

railfuture SCOTTISH BRANCH NOTES

No 57: April 2004

Spring Meeting - Saturday 17th April at 14:00

in The Royal Overseas League, 100 Princes Street, Edinburgh

Speaker: Bob McLellan (Fife Council)

Subject: How public transport is progressing in Fife - especially rail

followed after a short coffee break by

Branch AGM

Agenda:

- Reports from Office-Bearers (Chair, Secretary, Treasurer, Membership)
- General Discussion – a chance for members to ask questions, and to provide guidance to the Committee for policy and activity for the coming year
- Election of Office-Bearers

We do want an active and varied committee, and new volunteers for office or committee membership will be welcomed. Have you considered whether you could bring anything to the Committee?

OPEN MEETING DEC 13th 2003

Summary Notes

Airport Link

The main discussion item at this meeting was the proposal for the new station to serve Edinburgh Airport.

Of course, the key point was raised about the 'Necessity for air travel' especially for internal UK flights. If the key long-distance UK rail routes could be improved in journey times and reliability, then a lot of the demand for air services could fall. It was suggested that quite a lot of the impetus could be to do with image – Edinburgh is a Capital City and therefore needs a prestige airport, but the current image is of "Edinburgh=bus; Glasgow=charter flights" so we must upgrade the image of Edinburgh Airport. There was even a cynical view expressed that perhaps the Scottish Executive had offered £0.5bn thinking that it might not be taken up – a political gesture! And it was noted that the cost per mile would be more than that of the Channel Tunnel.

As for the proposal for a tunnel to get a new line under the runway, the question of technical obstacles was raised about gradients involving the runway, the River Almond and joining the existing line near Dalmeny. And since that meeting there have been the proposals for a second runway, which would exacerbate these difficulties.

On a more positive note, and to try to suggest some resolution, we asked what analysis has been done on the number of journeys to the Airport and their origins. The proposed station could be another Edinburgh Park with all users from the North having to travel in to Haymarket and back out on a Glasgow/Dunblane train to get to the Airport.

Our suggestion was to locate the station at Turnhouse. The positive advantages of this would be:

- no tunnel required
- considerable cost savings
- station would be able to serve all routes to/from Edinburgh to the west and north (except Bathgate & the Shotts line)

Note:

- this would involve the construction of a 'Dalmeny chord' which could pass the eastern end of the runway and then curve round gently to join the Dalmeny-Winchburgh line
- it would remove the expensive and difficult tunnelling

Dr Bob McLellan

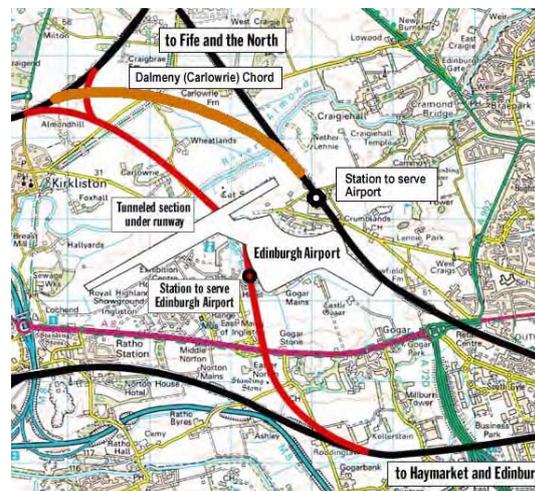
He is presently employed as Head of Transportation Services, Fife Council. He graduated with a BSc (Hons) in Civil Engineering from Strathclyde University, Glasgow 1978-82. Thereafter, he worked for Lothian Regional Council in Edinburgh in 1982 as a Graduate Civil Engineer and progressed to Assistant Director of Transportation, a post he held between 1993 and 1995 when he moved to Angus Council as Director of Roads. In 2001 he moved to his current post in Fife.

He has a doctorate (PhD) in project/construction management which he undertook on a part-time basis between 1988 and 1994, again at Strathclyde University, Glasgow.

He is a Fellow of the Institution of Civil Engineers, a Fellow of the Institute of Highways and Transportation and a Fellow of the Institute of Asphalt Technology.

He is currently Chair of the Management team of the South East of Scotland Transport Partnership (SESTRAN) which comprises 9 Local Authorities and the Forth Estuary Transport Authority (FETA).

