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Dame Anne Begg MP
House of Commons
WESTMINSTER
London SW1A 0AA

21 November MMXI

Dear Dame Anne

Possible withdrawal of through rail services Aberdeen/Inverness to London

You will be aware of the Transport Scotland report advocating the withdrawal of cross-Border rail services. I am only too aware that this is a Transport Scotland report rather than a Westminster matter, but withdrawal of these services seriously affects the quality of travel for passengers in both Scotland and England, and is a UK matter. What Transport Scotland advocates is replacement by local trains for the mileages north of Edinburgh.

This wretched issue cropped up last year (my letter to you of 5 August 2010 refers, and a copy is enclosed), and we had all hoped that the battle then won would be the end of the matter. Apparently it isn't.

In support of its case, Transport Scotland raises spurious evidence about cross-Border trains being "underused" by passengers north of Edinburgh. Not in my experience they aren't, and I travel to Edinburgh (My last trip there was Friday 18 November, and my next will be Wednesday 23 November).

I repeat what I said to you in my letter of 5 August last year, that "The suggestion that through rail services operated by East Coast be withdrawn is probably the single most serious item of transport news for north Scotland since Aberdeen-London services began 150 years ago.

"Some kind of measured and robust response to this suggested move has to be organised. I am a regular user of Aberdeen-London cross-border services. Can we, through you, look for a lead here?"

Bland assurances by Transport Scotland that cross-Border passengers might be easily conveyed north on local trains are nonsense, and reflect the patronising tenor of the 1963 Beeching Report. Indeed, this Transport Scotland "son of Beeching" offers

similar empty assurances to those of the 1960s.

It is fact that the number of passengers for Aberdeen or Inverness alighting from an incoming London train at Waverley simply cannot be accommodated aboard a First ScotRail (FSR) train for their onward journeys. It is fact that passengers on cross-board services carry more luggage than those on short-haul services; there is simply no room for existing luggage on busy FSR trains, never mind as continuances for London-Scotland trains. I state these two facts based on my knowledge of FSR trains. The move to cease cross-border direct Aberdeen/Inverness services brings with it all kinds of suggestions, some less practical than others.

It is essential that cross-Border services are left as they are, with existing East Coast (EC) trains. We in Aberdeen/Inverness currently operate on the barest minimum of cross-border service provision. Withdrawal of cross-Border services neither advances any green argument, nor assist in helping to expand the rail share of the growing air market to London.

I hope you can help.

With best wishes

Yours sincerely
Euan Casely

Respondent Information Form and Questions

Please Note this form **must** be returned with your response to ensure that we handle your response appropriately

1. Name/Organisation

Organisation Name

Title Mr MR Ms Mrs Miss Dr *Please tick as appropriate*

Surname

Forename

2. Postal Address

3d Hill Street		
Aberdeen		
Postcode 2XZ	AB25	Phone
		Email gcasely@herald-strategy.co.uk

3. Permissions - I am responding as...

Individual <small>INDIVIDUAL YES</small> <input type="checkbox"/>	/ Group/Organisation <i>Please tick as</i> <input type="checkbox"/>
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(a) Do you agree to your response being made available to the public (in Scottish Government library and/or on the Scottish Government web site)?

Please tick as appropriate yes Yes No

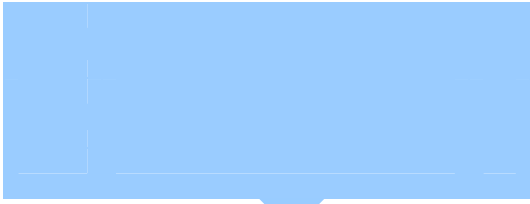
(b) Where confidentiality is not requested, we will make your responses available to the public on the following basis

Please tick ONE of the following boxes

(c) The name and address of your organisation **will be** made available to the public (in the Scottish Government library and/or on the Scottish Government web site).

Are you content for your **response** to be made available?

