

Calls for Scotrail franchise to end

Scottish Labour have called for Scottish Government Ministers to use their power to end Abellio's ScotRail franchise in 2022 – and refuse a three-year extension.

The party has tabled a motion at Holyrood, which will be heard this Wednesday, stating: "This Parliament believes that the Government should not extend the current ScotRail franchise beyond its first expiry date in 2022."

The party asserts that the rail service from Abellio has consistently left passengers exasperated and successive transport ministers under pressure.

Recent performance figures showed the operator recorded its worst performance time for August/September since taking over the franchise in 2015, despite the introduction of a remedial plan earlier this year to improve punctuality.

The party says that if the SNP Government wants to extended the franchise it would need to begin work on the negotiations from the end of this month and conclude them by the end of March. However, if Labour's motion is successful the Government would come under extreme pressure to issue a "no rebasing notice", meaning the franchise would expire in 2022.

Meanwhile Scotrail have claimed that almost 90% of their trains arrived on time in the most recent four week period from 18 August to 14 September 2019. They say that 89.6% of train services arrived within 4 minutes and 59 seconds of their scheduled arrival time. But they admitted that the average performance for the year was lower at 87.4% blaming

external incidents for the performance. The incidents which caused most disruption included

- A customer pulling the emergency alarm on a service leaving Glasgow Central, having a severe impact on multiple routes.
- An incident on the railway at the Forth Bridge.
- An incident requiring the emergency services at Falkirk Grahamston.

Alex Hynes, Managing Director of Scotland's Railway, said: "It is encouraging to see an improvement for our customers, but even though nine out of ten trains running on time is good, we know there is more to do to keep the country moving.

"I understand and share their frustration when things don't go to plan, and everyone across Scotland's Railway is working round the clock to deliver the service our customers expect and deserve."

Scottish Labour transport spokesperson Colin Smyth said: "Having repeatedly moved the goalposts to make allowances for a succession of failures, it's now decision time for the SNP government over whether they extend Abellio's franchise.

"If they do extend it, it would mean another three years of performance failures, delays to infrastructure projects and chaos at the most crucial of times for the railway.

"The very least SNP ministers can do is ensure the franchise is handed back at the first expiry date in 2022. Many passengers think Abellio is well past its expiry date already."