He has previously (2000) been Chair of the Association of Municipal Engineers in Scotland (AME) and has held key roles within the Society for Chief Officers of Transportation in Scotland (SCOTS), most recently as Chair of their Engineering Committee (2003).



- while Glasgow, Dunblane, Aberdeen, Inverness, Fife Circle trains would all pass through a Turnhouse station, not every train would need to stop there

It was agreed to produce a paper on the Airport Link jointly by Rail-Future Scotland and TRANSform Scotland

Waverley

This topic at our December meeting was rather buried by the discussions about the Airport link, but it is worth noting that Kenny MacAskill (MSP Lothians) had an article in the Scotsman on December 4th headed "Waverley redevelopment is too important to be stuck in a siding", but that's where it seems to be with weeds growing up through the structure. He is concerned that a 'second-class ticket may be purchased' – that necessary upgrades for disabled may be done, but that the necessary capacity upgrades may be postponed. He argues that Waverley is centre-stage in a World Heritage City in all sorts of ways – as a travel gateway, as a part of the landscape, a showcase for the nation and a symbol of commitment to public transport. He concludes that if the SRA is not prepared to fund the project, then it's time for powers over railways to be devolved to Scotland.

Stranraer Ferry

The effect of this moving to Cairn Ryan on the Stranraer railhead was discussed. There is a possibility that the rail service may terminate at Girvan with a bus service to Stranraer. Again research needs to be done into current usage: who uses the train – the locals or ferry passengers? Could the rail be extended/diverted to Cairn Ryan (there was a branch to Cairn Ryan during the war)?

Letter to the Editor

Installation of ticket barriers

Dear Mike,

The impending completion of ticket barrier installation is now becoming very obvious at Waverley Station. While it is laudable that Scotrail should seek to cut down on fare evasion is this really the only way to accomplish that? It seems to be the equivalent of using a sledgehammer to crack a nut. For many years we as passengers and railway campaigners were asking for 'open stations' both to make boarding easier and to encourage more people to use trains. British Rail did eventually achieve this in the 1980s; perhaps that was naïve and the new openness became an open invitation for cheats. Nevertheless it is disappointing that the on-train checking and selling of tickets has not been able to prevent fare evasion.

My concern is that by installing permanent barriers at Waverley, Haymarket and Glasgow Queen Street passengers will be delayed or prevented from making connections either at the same station or elsewhere – particularly in Glasgow.

Due to the layout of the station it is not clear how connecting passengers are to be accommodated at Waverley. It appears that the 'Intercity' platforms 1,10,11 and 19 are to be fenced off from the Scotrail platforms with a gate between. What is not clear is how the flow of passengers between these sectors is to be managed and will arriving GNER or Virgin passengers who have already had their tickets checked on the train have to undergo a further examination at these gates? This could be a considerable inconvenience if they were trying to catch an onward connection to Inverness or Bathgate etc.

There does not seem to have been any public consultation on either the principle of ticket barriers nor, more importantly, on the practical aspects of implementing their use. When are we going to see an (illustrated) explanation of what the new layout and plan for the routing of connecting passengers is going to look like?

In these days when public perception is king it looks like passengers are being presented with a *fait accompli* – take it or leave it seems to be the underlying attitude. If there is a plan for dealing with the above questions **now** would be a good time to reveal it!

Regards

Charlie Niven

Editor's Answer:

I believe that one of the main arguments for having the barriers is that many travellers who board at unmanned stations close to Edinburgh do not have a chance on a busy train to buy a ticket during the journey. Until they alight at Waverley they are not deliberately evading paying a fare, but the moment they get off the train the attitude is 'They didn't make enough effort to get the fare from me, why should I now add to my journey time by going to the ticket office'.

My solution to this would be to have ticket machines at all stations, and require all passengers to already have a valid ticket before boarding the train. Only a faulty machine would be an excuse. I can see the difficulties – I board at Brunstane and want a through ticket to Plymouth and the machine can't see beyond Glasgow, or a hundred other cases, but I can also see the problem of one who boards at South Gyle during the morning rush-hour and wants only a ticket to Waverley, how does the conductor get to him?