Please tick as appropriate YES Yes
 No

Yes, make my response, name and address all available	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	
Yes, make my response available, but not my name and address	or <input type="checkbox"/>	
Yes, make my response and name available, but not my address	or <input type="checkbox"/>	

(d) We will share your response internally with other Scottish Government policy teams who may be addressing the issues you discuss. They may wish to contact you again in the future, but we require your permission to do so. Are you content for Scottish Government to contact you again in relation to this consultation exercise?

Please tick as appropriate YES Yes No

Consultation Questions

The answer boxes will expand as you type.

Procuring rail passenger services

1. What are the merits of offering the ScotRail franchise as a dual focus franchise and what services should be covered by the economic rail element, and what by the social rail element?

Q1 comments:

2. What should be the length of the contract for future franchises, and what factors lead you to this view?

Q2 comments:

3. What risk support mechanism should be reflected within the franchise?

Q3 comments:

4. What, if any, profit share mechanism should apply within the franchise?

Q4 comments:

5. Under what terms should third parties be involved in the operation of passenger rail services?

Q5 comments:

6. What is the best way to structure and incentivise the achievement of outcome measures whilst ensuring value for money?

Q6 comments:

7. What level of performance bond and/or parent company guarantees are appropriate?

Q7 comments:

8. What sanctions should be used to ensure the franchisee fulfils its franchise commitments?

Q8 comments:

Achieving reliability, performance and service quality

9. Under the franchise, should we incentivise good performance or only penalise poor performance?

Q9 comments:

10. Should the performance regime be aligned with actual routes or service groups, or should there be one system for the whole of Scotland?

Q10 comments:

11. How can we make the performance regime more aligned with passenger issues?

Q11 comments:

12. What should the balance be between journey times and performance?

Q12 comments:

13. Is a Service Quality Incentive Regime required? And if so should it cover all aspects of stations and service delivery, or just those being managed through the franchise?

Q13 comments:

14. What other mechanisms could be used for assessing train and station quality?

Q14 comments:

Scottish train services

15. Can better use be made of existing train capacity, such as increasing the permitted standing time beyond the limit of 10 minutes or increasing the

capacity limit? What is an acceptable limit for standing times on rail services?

Q15 comments: The business of “acceptable standing time” is both wrong and irrelevant. Scotland’s aim is no standing time at any time, and a seat for all.

16. Should the number of services making use of interchange stations (both rail to rail and rail to other modes) be increased to reduce the number of direct services? What would be the opportunities and challenges of this?

Q16 comments: Direct services are the backbone of a grown-up nation. Why are we even considering a third-rate option of changing trains, such as now prevails Glasgow-Inverness?

17. Should Government direct aspects of service provision such as frequency and journey time, or would these be better determined by the franchisee based on customer demand?

Q17 comments:

18. What level of contract specification should we use for the next ScotRail franchise?

Q18 comments:

19. How should the contract incentivise the franchisee to be innovative in the provision of services?

Q19 comments:

Scottish rail fares

20. What should be the rationale for, and purpose of, our fares policy?

Q20 comments: After more than six years of the First ScotRail franchise, we still don’t have a fares policy. We need to move on from a current situation where – if I’ve patience enough in the ordering system – it’s cheaper for me to buy three lots of tickets Abdn-Perth; Perth-Stirling; and Stirling-Glw than one lot Abdn-Glw.

Our vaunted “Advance” tickets have simply proved to be another name for a catch-all fares net. Understanding of Scotland’s rail fares system still required a degree in advanced maths; buying a rail ticket is not for either the faint-hearted - nor the poor.

21. What fares should be regulated by government and what should be set on a commercial basis? Do your recommendations change by geographic area (the Strathclyde area example), or by type of journey (for example suburban or intercity)?

Q21 comments: See my comments under Q32. In Scotland, there is no difference whatsoever between suburban trains and intercity trains. They're all suburban stock.

