



**ASLEF's response to the South Eastern Rail Franchise Public Consultation –
May 2017**

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. ASLEF has over 1000 members working on the South Eastern franchise.
2. ASLEF welcomes the opportunity to respond to the South Eastern franchise consultation. The franchise is the fourth busiest in the country with 182 million passenger journeys a year. Over 90% of its services go to or from London and 65% of passengers travel in peak times. We acknowledge the capacity challenges the franchise faces.
3. We support the priorities set out by the DfT. It is self-evident that the fundamentals need to be prioritised and include ensuring trains run on time and that there should be sufficient capacity. We find the language used to express this rather odd. Surely "making trains run on time" and "limiting the number of late-running or cancelled trains" is the same thing. Also "improving passenger satisfaction" will be the result of improving reliability, punctuality and capacity, rather than something which can simply be targeted in its own right.
4. ASLEF recognises that service levels on the railway in 2017 are still limited by the constraints of Victorian infrastructure. We therefore believe that the best way to increase capacity in the short to medium term is to increase

the length of trains. Notwithstanding the additional infrastructure costs at stations, such a step is the easiest way to facilitate capacity growth which will, of course, lead to revenue growth as passenger numbers increase. The increased ticket revenue will of course benefit the private operator of the franchise. In turn, this should be reflected in the who pays for the work.

5. ASLEF supports different configurations for rolling stock according to whether it is a metro service or mainline service. We agree that it makes sense to increase standing space for those only taking short journeys but would point out that those living at the final stop of a metro service can face a very long journey. In addition, simply removing seats and making more space to stand is hardly a long-term solution. Such a measure should not be used to squeeze as many passengers onto trains as possible therefore increasing train operator profits, reducing passenger comfort and not genuinely dealing with capacity constraints. ASLEF supports removing first class seating on the busiest metro routes. Too often, passengers are left standing uncomfortably on journeys whilst a first class section of the train remains virtually empty.

6. The document correctly places considerable emphasis on passenger experience. ASLEF would point out that one of the things passengers frequently demand is more visible staff including a second member of staff on trains. ASLEF firmly rejects any extension of driver only operation (DOO). Transferring responsibilities for guard duties to drivers is a safety concern. Driving trains is an enormously safety critical role. We want train drivers to be focused 100% on the track and signals ahead. Closing doors and dispatch is also in its own right a safety critical role and lives can be lost if this is not done correctly. ASLEF believes that it is therefore a risk to the safety of the travelling public to try and combine these two separate roles. Let drivers focus on driving and guards focus on safe dispatch.

7. Additionally, having a trained guard on trains who is practised in dispatch and door operation is important for potential emergency situations. Surveys show that the traveling public want a second member of staff on board who is as skilled and qualified as possible to deal with whatever situation could arise.
8. ASLEF therefore restates its opposition to the deskilling of on-board staff. Guards must continue to hold responsibility for door operation and dispatch and not be there to primarily protect the income of the franchise holder.
9. Passengers feel strongly about this matter. This is demonstrated by Transport Focus' report "Passenger attitudes towards rail staff." When asked whether they had cause to worry about their personal security during a rail journey in the previous six months, one in ten passengers said that they had. This is clearly too many. The report notes, "When asked what could allay some of those concerns, passengers consistently identified staff presence as the key."
10. The report added "the industry needs to consider how it can best deploy staff across the rail network to meet this need. Cutting the number of staff, either at stations or on the train, runs counter to what passengers actually want and could jeopardise their confidence in their ability to get to their destination safely."
11. A recent poll commissioned by our sister union the RMT of passengers on Southern found that three quarters (73%) are concerned about the safety of travelling on trains that no longer had an on-board train guard and a similar percentage believe Southern Rail should not allow trains to operate without at least one member of staff assisting passengers and protecting their safety (70%).

12. It is therefore clear that passengers believe that a second member of staff must be present on services.
13. ASLEF would also oppose reductions in station staff. This has a significant impact upon the public's perceived safety in using the railways. Cuts to station staff could be counterproductive with many of the more vulnerable people in our society deciding not to use free capacity late at night due to a lack of staffing at stations and concerns for their safety in empty stations. These proposals will ultimately lead to a reduction in revenue and thus offset the savings accrued from getting rid of the staff in the first place. Ticket offices are more than just facilities to pay for journeys. They represent a place where passengers know they can contact a member of staff. The value of this should not be underestimated.
14. ASLEF has concerns over any form of close or deep alliance. An alliance with a TOC could introduce an element of profit making back into the maintenance of our rail infrastructure and would also mean yet more fragmentation. This may in fact lead to a series of mini Railtracks. The union believes it essential that infrastructure remains fully under the control of the public sector.
15. The paper also explains that the government will seek new funding streams. "This should include new models of private funding." It is currently hard to see what private sector firms would invest in rail infrastructure. The short term nature of franchising means operators have little incentive to invest as they may not receive the long term returns. Local authorities have suffered significant central government cuts meaning they also have very little money for rail investment. It is very hard to see what other streams are available. ASLEF would also reject any private sector funding that left infrastructure in the hands of the private sector. For the reasons stated above, the union rejects the privatisation of our infrastructure and any profit motive that goes with it.

16. The South Eastern franchise is, along with the other major commuter services in the south east of England, one of the most challenging sections of our network. Our aging infrastructure and ever increasing passenger numbers poses a real challenge. Only by engaging with the workforce who provide the services that so many rely on, on a daily basis will be able to find the necessary solutions. ASLEF calls on the DfT to ensure that it engages with stakeholders from across the rail industry as part of the refranchising process including the recognised unions that represent these workers.

Mick Whelan
General Secretary
ASLEF
77 St John Street
London
EC1M 4NN