I have no inside information on how the Waverley Wall is really going to work, but here's a little personal experience. I was waiting on Platform 19 for the 1700 to London two weeks ago. It was delayed – we were later told due to a) vandalism on the line near Motherwell and b) a foul with another train at Carstairs. (Nothing to do with this story, but they then brought the 1700 Glasgow train in to Platform 1. This then broke down and another 3-car set had to be brought in to tow away the 6 broken down ones!)

While we were watching this spectacle – by this time already 1725 – it was announced that our train would come in to Platform 11. Those of us who were up at the eastern end of Platform 19 started heading for the half-built barriers by way of Platform 17. Just as we passed the ticket sellers, I hesitated, thinking 'Why go out to the concourse and back up Platform 11?' Fortunately a ticket-seller realised what I was about to do, and told me there was a fence and I would need to go round the long way. So, yes you have correctly identified a problem. The next evening, when I returned and we pulled in to Platform 11 at 2257, the gate through to Platform 12 was open and unmanned. So draw whatever conclusions you like.

I don't know what consultation has been done, and I'm sure that you have only scratched the surface of the possible operational difficulties. Does anyone have any more information? The Scotrail web site now has full information on how the system is intended to work (www.scotrail.co.uk) and by the time you read this they will be in operation at Queen Street and Haymarket.

Editor



SE staff waiting for the official opening party to arrive from Waverley

EDINBURGH PARK

The week before our last meeting on December 13th Edinburgh Park station opened – in a temperature of -5°C. As far as the functionality of the station is concerned, that temperature seems to represent the enthusiasm of a lot of our members. The station is there, season ticket offers are in place, but tough if you are coming from further west than Falkirk. No Glasgow-Edinburgh trains stop there. Anyone from Glasgow wanting the Park has to travel on to Haymarket and then get another train back, and obviously repeat the process on the return journey. "Thanks, but no thanks, I'll use the car" is likely to be the response. The Dunblane and Bathgate trains do call at Edinburgh Park.

The weather was so unfriendly that the official party went straight into the marquee for the speeches and the plaque was surreptitiously unveiled afterwards while all the journalists, including the RailFuture photographer, were enjoying breakfast in the marquee!



Andrew Burns, Jack McConnell & Minister Nicol Stephen at the opening of Edinburgh Park Station

Late News: SAPT AGM on SATURDAY 27th MARCH 2004 at 10.30 hrs in the GLASGOW QUALITY HOTEL (Glasgow Central Station). Chris Harvie will be in the Chair. Coffee/tea available at 10.00 hrs.

This will be a good opportunity to hear about the latest SPT ideas for Glasgow CrossRail, Glasgow Airport Rail link, Light Rail to the Glasgow waterfront developments, etc.

Councillor Watson has also been involved in defending the threatened West Coast upgrade to Scotland, and we may hear the latest on this.

More details on www.sapt.org.uk

THE FORTH TUNNEL

In year 2001 there was a brief flurry of interest in a tunnel under the Firth of Forth but it was met with widespread ridicule. Should it have been so quickly rejected in terms of a long-term future transport network for Scotland?

The basic design proposed is an 11.6 miles route of all-purpose railway, almost all in tunnel, between Edinburgh Waverley and Kirkcaldy. Is it possible? What are its costs? How would it work?

The greatest water depth of the firth on the intended line is approximately 50 metres but this is close to the Fife Coast which necessitates a steep gradient. The rest of the Firth is relatively shallow but with thick deposits of drift, i.e. not solid rock. There is a buried drift channel down to 80 metres just off the Lothian Coast which is surprising as Leith Harbour is built on quite shallow solid rock. The end points at Kirkcaldy and Edinburgh Waverley are quite high at 20 metres and 45 metres respectively above sea level. If the buried drift channel is suitable for tunnelling then a maximum gradient of 1 in 60 is possible and quite suitable for ordinary train operation but if the drift proves unsuitable then gradients of 1 in 40 would be required. The geology consists of strata of Carboniferous age with some igneous intrusions and faults. This type of geology was well known in the deep coal mines of the area but less kind to tunnellers than that of the Straits of Dover. An immersed tube tunnel would be challenged by the steep gradients into the deep channel off the Fife Coast and would have to marry into a bored tunnel at least on the Lothian side. Interestingly a bored tunnel could make use of the ex-mining skills of the area while an immersed tube tunnel would make more use of ship-building and North Sea oil skills.

