

ASLEF

Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen founded 1880

Scottish Parliament Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee – Transfer of Ownership of ScotRail

Whether the rail industry structures being put in place by the Scottish Government are conducive to good industrial relations?

Aslef is the union that represents train drivers in Scotland Railways. We represent 98% of train drivers in Scotland.

The transition and planning around the move from operating under the private franchise to under the public sector owned operator of last resort has not been done in a way that fosters good industrial relations.

Trade unions have not been included in the planning. We contend that our members, and other members of trade unions, the workers across all rail services in Scotland have the most expertise and knowledge about the rail industry and should be the first group of people involved in helping to develop our passenger services, and indeed all rail services.

Not including the workers and their representatives in the trade unions when designing the new ScotRail and governance structures, was a significant omission that was damaging to good industrial relations. It was not a good start. We should have been included from the start of the planning process about the structures, governance and regulation of the new publicly owned operator of last resort.

At this stage, it is unknown whether the governance structures within the newly created public ScotRail will help or hinder industrial relations. We still do not know whether trade union representatives will be on the board or not and whether they will play an active role in the governance or not. If a truly public service, it should ensure that the voices of the public are heard, inclusive of workers and passengers. Not including workers in the governance would be a backward step and not something that would result in good industrial relations.

The Abellio years were a disaster for good industrial relations. The development of a new publicly owned passenger service should be drawing a line under the damaging industrial relations presided over by Abellio. However, it has not been a good start and how workers and trade unions are treated by the new arrangement and their senior managers has not inspired confidence.

What impact the creation of Great British Railways might have on rail service provision within Scotland and on cross-border services?

We made clear in our report 'A Vision for Scotland's Railways' our concerns about GB Railways and the values that underpin it. GB Rail will still be built around the failure of privatisation with private involvement, profiteering and capital extraction all still central characteristics in the new GB Railways structures.

How GB Railways interacts with ScotRail and what impact it has on cross border services is still unclear and the Scottish Government must clarify as a matter of urgency.

For example, it is important to understand where responsibilities lie over rail infrastructure. Whilst we are supportive of increasing devolved powers over rail infrastructure, we are still committed to an integrated rail network across the UK. Given GB Railways is absorbing Network Rail it is important to understand how this will impact on Scotland and how GB Railways will work with devolved administrations to ensure local, Scottish priorities are fulfilled.

We are concerned with the idea of driving efficiencies, by cutting the operating base, which appears to be a shared objective of the Scottish and UK Governments under GB Rail and the new ScotRail. Too often we hear it said by both the UK and Scottish Governments that current levels of investment are unsustainable. We refute this. Rail and transport are vital public services that help deliver economic growth, social policy and environmental objectives.

Rail services are a vital public service just as health and education are and, quite rightly, you wouldn't hear it said that spending public money on them is unsustainable. Neither should it be said about rail services. On the contrary, we believe that more investment, not cuts is required so that we can grow and build our railways.

How the rail industry successfully copes with changes in travel patterns and the currently reduced farebox income caused by the coronavirus pandemic?

The pandemic has obviously brought significant challenges to the rail industry. Lockdown and Government instruction not to travel saw a huge reduction in passenger numbers. This must however be seen in context. It was and is a short-term, not a long-term challenge. We have to consider how we invest in and improve rail services based on long term considerations. If cuts are made based on short-term considerations, then this will impact long term outcomes. Long Term if we are to meet Scotland's climate change targets then we must shift people from the car to rail and other forms of public transport. We will not accomplish this if we cut rail services, make trains too expensive and unaffordable for too many, inaccessible, unwelcome, and unattractive for passengers.

The new publicly owned ScotRail has the opportunity to put a line under the failures of the past few years and re-build confidence in our railways. There is the opportunity to

make rail travel the natural mode of travel for more people. For example, by removing peak fares and making it free for our young people so that they are naturalised and socialised into choosing rail travel before any other mode.

Yours Sincerely

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