

ASLEF

Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen founded 1880

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Colleagues

ASLEF SUBMISSION DEVELOPMENTS ON SCOTLAND'S RAILWAY

Introduction

Scotlands' railways represent a vital part of national infrastructure. An efficient railway system that is attractive, accessible and affordable for the Scottish people is vital if Scotland is to grow its economy, tackle inequality and meet its climate targets.

In the absence of a Scottish Government published vision for Scotland's railways, ASLEF alongside the other rail unions presented the report 'A Vision for Scotland's Railways' prior to ScotRail returning to public ownership.

In that report we outlined how Scotland's railways can be improved to make them the world class service that Scotland needs. Up until now the Scottish Government has not set out in any comprehensive or detailed way their vision for Scotland's rail services, nor have they officially responded to the vision set out by the four rail unions. To this day our report remains the only comprehensive and properly thought out vision for the future of rail services in Scotland.

Sleeper/ScotRail public ownership

We campaigned for both ScotRail and the Caledonian Sleeper to be taken back into public ownership and are obviously extremely pleased that both are now back under public ownership after the failed franchises of Abellio and Serco.

We believe that these two services should be combined and come under the same ownership model as part of the same entity. It makes no sense financially or operationally for them to be run separately. The fragmentation of our railways as a result of the failed privatisation of our railways has been an unmitigated disaster.

The Government should commit to ScotRail and the Caledonian Sleeper being placed permanently in public ownership bringing the 2 train operating companies together. There would also be instant savings with only board required, given the level of Executive pay in place this would provide significant annual savings.

Currently, many of the operational functions of both are subcontracted to private firms. This has resulted in Abellio and Serco remaining involved and still profiting from Scotland's railways in spite of their failures. Other private companies are also benefiting from the contracting out of operational functions.

The continuing involvement of Abellio and Serco in Scotland's railways after their previous failure must be ended. The operational capability of both ScotRail and the Caledonian Sleeper should be enhanced and the profiteers removed from Scotland's rail services and all operational services and functions brought back in-house. If we are serious about building a financially sustainable rail service in Scotland then we must ensure that all investment is going into our rail services and not paid out in dividends to private shareholders.

Climate Targets/Social Policy

Attracting people (and freight) onto trains is a fundamental requirement for Scotland to meet its climate targets. Transport is the greatest driver of CO2 emissions and road travel is the biggest contributor to these emissions. It is critical that the Government does all that it can to make trains as attractive and accessible as possible. This must mean greater investment in rail services, for instance in staff, stations, trains and lines.

Scotland must continue to invest and make trains attractive to all our citizens by making them as safe as possible, accessible and affordable. We have to do more,

to help shift people from road travel to rail and ensure that Scotland delivers on its climate targets.

Investing in rail services and infrastructure also helps grow the economy. Evidence from a Railway Industry Association report published in 2021, showed how for every £1 spent on rail travel £2.50 is generated for the wider economy. Trains move goods, transport people for work and leisure, boost economic activity across Scotland's towns and cities and create and sustain jobs.

Rail services also help advance social policy goals. Reducing the cost of fares will contribute to addressing economic inequality as a result of people having more disposable income. Rail services also connect people and therefore help tackle the social isolation that is a real and growing concern in our communities. If we make our stations safer and more accessible we will also encourage more women (especially at night) and elderly and disabled people to travel by trains. This can only be achieved with more, not less, staff and giving confidence to the travelling public through having a more and increasing visible staff presence at stations and on trains.

Affordable Fares/Peak Fares

Attracting people on to trains requires rail travel to be much more affordable. Fares for too long have been too expensive. In the 'Vision for Scotland's Railways' we argued that peak fares are an additional tax on workers and should be permanently abolished. We were delighted when the Scottish Government listened to our calls and introduced the scrapping of peak fares as a pilot scheme. It was a signal that the Scottish Government appeared to agree with ASLEF, and the other rail unions, that making fares affordable is a fundamental prerequisite to encourage people onto trains.

However, we have very real concerns that the Government is not committed to making the abolition of peak fares permanent. Should the Scottish Government reintroduce peak fares it would be a retrograde step that would send exactly the wrong message at the wrong time.

The Government is obviously right to acknowledge that Scotland has to play its part in tackling climate change. The Scottish Government also has a duty to help grow the economy and protect the citizens of this country when it is able to. Scrapping peak fares is a clear step in the right direction on both those fronts.