A major consideration is that of construction sites without which the project becomes even more expensive and impracticable. Major construction sites would be required at Abbeyhill, on the seaward side of Leith Harbour and West of Kirkcaldy where the former Seafield Colliery site would have been ideal but is now rapidly being covered by expensive housing.

Some details of stations and design can be envisaged. Kirkcaldy Station is almost suitable at present. A west facing turn-back bay would be beneficial and the relatively wide track area to the east of the station could provide holding loops. Car parking capacity, already large, could prove insufficient. At Waverley the overall capacity appears sufficient as few extra trains are envisaged but longer trains with a major increase in passenger numbers and a shift to the east end of the station balancing train movements. The present two track capacity through the Calton Hill Tunnels is insufficient even for predicted growth without the Forth Tunnel. Therefore either additional tunnels under Calton Hill would be required or the existing tunnels will require to be enlarged and restored to four track operation. There are major cost and operational advantages in using the existing route as far as Abbeyhill although incurring slightly steeper gradients north of Abbeyhill where the main tunnel would start. A major, deep and expensive station is recommended at Leith Harbour or Ocean Terminal to serve the massive developments which are being promoted there despite (or perhaps because of) the lack of good existing public transport infrastructure. Additional stations could be considered at Kirkcaldy West for park and ride capacity and at Leith Central, Easter Road or Abbeyhill although it is probably better to serve these last three by surface tram systems. A single line chord would allow access from the East Coast Main Line northwards into the main tunnel.

The costs depend on a whole range of issues but on a pro rata basis from the Channel Tunnel in terms of being shorter, smaller diameters, less complex but with more difficult geology the starting estimate is one billion (£1 000 000 000). Railways in Scotland do not make a profit so this tunnel, while improving railway revenue and operational costs, could not be financed from profits. Therefore the benefits and avoidable costs must be considered. The benefit is in bringing East Fife and points north 20 minutes closer to Edinburgh (Kirkcaldy to Edinburgh in 10 minutes?) and thereby vastly reducing the pressure of car traffic along the coast and into Edinburgh. While there is no evidence (no commercial accounts) to indicate that roads in Scotland make a profit either there has been an ongoing campaign to build a second Forth Road Bridge. It appears in different disguises, the latest being as a bridge for trams, but the underlying reason is a belief in increased road building and increased car use. To build a new bridge AND the extra motorway and urban expressways it would require would approach a billion. This cost could be avoided by building the rail tunnel. The other advantages are in serving Leith, one of Scotland's most rapidly expanding centres, and in providing extra capacity and an emergency alternative to the existing Forth Railway Bridge, built with pre-Titanic technology and surely requiring major repair work in the coming decades.

A drive through car tunnel would be estimated at 4 billion and a car shuttle tunnel some 2 billion taking into account of the necessary road works. It is doubtful if Edinburgh could accommodate this extra car traffic and there would be no environmental benefit.

Train operation is on the basis of overhead electrification as far as Kirkcaldy or possibly Thornton Yard for freight trains. The ultimate goal is electrification to Aberdeen for which the case is made much stronger by the tunnel. However the tunnel project itself is independent of any further electrification. Electrical multiple units may be suitable as far as Kirkcaldy but the proposal is for 6-car trains push-pulled by electro diesel locomotives, not totally dissimilar from those used in the USA for commuter trains into New York. This would allow trains to continue to Aberdeen and Inverness without engine change and although the diesel engines would be switched off in the tunnel they would be a safety consideration in case of electricity supply failure. The idea is to get away from the present rattlecar underfloor engine design of train and provide a quiet, smooth, roomy environment for passengers.

The main advantage is the reduction in journey time of 20 minutes from East Fife, Perth, Inverness, Dundee and Aberdeen to Edinburgh. If the tunnel trains had the same performance as existing trains then Aberdeen would be almost 2 hours and Inverness almost 3 hours from Edinburgh. The journey time reduction would strengthen the case for re-opening the lines to St Andrews and Methil. A ten minute frequency is proposed with an hourly cycle of trains to Dundee/Aberdeen, Kirkcaldy/Methil, Perth/Inverness, Dundee/Arbroath, Kirkcaldy/St Andrews, Kirkcaldy/Fife Circle, Dundee/Aberdeen with trains stopping at Leith and leaving sufficient time for GNER, Virgin and Freight although with the possibility of their having to be piloted by electric locomotives.

