

Scottish Women's Convention response to:

Transport Scotland's Consultation on Scotland's Rail Infrastructure Strategy from 2019

February 2016

The Consultation

Scotland's railways are a national asset. They provide a vital public service to people and communities across the country and enable businesses to move goods and materials to markets. Railways are a key part of the implementation of Scotland's Economic Strategy, supporting a resilient and growing economy through the Scottish Government's four priority areas of investment: infrastructure, innovation, inclusive growth and international engagement.

The Scottish Government will continue to work to set a clear strategy for the rail industry in Scotland and will provide the funding and investment that will support its delivery. This means ensuring the effective delivery of those service aspects that matter to rail users: faster journey times, increased capacity on trains and better reliability.

In the short term the Scottish Government has taken decisive action with the ScotRail Alliance expected to deliver on an Improvement Plan to address areas of poor performance across the country, returning levels of reliability back to the levels of the contracted and regulatory targets. Longer term, this consultation paper sets out the Scottish Government's vision for rail, considers the challenges and opportunities faced and makes a number of proposals that the Scottish Government believe can help to maximise investment in the infrastructure. This will support the growth in demand that is predicted and deliver services upon which customers can depend.

The Scottish Women's Convention (SWC)

The Scottish Women's Convention (SWC) is funded to engage with women throughout Scotland in order that their views might influence public policy. The SWC uses the views of women to respond to a variety of Parliamentary, Governmental and organisational consultation papers at both a Scottish and UK level.

The Scottish Women's Convention engages with women using numerous communication channels including Roadshow events, Thematic Conferences and regional contact groups. This submission provides the views of women and reflects their opinions and experiences in a number of key areas relevant to the issues around rail infrastructure in Scotland.

Question 1

Do you agree with our vision and approach? Will they help us to achieve the Scottish Government's purpose of increasing sustainable and inclusive economic growth?

Vision and Approach

- **Improved Services** – faster journey times, strengthened commuter services and effective connections between cities and regions;
- **Improved Capacity** – greater utilisation of network and on-train capacity through investment and high levels of performance;
- **Improved value** – efficiency and value for money, for the taxpayer, the fare-payer and the rail freight customer; and
- **More effective integration** – between rail services, and between rail and other transport modes.

The SWC welcomes the opportunity to comment on proposals set out in Scotland's rail infrastructure strategy, particularly with regards to the vision and approach which intend to achieve the purpose of increasing sustainable and inclusive economic growth. This will only be realised, however, if the views, concerns and ideas of those who use the rail network are considered as part of this process.

The lack of safe, accessible, affordable, working public transport continues to be a significant issue for women throughout Scotland. This is particularly acute in rural areas, where provision is extremely limited. In more remote parts of the country women and their families are forced to rely on cars, which are expensive to run and are being driven on roads which many believe are *“not fit for purpose”*.

Many of the women in Scotland who regularly use public transport are more likely to use bus services than they are rail services. This is due to a number of factors, one of the most significant being the lack of train stations close to their home or place of work/study. This is particularly the case in rural areas, where there is a real lack of any transport provision. In more remote parts of the country, train services are so sparse that it is unfeasible for women to use this mode of transport to access work or education. Poor timetabling, late-running services, un-staffed stations and increasing fare costs are also contributing factors.

Women have commented on the recent perceived unreliability and cost of using the rail service in Scotland.

“The trains have been terrible recently. I can be standing on a platform waiting for a train, the boards indicate that the service is due, but when I look at the app on my phone it says the train is cancelled. You can wait long enough for an announcement to back this up. If and when a train does appear, it's usually over-crowded, meaning I have to stand. I pay a lot for my monthly season ticket, but I can't really see what for. I'm considering switching to the bus, which would make my journey longer, but at least I'm more likely to get a seat and if one doesn't turn up another will come along shortly.”

This uncertainty discourages women from using the rail network to access employment or education. Issues around late-running and cancelled services in particular can cause significant problems.

