



ASLEF's Response to the Intercity West Coast Franchise Consultation – July 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 over 550 members on the Intercity West Coast Franchise.
2. ASLEF appreciates the opportunity to respond to this consultation and highlight some of the issues we feel are important on this busy and strategically vital network.
3. In recent years there has been unprecedented demand for rail travel with over 1.65 billion journeys taking place 2014-2015. The West Coast Mainline is one of the lines which has been pushed to full capacity by the increased demand and the 20% increase in journeys between 2010/11 and 2014/15 shows what a challenge stakeholders face going forward.
4. ASLEF has some concerns over some of the priorities set out in the consultation. One example of this is Wi-Fi. ASLEF supports increased Wi-Fi provision across our network. This will clearly benefit passengers and is seen as increasingly important. However establishing a government commitment on this matter risks diverting resources away from key demands from passengers for a more punctual and reliable network. This is demonstrated by the Rail Users Factsheet - 2014/15 published by the Rail Executive. Within this it lists 10 priorities identified by passengers. It is

the price of tickets which comes top, followed by ability to get a seat and frequency of services. Wi-Fi availability is bottom of the list. ASLEF calls on the DfT and franchise holder to prioritise the core functions of the railway; punctuality, reliability and affordability.

5. ASLEF rejects some of the binary choices offered in the consultation. For example, we shouldn't have to reduce stops on certain services in order to reduce journey times. These sticking plaster solutions are short sighted and benefit some passengers at the expense of others. It is fundamentally flawed to make decisions like this when we have just spent millions of pounds redeveloping Birmingham New Street Station without improving its operational capacity. Birmingham New Street will now remain a pinch point despite that fact we had the opportunity to enhance the infrastructure.
6. Also focusing on headline service times is often a mistake that fails to recognise the door to door journeys made by passengers. Reducing the amount of stops may mean people having to take additional services from larger hubs to smaller stations which are no longer a station stop. Such adjustments may reduce headline city to city journey times, but increase journey times for many passengers for the whole of their journey.
7. Further travel must also be considered with regard to stations and platform use. We must take a holistic view of rail services and ensure that stations layouts, platforms and timetabling make connections easier. The franchise holder must also work with other modes such as local bus services in order to ensure we have a genuine fully integrated rail network.
8. ASLEF strongly believes that every service on the West Coast Mainline must have a fully qualified guard that is responsible for Passenger Train Interface (PTI). 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 feels that it is therefore a risk to the safety of the travelling public to try and combine these two separate roles. Our view is that train drivers must be allowed to focus on driving and guards must focus on safe dispatch.

9. Additionally, having a trained guard on trains who is practised in dispatch and door operation is important for potential emergency situations. 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.
10. ASLEF therefore opposes any deskilling of on-board staff. Guards must continue to hold responsibilities for door operation and dispatch and not be there to primarily protect the income of the franchise holder.
11. Passengers must be given greater access to information. Very often those with internet access whether at home, or on their mobile devices, are able to get more up-to-date information about a service than individuals on the train itself. Too often informing passengers of service delays and alterations is a secondary consideration. This must change.
12. The West Coast Mainline is the most heavily used mixed use line in Europe and carries nearly half of all freight traffic in addition to passengers. This is one of the many reasons ASLEF passionately supports HS2. The line is at capacity and only by building new lines will we be able to relieve it and continue to grow the railway. However the construction process is going to cause many challenges for this franchise, in particular the redevelopment of Euston Station. The franchise holder must plan far in advance and work with all stakeholders (including unions) to ensure service disruption is kept to a minimum. We must learn the lessons that have led to the abysmal levels of disruption caused by the redevelopment of London Bridge and the terrible mismanagement by GTR.

13. The new franchise holder must also work with freight operators and the DfT to ensure that the needs of the rail freight industry are considered. Rail freight is going through a challenging time at present although it has grown over previous decades and is projected to continue growing. The West Coast Mainline is the most important freight route in the UK and we call on all stakeholders to ensure rail freight is given appropriate priority when any operational matters are discussed or decisions made. It must never be marginalised from the network to prioritise passenger services.

14. 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.

15. ASLEF feels it is important that, now it is acknowledged that franchises come under the scope of public sector equality duties, they also fulfil the statutory equality audits that are part of the obligations of the act.

16. The West Coast Mainline has a considerable amount of work to do in order to ensure a workforce that reflects the society it serves. ASLEF has close to 100% membership on the franchise and therefore the makeup of our membership accurately reflects the makeup of its drivers. We recognise that the drivers' grade is disproportionately white, male and older across the country but acknowledge it is particularly the case on this operator. The operator currently has just 13 BME drivers (2.4%) and 13 women (2.4%). There are historic reasons for such low figures, predominantly being that

intercity services attract more experienced drivers who tend to be older, and therefore from an intake which had even fewer BME drivers or women than we have now. This is borne out by the fact that there is just one driver who is 30 or under out of 553. The franchise holder must therefore actively seek to ensure greater representation in its workforce from minority groups and women and in doing so is likely to see a more even age demographic achieved as well. ASLEF can only recruit members from the drivers that train operating companies employ. We therefore call on railway operators to do what they can to ensure more diversity in the workforce. ASLEF would welcome moves to introduce apprenticeships or similar schemes to get more young people interested in a career on the railway and to get new blood into the industry.

17. The West Coast Mainline faces some major challenges over the coming years. Demand continues to increase, yet capacity remains limited. HS2 will help relieve that situation, but though it is necessary, it will also cause disruption. Managing these infrastructure enhancements will be a major challenge for the new franchise holder. ASLEF believes that these hurdles will only be overcome by working in co-operation with all stakeholders, including the unions who represent the workers who deliver these essential services.

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