Indeed, we believe that the Scottish Government must go further. We believe that Scotland needs a ticket pricing system that is integrated and linked with other forms of transport, and one that incentivises people to use trains and reduce road travel. This is entirely consistent with Scottish Government policy that wants to achieve a 20% reduction in car kilometres by 2030.

Ticket prices must be reduced to a level that is on par with the cost of travelling by car and the charging system made more transparent. We also believe that fares should be made free for under 24's and over 60's just as they are with bus travel.

In making fares affordable in the ways mentioned above it will help people get into the habit of travelling by train and travelling less by car. It is an obvious approach to take and would be worth every penny of public money spent.

Rolling Stock/HS2

ASLEF is clear that the HST fleet of trains must be replaced as soon as is practically possible. The decision to lease old, heavy polluting diesel engines was in our view a backward step. During the research for 'A Vision for Scotland's Railways' our drivers described the HST's as 'notoriously unreliable', an 'unmitigated disaster' and that using them is 'tantamount to environmental vandalism'.

ASLEF has previously and repeatedly made clear our view that HST trains are not fit for purpose and need to be taken out of service. In our view the HST's are not crashworthy and do not meet modern safety standards. Their fibreglass cabs with wooden frames bolted on were built in the 70's and are not fit for purpose for speeds of up to 125 mph. As such our members who drive these trains have little or no confidence in them.

ScotRail's dependence on privatised rolling stock companies for the leasing of their trains is a wider concern that should be recognised and ultimately changed. Rolling stock companies receive significant public funds. As a virtual monopoly they are engaged in excessive profiteering and make huge profits from Train Operating Companies like ScotRail. The Scottish Government should look at ending the stranglehold of rolling stock companies, which sees huge amounts of money flowing out of the industry. Publicly owned rolling stock would leave more finance available to be reinvested into rail services.

Anti-social behaviour on trains

Anti-social behaviour is a growing concern that must be tackled. Staff assaults and assaults on passengers come against a context of cuts to British Transport Police budgets over recent years, more lone working on trains and unstaffed stations.

Already this year we know that the number of assaults on railway workers (including those that see staff lose time and those where they don't) already exceed thresholds. Moreover, we also know that 'passenger on passenger assaults' are stubbornly high as is general anti-social behaviour on trains.

Considering these figures as a whole suggests that Scotland needs more BTP officers, more staff and every train having a safety critical guard on board. This means greater staff and BTP visibility on our trains, which would make them safer and ultimately more attractive for passengers particularly women and disabled people.

Industrial Relations

Industrial relations since ScotRail was taken back into public ownership industrial relations have improved. We are encouraged by the constructive approach now taken by ScotRail management. They have both taken a more positive attitude towards trade unions and appear to value the workforce more, and in a way that was not apparent from either Abellio who took a much more confrontational approach and who clearly did not value the workforce in the same way.

Pay

The best and most accurate measure of how train operating companies value their workforce is through pay. We have negotiated satisfactory deals with ScotRail since being taken back into public ownership. We will be entering new negotiations in April with ScotRail and expect them to take a similar approach, and value the workforce appropriately, this time around too.

Network Rail Cuts

Over the next 5 years Network Rail is planning a cut of £1.2bn to track and infrastructure renewals work. In Scotland this equates to a £315m cut to the budget that was in place for the previous five years.

The renewal work includes, off-track, signalling, level crossings, earthworks, drainage, buildings, electrification and fixed plant, and telecommunications.

If the cuts go ahead, there will be an increased risk to public safety, railway workers and overall efficiency of the service. As the Carmont crash showed we cannot ever take any chances or risk with health and safety and we find it unfathomable that this cut is taking place and will compromise health and safety, as well as making ScotRail more unreliable.

Conclusion

Our railways have made real and significant progress in the past 2 years. Taking ScotRail and the Caledonian Sleeper back into public ownership and demonstrating the benefit of public ownership by introducing a pilot to scrap peak fares are real achievements and should be rightly celebrated.

However, we are very much at the start of the journey and have some way to go before we reach our desired destination that brings the world class rail services that Scotland needs.

If the Scottish Government is serious about this they must commit to making peak fares permanent and similarly ensure and commit to ensuring ScotRail and the sleeper are kept in public ownership for the long term and that they are brought together as one public rail company.

Rail travel is a vital part of our national infrastructure and a critical tool if social and environmental policies are to be successful. Making trains more affordable, well staffed, safe, attractive and accessible is critical if people are to change their travel habits and make the shift from road to rail. This necessitates consistent and long term investment. The Scottish Parliament must remain vigilant to ensure that Scotland is steadfast in its commitment to improving our rail services.

Yours in Solidarity

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District 2