

Autumn Meeting
Sat 29th October at 14:00
in Royal Over-Seas League, 100 Princes St., Edinburgh
Speaker: James King
The RPC - past & present

Programme:

- Talk by James King
- Questions to the speaker
- Coffee/Tea break
- General Discussion - a chance for members to ask questions, and to provide guidance to the Committee on activity until the next AGM

ROSL: Just west of Frederick Street junction with Princes St.

James King: After a successful career in advertising and marketing James established his own strategic business and marketing consultancy in 1996, which he continues to run today. He is the Scottish member of the new Rail Passenger Council, before which he was a member of the now defunct Rail Passenger Committee Scotland. He is also the Scottish Member of the British Transport Police Authority and a former Vice Chair of Rail Action Group East of Scotland (RAGES). His interest in rail was established in student days when he campaigned for the retention of the Kyle line.

Specials

The GOLFLINK service operated during this year's Open Championship has been hailed a tremendous success by the organising partner agencies and the travelling public alike.



GOLFLINK was operated by Fife Council Transportation Services, Fife Police and British Transport police, in partnership with First ScotRail, GNER, Virgin Trains and Stagecoach. The service offered an integrated ticket allowing visitors to The Open to board a train anywhere in Scotland and travel to Leuchars Railway Station and then be transported by police escort on convoys of buses, straight to the Old Course in St Andrews.

During the period of operation, almost 30,000 visitors used the GOLFLINK service which was 15% of the visitors to the Championship. Just think - if they could have got right into St Andrews on the train....

partnerships

It happened by chance, but it's become obvious as material has been gathered for this issue that the theme is *partnership*. MSPs from different parties, campaigning organisations, Local Authorities, Regional Transport groups, Train Operating Companies, Bus Operating Companies, Road Haulage, walkers, cyclists, Scottish Executive, community groups and just ordinary rail users have all been meeting together, talking to each other, and actually doing things together!

There's not enough money, there's not enough time, there are some disagreements and setbacks but there's also a lot of goodwill.

As a campaigning group we need to keep pushing, but we have to be seen to be making a useful and positive contribution to finding transport solutions. We have to examine our policies and focus on key issues to help to change the things which can be changed while still having a vision of the perfect solution.

Apart from writing letters to the Secretary, members don't get much of a chance to meet to discuss either current issues or overall policy. With the new powers over rail which the Scottish Government now has, while RailFuture Scotland will not deviate from the policies of RailFuture (UK) there will be differences in the detail. The two open meetings we have in Spring and Autumn are your chance to meet other members and to talk about these things. The second half of the session is just as important as listening to the speaker. Please do try to come along on October 29th.

STRATEGIES - NATIONAL AND REGIONAL

Partnership and cooperation has been the theme of several conferences recently. The Scottish Executive arranged a series to inform their compilation of the National Transport Strategy (due for publication Oct-Dec). They had themed conferences on topics such as Transport and Health, Transport and Walking and Cycling, Sustainable Transport etc. Although they did not allow a lot of time for questions, there were workshop sessions (also quite short) and notes were taken. We shall see soon how much of what was said gets incorporated into the Strategy. Consultation will run for a few months once it is published. This National Strategy of course will cascade down to the Regional Transport Strategies which have to be revised.

The Regions have also been having Conferences, but the main topic at some of these has been deciding on the composition of the members of the boards. The Council Representatives will be voting members, but some are not happy with the proposed number of reps. from each council, and it appears that the non-elected members may at the discretion of the Executive be given votes on certain issues, but they may not be allowed to vote at all. Also the numbers will be very limited. For example at the Sustran conference there was agreement that the Health Boards should be represented (as the constitution requires that they should be involved), and agreement that there should be a representative of user groups/campaign groups, but it looks as if one person may have to represent ALL of this sector - commuters, holiday-makers, cyclists, walkers, and everything else. So how do we select this polymath?

Organising special trains is more difficult with the overcrowded lines we have today, but ScotRail managed some late-night specials for the Edinburgh Festival, and all the relevant ToCs were well-prepared for the huge numbers which came to Edinburgh for the G8 rally in July. Many came in groups by private coach, some cycled all the way from London and Birmingham, but many more must have come by train.

