

1. Campaign for Better Transport welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Assembly's inquiry. Established for over 40 years, we are a national charity working in England and Wales to promote more sustainable transport. Through research and campaigning, we advocate policy and public investment decisions that support better bus and rail services and alternatives to major road building. Our comments, below, are organised around the question of priorities for a future franchise specification to ensure rail services meet the needs of current and future travellers throughout the franchise area, and deliver value for money for both passengers and the taxpayer.
2. We support the devolution of this franchise to the Welsh Government. Where local authorities have taken control of franchises, it has led to increased accountability, improved frequencies and reliability; and ultimately better passenger satisfaction. Our 'Going Local' report sets out the experience of rail devolution with MerseyRail and London Overground - http://www.bettertransport.org.uk/sites/default/files/research-files/Going%2520Local%2520web_2.pdf
3. We support stronger passenger involvement in the railway, not only in the development of the Invitation to Tender but on an ongoing basis. To ensure plans for rail are properly integrated into other decision making, we propose more and stronger local involvement in the franchising process, including from passenger group representatives, local authorities, Local Enterprise Partnerships and Sub-National Transport Bodies. We also support passenger representation on the franchise board.
4. The 2013 Brown Review of the Rail Franchising Programme recommended more attention be paid to improving service quality for passengers, with the National Rail Passenger Survey (NRPS) being used in both bid evaluation and subsequent franchise management [see for example paragraph 1.7 https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/49453/cm-8526.pdf].
5. Relevant findings from the NRPS are now included in public facing elements of the re-franchising process, in particular prospectus. This has been a welcome development but is often used as a proxy for all passenger interests, something it is unsatisfactorily positioned to do:
 - Closed process - while it is reasonable to assume the NRPS findings carry some weight, no detail is made public on how any bidders responded specifically to issues raised in the survey

- No visible opportunity cost - similar to the previous point, no information is available on what failed bids offered in relation to issues identified in the NRPS, raising the prospect that beneficial initiatives could have been lost
- Backward looking - the NRPS is a backward-looking comment on past performance; while it helps identify immediate priorities for improvements, it does nothing to shed light on medium term transformative improvements passengers may want to see, and have the right to expect over a 7-10 year franchise.

The Wales and Borders franchise is in a position to consider passenger interests more broadly throughout the franchise.

6. This franchise presents significant opportunities to improve the current fares system, in order to increase passenger satisfaction; attract new users onto the railway; and make the current fares system more social just. These opportunities include:
 - **Introducing part-time season tickets which give part-time commuters a fair discount** Cardiff Buses plan to introduce this in May this year and it is right that rail should do likewise – eventually a multi-modal ticketing scheme could be introduced across train and bus. Part time workers are disproportionately penalised by rail fare structures at present, with season tickets offered only on a 7-day-a-week basis. With more and more people (predominantly women) disadvantaged by the current discriminatory fares structure, the Welsh Government has the opportunity to rectify this.
 - **Concessionary travel extending to 16-18 year olds** Currently, 16-18 year olds must pay an adult fare on peak-time trains (the Young Person's Railcard is not valid on season tickets), despite the fact that 16-18 year olds must now be in full time education or training. Where, as in Cambridgeshire, a discount for 16-18 year old students has been introduced (see <http://www.bettertransport.org.uk/blog/rail/cambridgeshire-50-cent-discount-student-rail-fare-national-standard>) there has been an uplift in passenger numbers; and anecdotally when this was introduced in the MerseyTravel region (see <http://www.merseyrail.org/seasonal/young-person-tickets.aspx>), there was a decline in truancy as young people could afford to get to school and college. As 16-18 is the age where many people decide to learn to drive and to buy a car, there is an important long-term advantage in setting the habit of public transport, which could influence travel habits and therefore environmental impact for years to come.
 - **Cap fare increases** Fare increases should be calculated using CPI rather than RPI. This is fairer and would reduce ticket price rises and increase passenger numbers. Annual fare increases should be capped at 2% (rather than at 5% as is now the case) and off-peak fares should be regulated as well as peak fares.
 - **Simplification** We encourage the Welsh Government to simplify ticketing, for example by ending split ticketing by ensuring that the end-to-end journey is always the cheapest option (as Scotland have done – see <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-scotland-politics-22002256>). The franchise should include a "Passengers' Charter" with a right to be sold the cheapest ticket for any journey on the network