22. How should we achieve a balance between the taxpayer subsidy and passenger revenue contributions in funding the Scottish rail network? At what rate should fares be increased, and how feasible would it be to apply higher increases to Sections of the network which have recently been enhanced?

Q22 comments:

23. What should the difference be between peak and off-peak fares? Will this help encourage people to switch to travelling in the off-peak?

Q23 comments: We can't help travelling at peak times. That's dictated by our work. Thus most of us in Scotland are held to ransom by the euphemism of "peak fares".

Scottish stations

24. How should we determine what rail stations are required and where, including whether a station should be closed?

Q24 comments:

25. What are the merits or issues that arise from a third party (such as a local authority or local business) being able to propose, promote and fund a station or service?

Q25 comments:

26. Should only one organisation be responsible for the management and maintenance of stations? If this was the franchisee how should that responsibility be structured in terms of leasing, investment, and issues relating to residual capital value?

Q26 comments:

27. How can local communities be encouraged to support their local station?

Q27 comments:

28. What categories of station should be designated and what facilities should be available at each category of station?

Q28 comments:

Cross-border services

29. Should cross-border services continue to go north of Edinburgh? In operating alongside ScotRail services, how do cross-border services benefit passengers and taxpayers? And who should specify these services, the Department of Transport or the Scottish Ministers?

Q29 comments:

This threat to discontinue Inverness/Aberdeen cross-Border rail services, with replacement by local ScotRail trains for the mileages north of Edinburgh is the same issue which cropped up on August 4 2010 under then Westminster transport secretary Philip Hammond. We won that battle, and we had the temerity to presume that that was the end of the matter

I travel to Aberdeen to Edinburgh by East Coast weekly. What research has been done to ascertain East Coast passenger numbers Abdn-Edinburgh? These trains are ALWAYS busy, and any suggestion that through rail services operated by East Coast be withdrawn is probably the single most serious item of transport news for north Scotland since Aberdeen-London services began 150 years ago.

It is essential that cross-Border services are left as they are, with existing East Coast trains. We in Aberdeen/Inverness currently exist on the barest minimum of cross-border service provision. Withdrawal of cross-Border services neither advances any green argument, nor assists in helping to expand the rail share of the growing air market to London.

30. Or should the cross-border services terminate at Edinburgh Waverley, allowing opportunities for Scottish connections? And if so, what additional benefits would accrue from having an Edinburgh Hub?

Q30 comments:

The numbers of passengers for Aberdeen or Inverness alighting from incoming London train at Edinburgh Waverley simply cannot be accommodated aboard First ScotRail trains for onward journeys. Passengers on cross-Border services carry more luggage than those on short-haul services; there is simply no room for luggage on existing First ScotRail trains, never mind as continuances for London-Scotland trains.

Rolling stock

31. What alternative strategies or mechanisms could be used to reduce the cost of the provision of rolling stock?

Q31 comments:

32. What facilities should be present on a train and to what extent should these facilities vary according to the route served?

Q32 comments:

Current rolling stock used for long-distance services in Scotland is AWFUL, utterly unfit for purpose, and quite the poorest-quality long-distance rolling stock of any nation in Europe.

It says much about this entire consultation document that the lead item on rolling stock is train livery. What about the rolling stock underneath the paint?

Current long-distance trains (Turbostars, 158s and the utterly risible SuperSprinters) are noisy, vibratory, cramped in seating and don't possess enough toilet accommodation. Let's stick with the pride of the ScotRail fleet, the 170 Turbostars (not for nothing referred to by the cognoscenti as "Turдостars"). These 170s have cramped seating, with no legroom. Where is there provision for luggage on long-distance services? Rail passengers tend to carry more luggage than on other forms of transport, and nowhere more than on long-distance journeys. Those travelling 1st on a 170 have nowhere at

all to put cases....for they're not going to risk stowing cases a coach-length away, even assuming there's space in the rack.