Celebrating 150 years

Railfuture members are sometimes accused of being closet anoraked train-spotters, but there are times when it's good to be proud of our rail history. In July there was an historical re-enactment in the north of Scotland to mark the 150 year anniversary of the Inverness and Nairn railway.

The railway was the first standard gauge public railway line built in Scotland back in 1855 and the ceremony was an exact recreation of that which took place 150 years ago.

The commemoration was organised by Highland Rail Heritage and the Highland Rail Partnership, alongside First ScotRail and other industry partners to celebrate the history, success and future of the line.

The [2005] event was an auspicious occasion that began with a breakfast, courtesy of GNER at the Royal Highland Hotel in Inverness. At 10.25, guests were led by a piper and the Florian Players, all dressed in full Victorian costume, to platform 2 at Inverness Station where the train naming ceremony took place at 10.30. The name plate at the front of the 158720 unit, which read 'Inverness and Nairn Railway 150 Years' was unveiled by Mrs Christine Davis, a senior member of the Rail Passengers Committee for Scotland.

Mrs Davis and invited guests then boarded the newly named train, which formed the 10.44 from Inverness to Nairn. At Nairn, Provost A. S Parks and the Area Committee of Nairn hosted a plaque unveiling ceremony on the concourse, carried out by Her Grace the Countess of Seafield. It was an earlier Countess of Seafield who cut the first sod for the new line in 1854 and was amongst the first passengers on the line when it opened in 1855. Tom Coombs, Nairn event organiser and acting station master for the day, then introduced Mary Dickson and Ron McAulay, Route Director of Network Rail who both said a few words commemorating the occasion.

To complete the event, an extensive buffet was hosted at Nairn Museum, where photographs and a time path through the life of the Inverness and Nairn railway were on display.

Mary Dickson commented, "It's was real honour to be involved in an event such as this, which illustrated not only the history in the Highland railway but people's pride in and support for it. This was the first link in Scotland's railway as we see it today and this was a great opportunity to highlight how it has developed since then, as well as witness the enthusiasm that people have to commemorate it."

Editor's Comment: Beats the coffee and Danish pastries we get at ceremonies these days!!

HIGHLAND TALES

Railfuture is still campaigning for an improved service to Caithness, and the campaign gets a lot of coverage in the local press, but there seems to be no movement from those who control major projects, and the recent additional minutes added to the schedules make the journey one of the slowest in the UK.

However, there is some good news from the north, and the Tain story show the effect of concerted local community action to provide a better service as well as environment for commuters. Projects like this, which do not involve huge sums of money, work well when supported by all the parties involved. The Rannoch story is fluffier - more for the benefit of visitors - but again making the station a more attractive place.

TAIN RAILWAY STATION BACK ON TRACK

Tain railway station has become one of the first in Scotland to benefit from a host of new passenger facilities as part of First ScotRail's station investment plan.

Thanks to a £112,000 investment from rail organisations, public and community networks, disabled passengers now have step-free access to platforms - which complies with new disability legislation - plus special parking facilities right beside the station. A new turning circle has been constructed, making it easier for drivers to drop off friends and family. A new, well-lit waiting shelter and the installation of CCTV cameras linked to the Tain town centre system will improve passenger comfort and security. Station grounds have also been spruced up, flowerbeds planted, and the main buildings and outbuildings painted and secured. The Tain Initiative is contributing a community noticeboard.

The improvements have been completed and financed through a partnership between First ScotRail, HITRANS (Highlands and Islands Strategic Transport Partnership), Highland Rail Partnership and Network Rail.

Doug Blue, First ScotRail's area manager, north, said, "This shows what can be achieved by working together. There are still some projects in the pipeline such as the installation of cycle storage facilities and better lighting throughout the station. The refurbished station is now a credit to the town and is ready to meet the needs of the growing number of passengers who use the station. For example, December 2005 will see the launch of 'Invernet', a First ScotRail commuter service that will serve areas around Inverness with three peak-time daily services between Inverness and Tain, and twice daily between Inverness and Invergordon at off-peak times."

