



National Policy Forum consultation on giving people the power to shape their local communities

June 2018

1. The Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen (ASLEF) is the UK's largest train driver's union representing approximately 20,000 members in train operating companies and freight companies as well as London Underground and light rail systems.
2. ASLEF is pleased to have this opportunity to respond to the Labour Party's consultation on housing, local government, transport and giving people the power to shape their local communities. The Labour Party policy document on this area makes reference to the current government's failure to devolve power to local people: Local public services have been so severely affected by cuts to local government budgets that they are unable to deliver on urgent priorities such as building affordable social housing, making renting more secure, and tackling the drivers of homelessness, which means that local people don't really have a genuine say over local services.
3. It is ASLEF's view that investment in infrastructure such as housing and transport reaps financial and social dividends, and would help to boost economic growth and productivity. Access to safe and affordable housing is a basic right, and failing to fully address the current housing crisis will have a devastating impact on the economy and workforce. Similarly, much of our railway is operating on the edge of what it can cope with because of capacity constraints, therefore our long term economic prosperity relies on investment in long distance and local services, to accommodate the growth passenger numbers as the local economy grows.
4. Building more affordable houses must be central to Labour policy and the lack of available land in densely populated areas is a real problem, however ASLEF cautions against building on railway

land, which is needed for the expansion of overcrowded rail and wider transport and for building better transport links for commuters. Also the railways are an extremely convenient way of delivering construction materials, removing waste, and reducing congestion: An aggregates train can deliver enough materials to build 30 houses.

5. ASLEF fully supports the idea of local authorities and local groups having more say over how their transport system functions and operates, and supports the principle of greater devolution of rail policy to local authorities, but this must be done in the context of a more integrated system and a national, publically owned rail network as opposed to the fragmented, dysfunctional and inefficient system created by privatisation. The government's new strategy is that regional partnerships between Network Rail and a private partner will be overseen by an Alliance Director, responsible for jointly operating the trains and tracks. ASLEF's concern is that although devolution to sub-national authorities can be suitable for services run by a single operator – like Transport for London – it is more challenging when there is competition over access and timetabling and over how much each stakeholder should contribute to maintenance and improvements - particularly when their main motive is to make a profit and all are accountable to different shareholders. Local Councils and businesses have been encouraged to submit proposals for re-opening railway lines but a huge amount of guidance and ongoing support will need to be provided to any applicants, and there is a very real danger that the proposals for devolution and private investment could make an overly-complicated system worse, not better.

6. Local stakeholders are often best placed to define and negotiate the needs of passengers within their catchment area and they can offer valuable insights to national decision makers about how best to improve timetabling and ensure that connections with other modes of transport are fully integrated. Many services for local communities are not commercially profitable but the railway performs an important social function, connecting people and businesses. Cutting less busy services and reducing services can have significant negative effects on passengers and on whole communities. Clearly, resources are finite and priorities have to be made, but rail should always be seen as an important public service and local authorities, community partnerships, passenger groups and other stakeholders should all be involved in discussions before decisions are taken about services and investment.

7. It is particularly important that disadvantaged and vulnerable groups are given a real say over their local services because currently their needs are regularly overlooked. While growing numbers are dependent on public transport to get around, ASLEF is concerned that fares are continually increasing while wages have stagnated. We would like to see measures taken against transport poverty, such as freezing fares and maintaining concessionary schemes for pensioners, young and unemployed people.
8. As a union ASLEF also believes that equal access for disabled people should be the cornerstone of Labour's transport policy, assisting in its aims to create a just and inclusive society. On our railways we see huge variations from one region and from one operator to another in the accessibility of platforms and the age of rolling stock age. Much of our railway runs on Victorian infrastructure which predates step-free access for wheelchairs and prams and much of our rolling stock doesn't have visual displays for passenger information and announcements are unclear. Often information is incorrect, or last minute changes of platform or alterations to train destinations put passengers in a predicament. This is why the availability of staff to offer assistance is so essential. To have genuine accessibility and equality, people with mobility issues should be able to turn up and travel in the same way as any other passenger. ASLEF believes that with the correct level of trained staff on board services and on platforms, we can overcome many of these problems. Removing station staff and second members of staff from services simply exacerbates the situation.
9. It is also important to mention the importance for local communities of investing in improving the sustainability of the public transport sector and moving more freight transport from road to rail. Electrification of our railways would be better for the climate, better for our health and faster and more reliable for passengers. And rail freight produces 76% less CO2 emissions than the equivalent HGV journey an average freight train can remove 76 HGVs journeys from our roads, thereby reducing congestion and making roads safer.
10. Finally, in response to the question about positive examples and case-studies, we would like to briefly mention the East Coast mainline and the Suburban Bristol Railways: In contrast to the

failings of private companies, the East Coast line was profitable when it was nationalised and run by publically owned Directly Operated Railways. In 5 years DOR successfully returned over £1bn in premiums and several million in profits to the Treasury, kept fares down and achieved high levels of passenger satisfaction, whereas the last three commercial franchises have collapsed. And on a more local level, in response to plans to do away with the commuter train between Bristol and Severn Beach the 'Friends of Suburban Bristol Railways' launched a campaign and, with the support of trade unions, have successfully secured a more frequent and reliable service that is used by a much higher number of passengers today than it was before.

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