low base. However skip stopping with feeders may be of benefit. There is a case for strengthening services in the tourist season, as has happened on the West Highland lines over the past few years, but this

increase should not be balanced by a diminution from existing service levels in the winter months, as this would render routes unviable for meaningful journey opportunities.

b) *Would the increase in passenger kilometres and the volume of freight carried be an appropriate proxy measure for the benefit to the economy, or are there better measures?*

Perhaps that should read passenger numbers and freight tonne-kilometres? Growing passenger kilometres may represent a booming economy; growing passenger numbers may represent modal switch more meaningfully.

a) *How should we compare the benefits from passenger and freight services?*

Perhaps it would be useful if one lorry mile saved could be equated with x car miles saved where there is competition for train paths.

Question 4

a) *Do you have specific changes you would like to see on the railway? Please be clear what the change would achieve in terms of the overall objectives of promoting economic growth, social inclusion, health and protection of our environment.*

The following changes are proposed:

- **Inverness-Perth-Edinburgh Capacity Increase - additional infrastructure to allow hourly frequency, shorter journey time – enabling modal shift, increased business activity, commuting Highland Perthshire-Perth-Edinburgh, tourism access, social inclusion**
- **Inverness-Aberdeen Capacity Increase- additional infrastructure to allow hourly frequency, shorter journey time – enabling modal shift, increased business activity, tourism access, social inclusion**
- **Georgemas chord- journey time reduction bringing Caithness closer to Inverness plus operational benefits**
- **Inverness-Muir of Ord Capacity Increase- allows further development of Invernet to half hourly peak services**
- **Class 66 clearance for all Highland routes – allowing modern locomotive access to ports**
- **New stations at Conon Bridge, Dalcross and Beechwood (Inverness)- enabling access to employment centres**
- **Freight gauge enhancement on key routes – planning for the logistics of tomorrow**
- **Development of intermodal terminals**
- **Additional services: Inverness-Perth-Edinburgh/Glasgow, Oban-Glasgow, Oban-Dalmally, Inverness-Elgin (Invernet II), Inverness-Aberdeen, Inverness-Kingussie, Inverness-Wick**
- **Improved rolling stock suitable for longer journeys**

b) *Are there specific changes in your area that could improve integration of rail services with other forms of transport?*

Oban rail-ferry-bus connections – a sparse frequency prevails because trains and buses compete at the same departure times

Fort William transport centre (bus, ferry, rail, heritage rail) – the creation of a multi-mode ticketing and information centre

Inverness – links to bus through rail information at the bus station

Park and ride at stations

c) *Should any additional future investment in the rail network be focussed on the routes that provide the maximum benefit to the economy, where there is the highest use or potential use by people or freight?*

While it is evident that the more populous areas will attract greater investment it is nevertheless residents of the HITRANS area should be able to:

- **make a meaningful day trip to the capital or regional centre by rail**
- **make a journey from the islands to the capital in a day**
- **arrive in the local/regional centre for an 0900 start where possible**
- **make weekend trips (including Sunday travel) to the cities**
- **return ‘home’ for the weekend from the cities**

These are minimum standards that will allow the railway to retain its strategic importance in the whole country.

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Respondent information

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I am responding on behalf of the organisation. The content may be made publicly available. I am happy to be contacted further by the Scottish Executive.

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