

Railfuture
Campaigning by the Railway Development
Society Limited

To
Department for Constitutional Affairs,
Information Rights Division,
Sixth Floor,
Selbourne House
105, Victoria Street,
London.
SW1E 6QT

From
Rowland Pittard,
Director,
Railfuture,

04-03-07

Dear Sir,
Freedom of Information Act Consultation

I write on behalf of the Board and members of Railfuture.

Railfuture is a volunteer run, not for profit and non- political party company, limited by guarantee, that campaigns for improved rail services and better integration with other modes of transport. We note that the consultation document acknowledges that the campaign groups and researchers will be among those who will suffer the greatest impact of the new proposals.

It is essential that the organization is well informed to ensure that it puts forward constructive suggestions for the improvement of rail services and that its members are also fully briefed with regard to transport proposals and developments. It is important that Railfuture's publications and submissions to consultation are accurate and informative.

It is already difficult to obtain quality essential information because of the large number of organizations involved in the provision of rail transport. Many of the Train Operating Companies use commercial sensitivity to hide information from both passengers and campaigners. Devolution and the formation of transport consortia has increased the number of organizations involved in delivering rail services.

With large amounts of public money being given to provide rail transport it is important that there is as much transparency as possible and decisions affecting railways must not be taken behind closed doors at both national and local levels. The changes will undermine trust in the work and accountability of public authorities.

We note that the restrictions proposed do not take into account the public interest in the information concerned, since the Government has made no assessment of the public benefit that would be lost by allowing requests for information to be refused. We consider that this assessment should have been made before commencing consultation.

The quality of press releases is frequently poor with very little detail. There is rarely any quality back up information readily available. The availability of more detailed information would reduce the need for many requests, in some cases duplicated, for information.

Railfuture considers that it is unacceptable to restrict the availability of information further in a supposedly democratic society. The proposals could greatly inhibit the organization's work on behalf of rail travelers in the United Kingdom and we ask you to withdraw the proposals.

Yours faithfully,

Rowland Pittard
Director

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