Various social and economic advantages are apparent for Edinburgh, East Fife and Dundee but the overall change would have to be carefully assessed in the same way that it would have to be assessed for any new major road capacity increase on the route. Could a billion pounds be spent elsewhere on the railway? It would put many communities back on the rail system if spent on smaller scale projects. However, all projects have to be assessed on their own merits and if the billion is not spent on a new Forth rail crossing it will surely be spent on a new Forth motorway crossing.

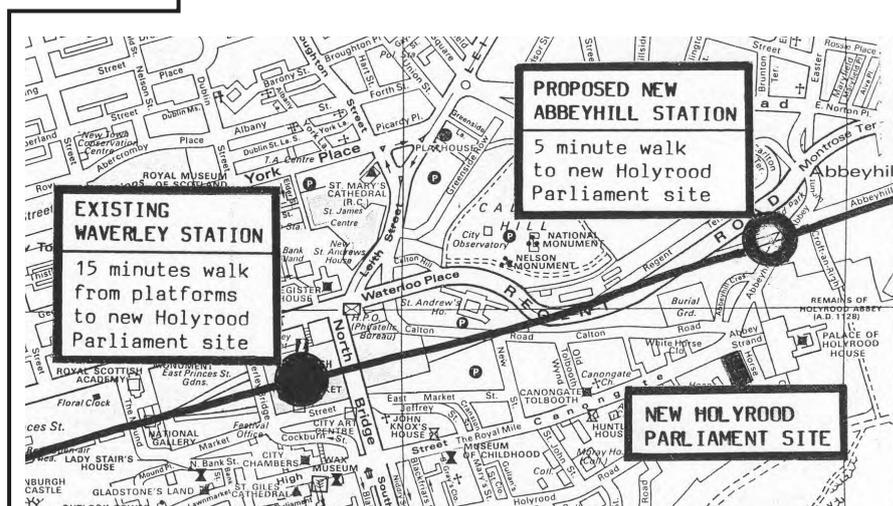
RB. April 1st

Abbeyhill Station

For over 5 years RailFuture Scotland has been pressing for the provision of a station on the ECML only 5 minutes' walk away from the Parliament building. We said then that perhaps there was no chance of having it ready for the opening of the Holyrood building, but as that date has been postponed again and again, so has any progress on the provision of a station. If prestige and image are important for Edinburgh Airport and Edinburgh Park, then so they should be for the Scottish Parliament. Just a few of the £430m spent on the Parliament building could have been spent on providing the MSPs with a platform for their feet as well as their political pronouncements. And many of them would be prepared to take a 5-minute walk, whereas I guess that many will take a taxi to Waverley.

The Times (March 12th) refers in the Fraser enquiry to an "It wisnae me" culture in relation to responsibilities for the increasing cost of the Parliament building. Ken Sutherland, in an article in Scotland on Sunday (Nov 2003) puts it more delicately when describing Abbeyhill -

"Yet although the required £8m (Railtrack estimate) Abbeyhill Station received backing in 2001 from a cross-party group of MSPs, further progress was stifled by the Pontius Pilate leadership of the then Scottish Executive which postured 'that such a transport link was not their responsibility'."



SNIPPETS

Rising Costs

It's not only the Parliament building – Nicol Stephen, speaking to rail industry leaders at a conference in December, said that industry and government had to do better to deliver major schemes. The Stirling-Alloa line was priced at £13m in 1999, but is now estimated at £37m when it opens in 2005. The Larkhall-Milngavie project has increased by 21% from £28m to £34.5m. He called on the SRA to invest more in Scotland, and pointed out that if it had been left to the SRA the Edinburgh and Glasgow airport links, the Waverley line and several other schemes would not have been started.

Train competition

In the 'car v. train' battle two key factors are convenience and overall journey time. For the train the time is a combination of number of stops and acceleration rate. The main argument against having more trains stopping at Edinburgh Park (now) and Edinburgh Airport (future) is the increased journey times for which the lines do not have the capacity. The solution of electrification is dismissed on the grounds of "difficulties" and "should be left for the next franchise".

