



ASLEF's Response to the TransPennine Express Rail Franchise and Northern
Rail Franchise Consultation – August 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. ASLEF has nearly 400 members on TransPennine Express and nearly 1300 on Northern.
2. ASLEF welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation on two extremely important franchises. There is considerable concern over many of the options and suggestions within this consultation. The union is concerned that many of the proposals are simply cuts and that yet again, rail services in the north are not getting the same levels of investment that other regions, in particular London and the south-east, receive.
3. The union strongly opposes any increases in tickets prices on either Northern or TPE. While it may be unfair for some users to have low ticket prices compared to other users on similar journeys elsewhere on the network, it should be remembered that the UK has some of the most expensive fares in Europe. Our view is that the best way to resolve this problem is to level down prices, not level up. Rail fares have dramatically increased, in real terms, since the early years of this century. In January 2013 fares across all operators were 23% higher than they were in January 1995; the average annual increase has been 1.2%. This is why Britain's railways are the most expensive in Europe with Action for Rail figures demonstrating that UK commuters spend over three times more of their salary on rail fares than most European passengers.

4. It should also be remembered that passengers in the region have to put up with some of the oldest rolling stock in the country. On Northern, the trains are 25 years old on average. It is clearly unreasonable to ask passengers to pay even more in fares for uncomfortable journeys on old trains.
5. The union believes the best way to finance improved frequency, capacity and quality of services in the north is to stop money leaving the industry through profit and inefficient fragmentation.
6. ASLEF takes the view that it would be a backward step to reduce services where demand is currently lower in order to improve rolling stock elsewhere. The railway provides an important social function. Services should not be provided solely on a commercial basis particularly in remote areas where train services are a vital social link. We don't believe there has to be a social versus economic trade-off and with a properly structured railway where profits leak from the industry and where better rolling stock should be able to be provided without the need to reduce services.
7. Ticket offices hold important functions other than simply the sale of tickets. People know that whilst a ticket office is open, there will be a member of staff to advise and assist. Closing ticket offices may stop passengers wanting to travel particularly those who may feel more vulnerable such as the elderly, young or disabled.
8. ASLEF understands and supports the idea of local bodies and people having more of a say over how their transport system functions and operates. Communications between national decision makers and local authorities as well as Local Transport Authorities are essential. However the British railway network must always be considered as a national entity.
9. It should also be pointed out that the current situation still enables local decision makers to influence the provision of rail services. The DfT consults widely prior to the publication of an Invitation to Tender for franchises and

there are many times when specifications have in fact changed due to responses from local authorities. If these changes are not accommodated, PTEs and local authorities are given the opportunity to fund additions to base specifications.

10. This is not to say that ASLEF opposes the devolution of power and responsibility for rail to regional representative bodies. When considering the European railway models, it is clear that strong regional involvement is widespread and highly beneficial. However these arrangements must be seen as within the context of a unified national rail structure.
11. ASLEF is concerned by the change in policy towards service specification. The consultation states that “For TPE, we believe that the operator should have flexibility to develop the train service to meet the needs of passengers. We intend to set the train service specification so that operational and timetabling decisions are devolved to the franchisee while protecting key outcomes for passengers, the economy, and the taxpayer.”
12. There is a fine line between the giving Train Operators “flexibility” in service specification, and abandoning the public service ethos of the railway. ASLEF would therefore call for a more detailed service provision to protect services that many communities rely upon.
13. The Union is concerned that the department is using the consultation as a pretext for cuts and the managed decline of rail in the north of England. Rail is going through unprecedented growth. A dramatic increase in economic and social mobility in the last two decades has seen more people traveling on trains than at any period in peacetime Britain. We now have to undo the great amount of damage done by the Beeching cuts to try and catch up with demand. Yet this consultation wants to reduce services to communities which could lead to their decline and simply shift passengers onto busier services.
14. ASLEF strongly supports investment in infrastructure projects around the UK such as Crossrail and the Thameslink upgrade. But the Union is concerned

over the lack of investment in rail the north of England is receiving. The Passenger Transport Executive Group has pointed out that “the regions of the North and the Midlands attracted little more than £12 of rail infrastructure investment per head of population, compared to over £226 in London and the South East.” This is unjust and unsustainable not least because when over 40% of peak services in and out of Leeds and Manchester are standing room only.

15. The area covered by the Northern and TransPennine Express franchises is a large one with Northern alone running more services than any other train operating company. When this is considered alongside the fact that 70% of jobs in the North are located within walking distance of a rail station, it is clear that the government should be demanding more services, more investment and more staffing. Not cuts.
16. The consultation’s strategy for addressing this appears to be to improve busy lines and cuts services to less busy stations. Such an approach will simply exacerbate the problem. New rolling stock and more frequency of services are needed on already busy services but we must also promote and improve less used services in order to boost demand for rail travel.
17. This franchise is in danger of repeating the mistakes of the last franchising where the current Northern Rail franchise was awarded on a no-growth assumption, which has led to increasing over-crowding on many routes into key northern cities. Demand on Northern services has in fact grown by 33% and TPE by 71% since 2004.
18. Professional services firm KPMG has estimated that overcrowding on Northern services could have already lost Leeds and Manchester around 20,000 new jobs by 2013/14, worth £500m in Gross Value Added.
19. The outlook is not much better going forward in Control Period 5 where the North and the Midlands are expected to receive little more than a quarter of the investment per head as Scotland or London and the South East.

20. ASLEF opposes the introduction of new DOO services. The union believes that it is in the interests of both passengers and train staff for the driver not to be the only employee on board passenger rail services.

21. ASLEF would also call upon the successful bidders to ensure that concessions previously financed by local authorities before budgets were cut are now paid for by the new operator. Recently, pensioners and disabled passengers have had concessions cut due to the lack of available funding for PTEs. ASLEF clearly opposes profiteering from the railway but should profit making companies take over franchises they should at least ensure that potentially vulnerable people are supported in traveling on their services.

22. At a time when rail use has grown, we need an ambitious vision for the railways in the north of England in order to ensure capacity increases at the same rate as passenger numbers. However the plan laid out in the consultation document falls far short of this. There should be no trade-off between better services on busy lines and cuts on quieter ones. As passenger numbers continue to grow we must invest in rail across the whole of the north of England and shrink the gap between infrastructure investment in the north and the rest of the UK.

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