

8 March 2024

## **Background**

The Committee is looking to take stock of developments in Scotland's rail industry over the past year by holding evidence sessions with industry stakeholders and rail operators. The Committee will explore a wide range of issues relating to the rail industry to gain a greater understanding of how ScotRail and the Caledonian Sleeper have organised and delivered rail services since the transfer of operations into public ownership. In doing so, the Committee is seeking to ascertain how these services have changed over recent years and whether they are delivering value for money for users and taxpayers.

## **What matters to passengers?**

We asked over 15,000 rail passengers<sup>1</sup> across Great Britain to tell us what is important to them. The research provides an importance ranking for twenty-five aspects of rail services and also shows how passengers think the railway is performing in each of those areas. This gives a clear view on what matters to passengers and where the railway should target investment and effort to meet passengers' aspirations.

In Scotland the research found passengers' top two priorities for the railway – well ahead of others – are the 'price of train tickets offers value for money' and 'reliability and punctuality'. This reaffirms that what matters most to passengers is a punctual and reliable railway that delivers on the timetable's promise at an acceptable price.

The railway must maintain its focus on this. Passengers' other key priorities also reflect an emphasis on the railway getting the basics right. Passengers want sufficiently frequent trains and accurate and timely information about train times and any delays. They want a seat on board a clean train and, of course, they need to feel safe. These are not the only things that matter, but passengers will judge the railway on how effectively it delivers its 'core product'.

## **ScotRail**

Our Rail User Survey<sup>2</sup> asks a representative sample of 2000 people across Great Britain about their public transport use. Those who used rail in the last seven days are asked about their overall satisfaction with their most recent rail journey and with aspects such as value for money, punctuality and cleanliness.

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<sup>1</sup> Britain's railway: what matters to passengers (December 2022)

<sup>2</sup> Rail user survey – train operator results (February 2024)

The results for the main twenty-two train companies on overall satisfaction and satisfaction with six key aspects of the journey, indicate that ScotRail score relatively highly with other operators on five key aspects:

- overall satisfaction (89%)
- punctuality/reliability (85%)
- level of crowding (82%)
- information during journey (80%)
- value for money (64%)

Scores on frequency of trains on route and cleanliness are relatively average when compared with other operators.

### **Caledonian Sleeper**

In conjunction with Transport Scotland and Caledonian Sleeper, Transport Focus set up a guest satisfaction survey<sup>3</sup> which has been used to set the benchmarks against which customer satisfaction with the service will be measured.

The survey is continuous and reports on the booking process, boarding and station facilities, accommodation and train facilities and the overall experience.

The trend in the overall rating of experience stands at 85% satisfied.

### **Network Rail**

As Network Rail enters Control Period 7 (CP7), we welcome the requirement in the High Level Output Specification<sup>4</sup> (HLOS) requiring that the outputs of the network will be maintained in such a manner as to enable ScotRail to meet a Public Performance Measure (PPM) target of 92.5% for every year of CP7.

We know day-to-day delivery of a reliable service is of paramount importance to passengers. Maintaining the network to improve current levels of performance will drive improvements in passenger satisfaction.

### **Personal Security**

In Britain's railway – what matters to passengers we asked rail passengers what is important to them when travelling by train. Out of a total of twenty-five considerations, 'My personal security on the train' comes in at number six and 'at stations' at number eight. The 'Insides of trains being clean and well maintained' sits in tenth position.

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<sup>3</sup> Caledonian Sleeper quarterly report (January 2024)

<sup>4</sup> Scottish Ministers' High Level Output Specification Control Period 7 (February 2023)

We believe our recent research *What makes for a clean and safe railway*<sup>5</sup>? will help focus attention on the things that really matter when it comes to cleanliness, maintenance and personal security, leading to a better passenger experience and higher levels of satisfaction.

In the research passengers note that CCTV and help points have the potential to make a valuable contribution to personal security. But even if passengers are aware of their existence, they still have concerns as to whether the technology is working and whether anyone is monitoring the systems. The presence of other passengers and, where provided, railway staff, is enormously reassuring. And after large public gatherings such as sporting events or concerts, a police presence is also welcome.

Focusing on hygiene factors can also be of benefit. A clean, well-maintained railway providing a safe journey environment is a basic passenger expectation. The railway should not expect massive thanks for getting these basics right on a day-to-day basis. However, renovating a run-down station, an occasional fresh coat of paint or brightening up the surroundings, perhaps with some plants, murals or pictures of local highlights, may help with overall satisfaction and propensity to travel.

What is clear is that failing to address these factors can contribute to a negative experience and have a detrimental impact on passenger satisfaction and likelihood of choosing to take the train.

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<sup>5</sup> *What make a clean and safe railway?* (December 2023)