RANNOCH ADOPTED

On Thursday 15 September, the highly regarded botanist, writer and broadcaster, Professor David Bellamy, officially opened a new visitor centre at Rannoch Station and unveiled a plaque to mark the occasion. He was joined by son, Rufus and Peter Brewer of Normanhurst Enterprises, who put forward the idea of the visitor centre. Also at the event were John Boyle of the Railway Heritage Trust and James Rattray of Explore Scotland.



The opening of the new centre follows the launch of First ScotRail's 'Adopt a Station' scheme, which is designed to invite individuals and community groups to submit plans of how they think their local station could be improved. The rail operating company hopes that this new centre will be just one of many initiatives geared towards enhancing stations' environments, which will benefit passengers overall journey experience.

The project at Rannoch has provided an opportunity to breathe life back into this unmanned station. Visitors to the centre will discover a wealth of attractive displays depicting the natural history of the stunning scenery within which the station building is situated. A dedicated display, situated in the signal box, covers the historical legacy of the station itself. A range of maps, nature guides and other publications to support the topics covered by the displays are available for purchase from the station tearoom and gift shop, whose friendly staff provide a welcoming point of contact for visitor information and travel advice.

First ScotRail's Commercial Director, Gordon Dewar, said, "The new visitor centre is a great addition to the station and provides an easily accessible opportunity for a wide range of information. Our 'Adopt a Station' scheme is designed to offer people the chance to enhance their local station either on a large scale such as this or more simply, through the introduction of floral baskets. There are a number of buildings at stations, currently unoccupied, which could be put to better use and we are looking for ways to do this."

LOCAL SERVICE on the WEST COAST MAIN LINE in SCOTLAND

Ralph Barker

In 1965 the West Coast Main Line in Scotland lost its local train services and most of its stations. Promises to provide a service using inter-city trains were not honoured. In July 2001 a feasibility study into the re-introduction of local trains was announced and only in July 2005 was a report made available. The Study was undertaken by consultants Atkins on behalf of lead partner Dumfries and Galloway Council and partner Strathclyde Passenger Transport, funded by a grant from Scottish Executive. The consultants seem to have worked hard for their money although there are apparent discrepancies and issues of concern with report. However, the main characteristic of the study is a complete lack of consultation with local people and their representatives and a very high degree of secrecy. The report recommended funding for the service on the basis of its cost benefit but warned that its financial performance was not good. The Scottish Executive has now decided against funding for the project as it now stands but is waiting for answers from the project partners. There are points of interest for all rail development campaigners.

The Study recommended a local train service between Glasgow and Carlisle (101 miles) serving some existing stations (Lockerbie, Carstairs and Motherwell) and re-opened stations (Symington and Beattock). The re-opened stations were restricted to two because this would allow a two-hourly cycle time for the trains between Glasgow and Carlisle. The Study believes additional stops would increase the cycle time and therefore increase train costs by much more than any extra revenue gained. The Study found a two hourly frequency and a two hour journey time, using typical 3 car electric trains, feasible within the present timetable and line capacity.

The social economic case was well researched and made using deprivation indices and transport exclusion. One discrepancy is that the areas of greatest deprivation are not the those where station re-openings are recommended. Also although the Study, quite rightly, emphasized that the 48 mile gap without a station between Carstairs and Lockerbie was the longest in Britain the recommendations only reduced this gap to 28 miles! However, two welcome findings were that exclusion deprivation was surprisingly high considering the communities were on the route of the West Coast Main Line AND the M74 Motorway and also that the main users of the train service would be people not presently in full-time employment.

The Study's low point was the low number of predicted train users. The Study estimated that most of the passengers would be from the existing station of Lockerbie and that the two re-opened stations would attract about 25 passengers each per day. This low number was reflected in the poor financial performance. The consultants had used their own formula for passenger estimates and justified it against the average of real results from a bundle of existing stations. However, the Study's own figures showed that the two nearest "control" stations, Lanark and Carlisle showed real results 300% higher than those predicted by the formula. This increase would have fed through to much better financial indices. It was thought that the consultants should have given a range of financial performance for the service.

