



## **ASLEF's Response to South Western Rail Franchise Consultation – February 2016**

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. The Union has just under 1250 members working for the South West Trains franchise.
2. ASLEF is glad to have the opportunity to respond to this consultation and raise some of the issues the union feels need addressing on this busy and important network. As key stakeholders, trade unions should be part of the formal list of interested parties.
3. Since the publication of this franchise document, the DfT and TfL have launched a consultation on TfL taking responsibility for major parts of rail franchises in London and the south east including the inner London services of the South West Trains franchise. Whilst the consultation points out that the franchise competition prospectus published in November calls on bidders to produce plans for a separable business unit for inner London services, this prospectus only does so in the context of a closer relationship with TfL, not a section of franchise being taken over by another party. Therefore these proposals change the context in which ASLEF is able to respond to this consultation. The union will give further consideration to this matter in the consultation dealing specifically with this devolution.

4. ASLEF is also disappointed that the DfT is consulting without having arrived at a position or asking respondents for their opinions on franchise length. This is clearly a vital matter in the long term planning for the service and can assist in knowing what changes are necessary.
  
5. ASLEF believes that there is a great deal investment that is needed on some of the non-operational infrastructure on the network. Mess room facilities and toilet facilities are extremely poor in many locations and this has a negative effect on staffing. Many of these are housed in temporary structures that were supposed to be utilised for ten years. They are still in use twenty years later. This is especially frustrating when virtually unused facilities are still housed in the former Eurostar site. Rail Executive state that they “believe that investment in the workforce, building skills and capability, improving employee engagement, and demonstrating a genuine pride in developing staff over the long term is central to the vision of a world-class railway.” ASLEF believes this is an important objective. Part of achieving this is ensuring staff retention. Creating a decent working environment is an essential part of this.
  
6. ASLEF is extremely concerned by proposals to separate Island Line from the rest of the franchise. Island Line has many social benefits for the Isle of Wight, and its value will never be in terms of profit but the wider role it has in the community. This means it will always require a subsidy. Being part of a profitable franchise such as South West Trains enables cross subsidy which means a better deal for the tax payer and the passengers. If the franchise is split, this will inevitably mean a greater deal of subsidy and taxpayer support. Should this become expensive, this is also likely to lead to service cuts. ASLEF therefore fails to see the benefit of splitting less profitable services from franchises other than to maximise private profit which will be taken from the industry.

7. ASLEF reiterates its position that there must be no extension of DOO. The union also wishes to clarify that this means that the second member of staff on board a train must be a qualified guard. ASLEF not only rejects the extension of DOO but also any extension of DCO. If there is at any point an emergency, having a fully practised and qualified guard can be essential for safety. Passengers expect a visible member of staff on trains. Taking staff away from services will have safety implications and could well put passengers, especially those who are more vulnerable, off of using services.
  
8. ASLEF welcomes the fact the DfT has acknowledged that the franchise is covered by the public sector equality duty under the Equality Act 2010. This is something that ASLEF have called upon for many years. Winning a franchise is winning a public sector contract. Therefore the relevant duties must apply. It is a core belief of ASLEF that the staff in our industry should reflect the communities they serve. The new franchise agreement must set out how the holder plans to address this issue. ASLEF will seek to work closely on this with any franchise holder. We must look to increase the amount of people from underrepresented groups in our industry and in the driving grade itself.
  
9. ASLEF hopes that lesson have been learnt in regards to alliancing and in particular “deep alliancing” from the previous experiences on South West Trains. ASLEF has always had major concerns over alliancing. Network Rail is a not-for-dividend company. There is a concern that an alliance with a TOC will introduce an element of profit making back into the maintenance of our rail infrastructure. It will also mean yet more fragmentation. This may in fact lead to a series of mini Railtracks. ASLEF therefore feel that it is essential that the infrastructure remains under control of one not-for-profit organisation.

10. Alliancing raises some interesting questions with regard to regulation and fines resulting from delays. It can lead to situations where for an operator effectively fines itself. It also raises concerns over prioritisation should more than one operator, including FOCs, run over the same track. ASLEF believes that the Southwest trains franchise change from a deep-alliance to a “lighter touch” relationship can be attributed to these problems and that the episode has led to disruption in maintenance projects.

11. ASLEF believes that this consultation has somewhat been superseded by the one published in January on a new approach to rail passenger services in London and the south east. Important lessons can be learnt from the failure of the deep alliance on this franchise and hopes that consideration is given to the taxpayer and passengers when looking at the potential separation of the Island Line, not just the effect on profit. The railway is a public service first and foremost, and commercial consideration should not be considered above this function.

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