Train v. Tram

The first draft of Edinburgh Tram Line 3 is now revealed. At the moment it goes from the east end of Princes Street out through Newington to the Royal Infirmary, then turns back NE to Craigmiller and terminates at Newcraighall Park-and-Ride. This will serve the shopping centres at Kinnaird Park and Fort Kinnaird, but it will also rival the Edinburgh Crossrail service. In terms of time there's no competition between a train from Newcraighall to Waverley (10 minutes) and a tram which goes by the route described above (20 minutes plus?), but the tram service will be every 6 minutes, while the trains are every 30 minutes. perhaps these two factors even out, and both will have a value.

Green light for railway link

BBC News reported (Feb 24th)

Work is starting on the first new rail link north of the border since the Argyle line in 1979.

Under the Larkhall to Milngavie project, four new stations will be added to the network.

The Strathclyde Passenger Transport scheme will cost a total of £35m, and is due to be fully operational by the year 2005.

As early as December 2004, four trains per hour will be running from Hamilton to Anderston.

SPT chairman Alistair Watson said: "To get this project to the construction stage is an achievement and testimony to the focus and hard work by our team of business partners.

Has anyone actually seen a bulldozer in action yet? Excuse me if after all this time I am sceptical about official announcements! [Ed.]

The Far North Line

Towards the end of 2003 there were stirrings of activity both in the press and between interested parties on the futures of this line and on the Dornoch link. A number of local politicians and trade union reps. are showing support for action to ensure that the line is modified to meet real needs. At the moment it has been described as "handicapped and hopelessly uncompetitive" north of Tain with passengers having to endure the hour-long Lairg loop between Tain and Golspie. The needs of 19th century lairds are no longer as important as those of the main townships up the east coast, and there are alternatives which could serve the rural communities in the Lairg area. The average speed of trains between Inverness and Caithness is 25 mph. Shortening the route by 27 miles and making track improvements on the rest would considerably shorten the journey time and reduce maintenance costs. With local MSPs and RMT urging that the Dornoch link should be implemented, there is now renewed pressure on the Scottish Executive to act.

An HIE report published on March 16th adds fuel to the campaign. Below is how BBC news reported it, and the full reports can be downloaded (PDF format) from <http://www.hie.co.uk/rail-report-2004.htm> while there is a short summary on <http://www.hie.co.uk/news.htm>

Study finds Highland rail boom

A report published by Highlands and Islands Enterprise has called for more investment in rural rail services. The independent study found passenger numbers on some services have increased by up to 50%. HIE said it would use the findings to challenge perceptions that the rural lines were underused and a waste of public money. One of the largest rises in traffic has been on the Far North Line, between Inverness and Thurso and Wick.

The report, carried out by consultants Steer Davies Gleave, pointed out that rail services kept many businesses viable and helped retain population in the more remote areas. HIE's transport policy manager Tom Matthew said the research underlined the contribution that rail services already made to the region's well-being, as well as the potential benefits of further improvements. Speaking in Inverness, he said: "There is a perception in some quarters of railway network in terminal decline and both at UK and Scottish levels there is pressure to focus investment on urban rail services." The study found increasing demand for rail travel on most of the Highland lines.

New trains

The top performance on the Far North Line was attributed to the introduction of a commuter service between Tain and Inverness, and the reopening of Beaulieu station, near Inverness. The consultants also calculated that the growth in rail freight in the region had removed the equivalent of more than 25,000 lorry loads from the road network. The report's publication coincided with an announcement from Transport Minister Nicol Stephen that one of Scotland's busiest commuter routes will be first to benefit from the introduction of 29 new trains in Scotland. The first batch of eight trains, each costing £4m, is to be introduced on the Glasgow to Edinburgh line this week.

Mr Stephen made the announcement as he visited the site of the Eastfield train depot in Glasgow, which is being reopened with £14m of Scottish Executive investment. Eastfield is being brought back into use 10 years after its initial closure to clean and store the new trains. Mr Stephen said: "By increasing capacity and improving journey quality we are determined to make public transport a more attractive option."

When all of the trains have been delivered they will be used on services to Fife, Dunblane, Bathgate, Inverness and Aberdeen.

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