More information on the opportunities for future rail funding and introducing simpler, more flexible fares, albeit on the UK level, can be found here:

<http://www.bettertransport.org.uk/sites/default/files/research-files/future-rail-funding.pdf>

7. We encourage the franchise to mandate better integration between rail and bus, and consideration of the end-to-end journey. This might include co-ordination of routes and timetables; multi-modal ticketing; and making the interchange between rail and bus as easy as possible through signage provision and, where necessary, relocating the bus stop. Arriva's work on bus-rail connections at Rhyl station provides an example of how this can be done effectively. Over time, this could include bringing rail and the Traws Cymru bus network together under one brand, as Cornwall is planning to do (see <https://www.cornwall.gov.uk/community-and-living/communities-and-devolution/devolution/devolution-to-cornwall/devolution-deal-newsletter/devolution-deal-newsletter-edition-one/freedom-to-create-an-integrated-public-transport-system/>). Greater integration is likely to lead to an increase in patronage and thus would make the whole network more financially viable.
8. At present, disabled passengers are poorly served on the Welsh rail network. Many stations lack stepfree access, and Arriva Train Wales 'strongly recommends' that passengers requiring assistance book 24 hours in advance – a recommendation which is incompatible with most people's working lives and social lives. We recommend that the new franchise introduces turn-up-and-go assistance during staffed hours at every station, and across the whole Metro. In addition, we recommend that an independent accessibility forum, comprised of older and disabled pan-impairment passengers, is set up to advise the train operator throughout the life of the franchise. The new franchise should also include a timetable of accessibility improvements including making stations stepfree – an investment which has been proven to have benefits to *all* passengers and to station footfall; and a very strong benefit-cost ratio (see <http://www.steerdaviesgleave.com/news-and-insights/access-for-all-benefit-research-report-released>).
9. There is ample opportunity to use franchising to more strongly incentivise improving the passenger experience. Opportunities include:
 - **Better door-to-door journeys** written into the franchise, e.g. links between stations and the towns they serve, through signage and through integration with other modes of transport, e.g. cycling, walking. At present, the link between Cardiff station and Cardiff bus stops is very poor. Our research report 'Fixing the Link' (<http://www.bettertransport.org.uk/sites/default/files/research-files/13.11.04.fixing-the-link.pdf>) shows that where this has been done, it has encouraged active travel and thus had a positive influence on public health; it has created more attractive places; and it has boosted local business. See also our report on door-to-door journeys: <http://www.bettertransport.org.uk/sites/default/files/research-files/door-to-door-journeys-full-report.pdf>
 - **Better stations:** Improvements such as regular station cleaning; repainting, real time information and good quality waiting facilities are highly valued by passengers; and can be delivered relatively quickly. A franchise commitment to upgrading station quality early in the franchise would be a 'quick win', and demonstrate very visible and tangible passenger benefits from the new franchise
 - **Better quality trains:** We welcome the intention to replace outdated rolling stock on these routes. Priority should be given to comfort and capacity, with standards for maximum passenger numbers on trains and maximum time passengers should expect to stand, as on the London and South East commuter network.

- **Better staffing:** Rail devolution through London Overground and Merseyrail decreased fare evasion and increased passenger's perception of security through mandating station staffing from first to last train. A visible, trained staff presence makes people feel safer and passengers value the availability of assistance and advice. We would like to see staff availability improve at stations through the Wales and Borders franchise.

10. Setting strong franchise commitments is of no use unless there is strong enforcement and regulation of these commitments. Unlike the rest of the UK, the Welsh Government funds people to monitor and report on bus timetable compliance, with the result that there is much better timetable compliance than in England. We would like to see the Welsh Government fund the monitoring of franchise commitments (e.g. how ticket office opening hours; average queuing times at peak and off-peak times; compliance with assistance commitments for disabled passengers; levels of crowding and cleanliness), including through mystery shopping, with real consequences for failure to comply.