“I have to get a specific train because it’s the only one that gets me back to where I live in time to pick my child up from nursery before it closes. I have genuine feelings of dread about turning up to the station and seeing the words ‘delayed’ or ‘cancelled’ on the information boards, which has happened on several occasions. It has meant I’ve had to get a taxi, which costs between £15 and £20 depending on the route the driver takes, just to make sure I get back in time. On paper the train is the quickest, most effective way for me to get to and from work, but in reality that’s no longer the case.”

The lack of ‘joined up’ transport services is another reason as to why women are less likely to use rail services. In some areas there are a number of stations along train routes, however this is not the case in all parts of the country. Many women who come off a train will have to walk to a bus stop to continue their journey, which can compromise their personal safety. Restricted timetables mean that choosing other forms of transport is the most sensible option.

“I can get a train home from work which takes 15 minutes to get to the town nearest my village, but then have to wait forty minutes for a bus, often in the dark, in a badly lit area. Or I can get a direct bus which takes about an hour, leaves two streets away from my office and drops me off a few streets from my home. It’s a no brainer – I would rather be on the bus for that length of time, where it’s warm and safe, than hang about waiting.”

The cost of journeys is another barrier to realisation of the Scottish Government’s vision and approach to achieving sustainable and inclusive growth. Fares on key routes are higher during peak times, which correspond to the hours of the day in which workers are more likely to be travelling to and from their jobs. The difference between these fares and those during off-peak times is enough to discourage many from using the train.

“Taking the bus means a longer journey, but I would rather have an extra half hour each way on my journey than spending almost £10 every day to use the train.”

Journeys between main towns and cities can also be prohibitively expensive. There are railcards available which provide discounts, however these are only open to certain age groups and are not applicable to all routes.

“It costs over £10 more for a return on the train from, say, Glasgow to Dundee for a weekend than it does using the bus. I know the bus takes longer, but if you’re on a limited income £10 is a lot of money.”

The existence of the free bus travel is another reason why older women in particular are more likely to use this mode of transport than the railways.

“The concessionary travel pass means I can travel anywhere in Scotland without having to pay my fare – the most I have to pay is a 50p booking fee for longer journeys. I also don’t have to pay for the card itself. It would be nice to take the train, but as a pensioner it just doesn’t make sense to pay £30 for a senior railcard and then the cost of the fare on top of that.”

In order to ensure value for money for the fare-payer, the Scottish Government should take into account the cost issues outlined. Similarly, more older people would be likely to use rail services if they were able to travel for significantly reduced costs, as they are on buses.

In more central, urban areas, women have commented positively on their local rail services. They are fortunate to have access to frequent, fairly reliable and reasonably priced services. Most of the carriages tend to be newer, which means more comfortable seats, more availability of seats and on-board extras such as free wifi.

“I live just outside the city. Our train station has approximately three trains per hour, depending on the day and time of day. It only takes about 15 minutes to get into the city which is ideal, not only for work, but also for socialising and for other transport connections.”

It must, however, be recognised that this is not the case throughout the country. The unique geography of Scotland would make it extremely difficult for each station to be serviced by such frequent provision as is available more centrally. Women in these areas fully recognise and understand this, however would still benefit significantly from improved provision where they are.

“My local station sees a train every few hours. We always seem to get old, rickety, poorly heated carriages on this route as well. It’s no wonder people are more likely to get a bus or rely on private transport, even though that can be expensive. A few simple improvements would make a significant difference to the uptake of usage.”

More needs to be done to ensure that there is parity, wherever possible, in the types of trains, services available onboard and frequency of journey times throughout the country. The stark differences between services in the central belt and those in more outlying areas are a contributing factor as to why more women do not use trains to access education or work.

Conclusion

Unreliable, expensive, inefficient public transport seriously curtails education and employment opportunities for women. The Scottish Government must take this into account when attempting to ensure that the rail network is accessible to all. Unless the issues outlined above are taken into consideration, the vision and approach set out by the Scottish Government will not be achieved.

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The Scottish Women’s Convention engages with women using numerous communication channels including Roadshow events, Thematic Conferences and regional contact groups. This submission paper provides the views of women and reflects their opinions and experiences in a number of key areas relevant to mental health in Scotland.

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