



ASLEF's Response to the Great Western Specification Consultation –
June 2014

1. The Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen (ASLEF) is the UK's largest train driver's union representing more than 20,000 members in train operating companies and freight companies as well as London Underground and light rail systems. The Union has just under 1,000 members on the Great Western franchise.
2. ASLEF supports many of the objectives laid out by the DfT but finds it difficult to see how creating a short direct award or franchise will enable targets to be reached during the terms of the interim arrangements.
3. ASLEF recognises that the Great Western franchise area is undergoing substantial work and infrastructure enhancements over the coming years and welcomes this. This investment is long overdue. ASLEF agrees with Travel Watch SouthWest that the South West as a region had suffered the lowest level of investment in its transport networks. First Great Western had the highest level of PiXC (passenger in excess of capacity) of any London & South East operator in 2012 with 7.1 per cent PiXC across both peaks. Six out of the ten of the most overcrowded rail journeys in the UK are on the route between London and Reading. This has been caused by passenger growth of 42 per cent over the last decade.

4. This problem is only going to increase as the population of the Southwest and the demand for rail continues to grow. Figures show that by 2019 40% more passengers will use peak time long distance high speed services into Paddington and 44% more passengers will be using peak time services in the Bristol area. In addition to this 41% more passengers will be using trains in the Exeter area. Over the last ten years passenger numbers have increased by 269% to well over 800k annually on the Severn Beach line, 158% on the Truro-Falmouth line and 124% on the Exeter-Barnstaple line.
5. We believe there needs to be more services available to passengers at Weston-Super-Mare and Worle at both peak times and late evenings. Weston needs more high speed trains to provide greater capacity at peak times and Worle requires HSTs to stop at the station in order to meet the demand for rail in the town.
6. ASLEF takes the view that these are major issues that require real solutions. Crossrail should help relieve some of the overcrowding between Reading and Paddington by December 2019. In addition ASLEF welcomes the electrification of the Great Western Mainline, which will reduce carbon emissions and improve reliability and comfort. Perhaps most importantly, it will increase the amount of seats by 20%. For this reason ASLEF is very concerned by the current dispute over the funding of electrification between the Welsh government and Westminster. It is important that this dispute ends and this extremely important infrastructure work does not get delayed. Such delays could mean that electrification is not complete in time for the introduction of the new Intercity Express rolling stock.
7. ASLEF would point out that reopening closed lines could help address the problem of overcrowding across the franchise. For example, in the early 1990s, Avon County Council proposed an incremental implementation of line and station openings. These were never put in place. Considering the increased passenger numbers expected and the emphasis on cleaner transport, it is time these were once again considered.

8. ASLEF understands the desire to have local people and local bodies having a greater say in transport provision. Communications between national decision makers and local authorities as well as Local Transport Authorities are essential. However this must all be done in the context of a national rail network. As previously mentioned, it is the opinion of both the McNulty Report and ASLEF that fragmentation of the British Railway has led to a lack of leadership, responsibility and inefficiencies. Handing responsibilities to local bodies would lead to varying standards and once again a lack of overall responsibility.
9. ASLEF is extremely concerned over the direct award of contracts being used on the Great Western Franchise and the wider rail network. One of the selling points of privatisation was the idea that competition would drive standards, efficiency and innovation. ASLEF would strongly argue that the franchise system does not actually create these situations but rather creates a series of private sector monopolies. However the fallacy of competition is even more undermined by these awards. ASLEF takes the view that the award of these contracts results in TOCs getting guaranteed income with virtually no risk and no incentive to actually improve performance.
10. The award of a six month extension and then a two year extension has meant that First have got the franchise for an annual sum of £32m. This is despite the fact that First Great Western had walked away from the initial contract option to run the line until 2015 to avoid payments of up to £800m to the government. It is therefore hard to see this deal as anything other as a bad deal for the taxpayer. This is especially true when Directly Operated Railways who have turned the East Coast Mainline into the most successful operator on the network, returning £1 billion to the DfT, were available to take the franchise on. Yet despite this, the First Group was able to set its terms as a sole bidder. Once again on the rail network, private profit has been prioritised over taxpayer and passenger value along with quality of service.
11. The constant short term and ad hoc contract decisions made across our network since the West Coast debacle hinder long term strategic thinking and

investment. They are yet more examples of the failures of the franchise model on our railway.

Mick Whelan
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