The Study detailed the several very high costs a new service has to pay such as station use charges and congestion risk charges. They did not mention the payment some train services receive known as ORCATS and whether it would be applicable or not. They also did not compare the financial support required with that for other train services and, in particular, the very poor financial performance of the long distance trains on the West Coast Main Line!

There were some other points such as not being able to re-open stations on curves because of regulations about the cant of the track which could affect many other re-opening schemes. Many local people are unhappy that they, personally had not been "Surveyed" by the consultants although it is doubtful if this makes much difference to the calculations. The consultants did say that no-one said they would use a station at X, Y or Z but made it clear that did not ask anyone in the communities at X, Y or Z! It is feared that the lack of communication means Scottish Executive will think the study an insignificant academic exercise and not realise that there are real people and real communities wanting their trains back. At the same time not only are those communities getting more and faster trains running right through their towns and villages without stopping but the line modernisation means more radio masts and more of that awful and unnecessary palisade fencing.

Cross-Party Groups merge

In Parliament there used to be a Cross-Party Group on Cycling and one on Railways. These have now merged into a Cross-Party Group on Sustainable Transport (many of the MSPs were members of both of the two old groups). Gordon Dewar was the speaker at the September meeting, where he gave a review of First ScotRail's first year. All those who questioned him paid tribute to things which ScotRail had achieved, some of them major successes, but many were small things which are noted by the passengers and appreciated. With the help of Network Rail staff he fielded a variety of questions as to how ScotRail intended to continue to improve the service. There does seem to be a new degree of cooperation between those who run the trains and those who manage the track, as well as between government and the rail people.

URGENT!!!

Have you heard about the Met Office plans to close their Scottish forecasting office, significantly reduce the number of 'regional' forecasters and centralise all their forecast and service production in Exeter ?

Alison Swiffin from Dundee wrote to the Secretary saying:

"I only recently discovered that the Aberdeen centre currently provides customised forecasts for ice, leaves and potential landslip for Network Rail through out Scotland. As a rail user I am therefore keen to see that we retain the best possible service which uses all the experience and local knowledge that has been built up by the Scottish team over the years.

"It is my understanding from Met Office Press releases etc that when the OpenRail product was launched in 2001 it was agreed between what was then Railtrack and the Met Office that due to the severity of the weather in Scotland responsibility for forecasts for the Scottish region would remain with the team of Scottish experts then located in Glasgow. <http://www.metoffice.gov.uk/corporate/pressoffice/2001/pr20010509.html>

"When all Scottish and Marine forecasting activities were combined at the Aberdeen weather centre (about 2 years ago) the responsibility for forecasts Scottish forecasts was once again retained within Scotland rather than transferred to the centralised team.

"The weather in Scotland has certainly not become any less severe and the latest research on climate change all seems to point to the fact that we can expect even more varied and extreme weather in the future. Our landscape and position at the forefront of most Atlantic weather systems also make Scottish weather particularly difficult to predict using even the latest computer models. I therefore find it a bit concerning that the Met Office are planning to close their Scottish forecasting centre. If these plans go ahead it would seem inevitable that not only will the provision and accountability for this and other services be removed from the area where they are used but also that much of the current expertise used to produce these Scottish forecasts will be lost.

"If you or any of your group share these concerns I would urge them to take Mr Touhig MP, the minister responsible for the final decision, up on his statement that he wants to hear from 'everyone and his uncle' re these plans and to express their concern to him, organise a petition of local rail users or maybe sign the existing e-petition at www.petitiononline.com/SCOTMET "

The consultation document can be downloaded from: http://www.mod.uk/linked_files/publications/foi/rr/meto/consultation_230605.pdf

and the minutes of the meeting that produced it from: http://www.mod.uk/linked_files/publications/foi/rr/meto/biacminutes.pdf

You have to get any comments in before 17th October. Please sign the e-petition.

snippets

Linking Glasgow Terminals

Thanks to investment by SPT there are now low-entry buses linking Glasgow Central, Queen Street and Buchanan St Bus Stations. This will be a great help to those with wheelchairs, buggies and the ubiquitous monster wheeled suitcases which seem to be obligatory for all rail passengers on the trains I go on. (I'm sure that a large part of the problem of luggage space on trains is that people no longer have to carry their luggage!)