Time and again on a long journey, passengers queue for toilets. Two per three-car train isn't enough.

Bike spaces? Some 150 years after inventing trains, we clearly haven't solved such a simple matter yet. Why not?

Turbostars vibrate, are noisy, and on cold days, the opening of carriage doors at stops allows freezing draughts in.

Serious consideration has to be given to push-pull loco-hauled rakes. These allow necessary remarshalling. The Mark 4 carriage is recognised as perhaps the finest passenger vehicle ever, and nothing currently on Scotland's railways (East Coast trains apart) begins to approach the standards needed on long-distance trains.

Q21 refers to "suburban" and "intercity" journeys. Here in Scotland, we suffer suburban stock all journeys no matter their length. When will we as a nation have the railway vision to grow up and operate real trains?

Passengers – information, security and services

33. How should we prioritise investment for mobile phone provision and / or Wi-Fi type high-bandwidth services?

Q33 comments: need to equip all seats with power points. Beyond 1st, there aren't any. As for WiFi, why is it that a Fife bus has WiFi, but a First ScotRail train doesn't?

34. How should we balance the need for additional seating capacity and retain the flexibility of a franchisee to offer first-class services if commercially viable?

Q34 comments: Development rather than "retention" of 1st class is vital if the business market is to be developed

35. What issues and evidence should be considered prior to determining whether or not to ban the consumption of alcohol on trains?

Q35 comments: It should be stressed that we are a poor nation indeed if the actions of a minority impinge upon the simple pleasures of the majority. But the minority do impose themselves upon the majority of us passengers; it's far too common to have a crowd of yobs entering a train with cases of beer, and then making an entire long journey miserable for the rest of us as a result.

First ScotRail trains at the time of the "Take That" concerts in Glw at end June 2011? I travelled Glw-Ayr return, and overcrowding and alcohol made the return journeys the worst ever experienced.

36. How can the provision of travel information for passengers be further improved?

Q36 comments:

Caledonian Sleeper

37. Should we continue to specify sleeper services, or should this be a purely commercial matter for a train operating company?

Q37 comments: Our sleeper systems are important. I use the Abdn-London service some five times a year. But under First ScotRail, standards are continually slipping. There's now no 2nd class breakfast, nor toilet bags. The hot water in carriages doesn't always work. These are simple management issues.

38. Should the Caledonian Sleeper services be contracted for separately from the main ScotRail franchise? Or should it be an option for within the main ScotRail franchise?

Q38 comments:

39. We would be interested in your views in the level and type of service that the Caledonian Sleeper Services should provide. Including:

- What is the appeal of the Caledonian Sleeper Service, and if there were more early and late trains would the appeal of the sleeper services change?
- What is the value of sleeper services to Fort William, Inverness and Aberdeen and are these the correct destinations, for example would Oban provide better connectivity?
- What facilities should the sleeper services provide and would you pay more for better facilities?

Q39 comments:

Point 1 -There is nothing finer than the Abdn-London sleeper in either direction regarding timing. It departs and arrives at civilised times. Cut the train timings (as with Edinburgh/Glw-London sleepers) and the amount of sleep suffers. Don't do it!

GNER unabashedly marketing itself as the UK's finest rail service (1st AND 2nd), but we in Scotland shy away from any option of providing the best. The term "travel experience" is thrown about by First ScotRail, but we need to provide travel which is enjoyable rather than simply to be endured.

Point 2 – "Value of sleeper services?" I can't put a value on these, except that I'm a more regular user than most of the Abdn sleeper – and it's a trip I enjoy. An Oban sleeper? I've no idea of the potential market. Suggest you go out

yourselves and find a market

Point 3 – En suite toilets would be ideal, but may be beyond an economic price. We have to be careful in sleeper pricing, for already it's at the upward end of Scotland-London travel costs.

Environmental issues

40. What environmental key performance indicators should we consider for inclusion in the franchise agreement or the High Level Output Specification?

Q40 comments: