

please reply to:
Stewart Palmer

Department for Transport

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stewart.palmer@railfuture.org.uk

Date; 13th May 2023

Dear Sir/Madam,

Rail Minimum Service Consultation.

Railfuture welcomes the opportunity to respond to the DfT consultation on the issue of provision of a minimum rail service level in the event of strike action. Railfuture is a non-political organisation that has some 20,000 members and associate members via Rail User Groups (RUG's). As a passenger representative group our primary focus is to ensure that rail user needs are put at the centre of rail policy and decision making. We have GB wide coverage and the organisation is run entirely by volunteers.

We have answered the questions posed in the consultation as far as they are applicable to our organisation.

Q1. In general terms we support the principles set out in the consultation document. We would much prefer that strikes, and the threat of strikes, were avoided altogether.

Q2. Whilst noting the proposed scope of the regulations, as a user focussed organisation, we would like to see equal emphasis on the needs of passengers who must travel on strike days. For example, the assisted travel scheme should be required to operate in such circumstances. There should be no restrictions on ticket validity and no requirement to reserve a seat on strike days. Our suggestion is that these requirements would be best developed via a rail user workshop with DfT.

Q3. Railfuture agrees with the proposed exclusions.

Q4. Railfuture supports the general principles set out in the factors for consideration. In terms of ranking, the priorities should be on supporting the economy and access to rail services where people have no sensible alternative, e.g. commuting to and from work in large cities. The issue of access to medical attention, whilst a very emotive issue, affects in reality a very small number of people overall. Railfuture therefore ranks the bullet points 1-8 in descending order as: 3, 2, 4, 7, 6, 1, 5, 8.

In respect of bullet point 8 it is very important to recognise the key role of freight in the national economy and whilst out of scope of this consultation, nothing should be proposed that will compromise the smooth operation of the freight railway (See also the answer to Q28).

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Q5. This is a complex issue. For example, the day of the week of a strike will be relevant. The need to take account of major public events etc. (some lines have no planned service for example on Sundays). The issue of first and last trains is also crucial to users. It would seem sensible to use a % of planned capacity as a metric, so for example operators could run fewer, but longer trains, but with the proviso of a minimum frequency compared to the normal planned service on the day, including the protection of first and last trains. The proposals need to recognise that in contrast to the recent experience of one day strikes, future disputes may be different.

Q6 to 24. Not applicable to our organisation directly. That said, rail strikes have caused us considerable inconvenience and cost, for example in a cancelled national conference at short notice and disruption to our regular meetings etc. In respect of our activities, members have resorted to video conferencing for example to mitigate the effects of strike action.

Q25. In general, Railfuture would prefer to see an amended timetable. A map without train specific details is of no practical use to users for whom “when” is as important as “where.” Many journeys involve a change of train or mode. Without a train specific plan (i.e. a timetable) potential users will not know if a journey is possible or not.

Q26. See remarks in Q25. A map of what will run will emerge from the identity of key flows and the proposed timetable.

Q27. The routes operated in previous disputes were not driven by customer need. They were driven by resource constraints of the number of competent people available. As already stated, a map will emerge from the identification of key flows and protection of the hours of operation, first and last trains

Q28. Railfuture has some concerns on this idea of ranking priorities. Who is to say that journey “A” is more or less important than journey “B”? If the overarching principle is that the purpose is to meet user needs, then all lines should have some service (if it would be normally provided on a non-strike day), and the capacity and frequency should be variable factors, not saying that this station gets a service, but the other one does not.

Q29. See previous answers. First and last trains need to be protected. They are vital for people going to and from work on shifts and for long distance travellers.

Q30. Already answered in effect. However, as a ball park figure Railfuture would want to see a minimum of 50% capacity on all lines for the normal duration of services.

Q31. Already answered in effect. No additional points.

Q32. Already answered in effect, but clearly the focus on the economic damage is crucial. So people going to work, school etc are more important than people going for a day out to Brighton!

Q33. Yes, it is one network. Many journeys start in one part of the UK and end in another.

Q34. Not applicable.

Q35. Not applicable for an organisation.

Q36. See answer to Q33.



Q37. Agree, see answer to Q33. Most users don't even know who operates what. Half the population still call it "British Rail." It is one network and the information about, and the use of rail should be seamless.

Q38. See answers above.

Stewart Palmer

Director.