New in Strathclyde

In Strathclyde there is the new station at Gartcosh, and the Vale of Leven RailLink provides a bonus in having a one-ticket journey to cover the train and bus connections to serve places in the Vale of Leven not directly on the line of the railway. This takes an existing train service and an existing bus service and coordinates the timings so that Central Glasgow to some of the smaller 'villages' can be as short as 45 minutes (often 90 minutes by car at peak times). Making the arrangements would have been easier because it was FirstBus and First ScotRail, but the same can be done elsewhere between two completely independent operators given the will. Sometimes it does happen, but why are there so many places where it does not? Even getting the timings for connections right can be done, having one ticket is an additional bonus.

322s back on North Berwick route

After their sojourn in East Anglia, the 322s are being refurbished (£3m) and brought back to be a dedicated North Berwick fleet. They will be here at least until 2011. They started to come into service in September 2005 and the refurbishment programme will be completed by autumn 2006.

Counting at Edinburgh Park

After just 12 months figures showed that the station was handling 1100 passengers a day. At its opening the figure projected after one year was 500 a day. There are connections with several bus services and also the owners of Edinburgh Park run an internal bus service to link with the station. Now that the Royal Bank's World Headquarters is open we can expect the numbers to increase significantly. If/When the Edinburgh Airport Rail Link is built and if/when Edinburgh-Glasgow trains stopped at the station patronage would soar.

Bed-time Reading

If you are looking for a good read, have you seen the SRA ECML Review published in June? It's a detailed description of all the activities on the East Coast line (interesting and readable in itself) linked to issues of how to deal with development and maintenance of a long and complex system. It can be downloaded from www.rail-reg.gov.uk/upload/pdf/ECML_Review.PDF

FRIENDS OF THE FAR NORTH LINE
AGM 19TH NOVEMBER

www.RailFutureScotland.org.uk

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All possible effort is made to ensure that facts in this newsletter are accurate. Please tell the editor of any inaccuracies.



RAIL USERS' CONFERENCE 5TH NOVEMBER 2005

Confirmed speakers include Brendan O'Friel, Chairman of the North West Public Transport Users' Forum and formerly Chairman of RPC (NW); Brian Simpson, until June 2004 a Euro MP and now Director of the North West Rail Campaign; John Mooney, RPC Passenger Link Director based in Manchester; Tony Young, formerly of Greater Manchester PTE, now an internationally-known light rail consultant and Trevor Garrod, Chairman European Passengers' Federation.

For the first time at a Railfuture conference there is an opportunity for members to meet up on the night before the conference (Friday 4 November) at about 8pm. We will choose a pub near to the venue and possibly go for a meal as well. If you are interested in meeting up please contact Jerry Alderson (email: jerry.alderon@virgin.net).

It's excellent value at £10 for Railfuture members and the first two representatives of affiliated user groups; £15 for others. This includes tea/coffee in the morning and afternoon. A buffet lunch is available for an extra £5.

The venue for the conference is the Mechanics Centre, 103 Princess St, Manchester M1 6DD. A 10-minute walk from Manchester Piccadilly and Manchester Oxford Road railway stations. Please don't wait for Railwatch to arrive with a booking form - book now! APEX train tickets now available for 5th November. A booking form/conference flyer can be downloaded from our website

www.railfuture.org.uk/tiki-index.php?page=Rail%20users%20conference

Stop Press

Kelvindale Station opened Sept 28th - a significant stage in the Larkhall-Milngavie programme.

S-A-K: Tavish Scott has announced a further £27.6m investment (18th August).

Opinions are those of the authors, and do not necessarily represent the policies of railfuture and railfuture Scotland.

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