

railfuture SCOTTISH BRANCH NOTES

No 66: October 2008

Autumn Meeting

Sat 15th November at 14:00

in Royal Over-Seas League, 100 Princes St., Edinburgh

Topic : Tram-Trains

what are they?

where is it appropriate to use them?

what benefits to users, to operators?

what are the limitations/disadvantages?

do they stifle development of 'real' trains [or 'real' trams]?

what would you want to see running on the tracks in this

picture?

etc. etc....

Programme:

- Talk - speaker Scott McIntosh of Mott MacDonald
- Questions to the speaker
- Coffee/Tea break
- Open Discussion - a chance for members to ask questions, and to provide guidance to the Committee for policy and activity for the future

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

Editorial

Autumn already - or is it winter? Certainly the time since our last meeting in spring and seems to have gone very quickly. In terms of railway campaigning, is this because there has been nothing happening? Well, on the surface, there may not seem to be much: there have been no major announcements of any new plans by the government or anyone else, there have been no new campaigns run by us or any other organisations, and no crisis meetings.

Of course, of concern to us is the fact that the Scottish Government/Transport Scotland, now driven by SNP policy, is very obviously pressing ahead with its road programme. We see this in the M74 extension and the AWPR - both of which are relentlessly driving ahead - and now increased activity in the EERR. The transport minister appears at conferences and makes the right kind of noises, but Transport Scotland seems reluctant to discuss anything other than roads. The Transport Scotland conference earlier this month did not show any new initiatives or inspire its delegates. On several issues, they were told to wait until the Strategic Transport Review is published and that publication has been delayed "until autumn".

Meanwhile, ordinary transport seems to have suffered more than normal disruption - on roads due to weather conditions, and especially in Edinburgh service upgrades of gas and water (not only in connection with tram installation), and on rail with strikes and also with line upgrades. The consolation to us is that most of the disruptions on the Edinburgh-Glasgow line have recently been in connection with the restitution of the Airdrie-Bathgate route. This very weekend as I'm writing this, a group of Glasgow cyclists (Go-Bike) possibly joined by a few Edinburgh ones (Spokes) are going to do the last ride on the Airdrie-Bathgate route before it begins to be dug up to put in the railway line. I must comment that cyclists are not at all happy that the route will be closed for the duration of the works and is not satisfied that the cycle way that will be built alongside the railway will be up to the standards that we look for.

In the last couple of weeks, the BBC seems to have rediscovered rail. There have been more than one series of programmes on a rail theme. One on walks along disused railways which have now been turned into a foot/cycle path has no real significance for transport. Another one is a rerun of Miles Kingston's 1986 series Steam Days - definitely one for the anoraks. But there was also Ian Hislop's review of Beeching - as usual with his documentary programmes, a perceptive analysis in this case of the shortsightedness and errors of Beeching's actions.



OBITUARIES

At our AGM David Guild volunteered to join our Committee. It was a shock to hear shortly afterwards of his sudden death. Ken Sutherland writes:

As a stalwart rail improvement campaigner, David will be well remembered locally in Edinburgh and across Scotland for his ongoing advocacy of the South Suburban Line reopening, the introduction of an Edinburgh Tram system, restoration of the Borders line, the Dornoch Rail Link, more carriage of railfreight, further electrification and the case for a new high speed Scotland-London line.

David's valuable support for extending the benefits of the National Concessionary Card scheme to rail travellers across Scotland was also something I also much valued.

His well informed, and cogently argued letters in the local and national Scottish/UK press were a considerable source of support and encouragement to others in Railfuture Scotland and related lobbying groups. In addition his efforts have, I believe, helped shape a more 'think positive' political attitude towards rail investment / expansion within Scotland, than is currently evident south of the Border.

It is with much sadness that we have to report that Douglas Smart (past Hon Secretary to RDS Scotland) died on October 5, 2008. Donald MacPhee writes:

Douglas will be remembered for the vigour of his campaigning as well as being an efficient Secretary to this committee. His activity did not diminish when he stood down as a committee member. He was very active in promoting the policies of the Green Party. He often wrote letters to newspapers (including Railwatch) and was frequently heard on radio phone in programmes. In his RDS Scotland days he famously got a mention in Hansard because of an exchange of correspondence with Sir N. Fairbairn MP where they both shared concerns about what was then the impending privatisation of the railways in Scotland. In more recent times Douglas gave evidence and got involved in submitting petitions to Scottish Parliament committees. He was also a keen follower of the fortunes of Falkirk Football Club and had long association with the Church of Scotland.

In the six months since our last meeting, however, members have continued campaigning activities - writing to rail companies, newspapers and politicians. A few weeks ago, we had a very lively committee meeting. There are several issues on the table at the moment where Railfuture does not yet seem to have a very clear policy. One of these is high-speed trains and a second one is tram-trains. When asked what Railfuture's line is on either of these, it's very difficult to say unequivocally either "yes, we are in favour" or "no, we are not in favour". There are many variables and many options, and the answer to the question depends very much on which of these variables and options are selected or incorporated into the plan or the question. At that committee meeting, two protagonists had a very lively interchange on the subject of high-speed trains. I even suggested that we put them up on the stage at the autumn meeting to provide both information and entertainment to the audience!

In the end we decided that we would take the other topic - tram-trains - and look at that at the autumn meeting. Hopefully, that too will provide not only a lively debate in which YOU can participate, but also will guide us to some formula or policy to which Railfuture as a body can subscribe. Activists are often asked for their opinion, by the press and the media, and it is always difficult for them to distinguish between official policy of a body they may be representing e.g. Railfuture and their own views. These will not always be completely coincident, and it is important that we as an organisation should not be presenting conflicting views to the media.

Inquiry into the potential benefits of high-speed rail services - call for views

- What do you think could be the potential economic and environmental benefits from the development of a high-speed rail link network?
- What would be the costs of any new links and how would they be funded?
- What would be the likely timescale for delivering a new network? What would be the most appropriate technology and type of train required for use in the UK?
- How could the existing rail links with Scotland be improved to ensure that all rail users are able to take advantage of improved high-speed connections?

Remit of inquiry

The Committee has agreed that its inquiry will focus on five key areas set out in the following remit—

- To identify the potential economic and environmental benefits to be gained through the development of a high-speed rail network linking Scotland with major English conurbations, London and Europe via High Speed 1;
- Options for ensuring that the existing rail network within Scotland can connect effectively with any high-speed network;
- The practicalities and costs of constructing a high-speed line and the different options for routes and train types;
- The potential for high-speed and improved links to achieve modal shift away from domestic aviation and long distance driving, as opposed to meeting increased overall demand; and
- To identify any barriers to the development of improved high-speed rail links.

The Committee is keen to hear the views of interested parties on the remit set out above to assist in its inquiry.

Relationship between good rail links and higher house values

Transport Minister, Stewart Stevenson has made the point (24th April 2008 'Leven to Thornton Rail Debate') that good rail links can boost house values by up to 20%. This statement by the Minister had come from the STAR Transport Conference, Glasgow 24th April, and was attributable to Professor Phil Goodwin, who had made this point during the Conference.

This has been backed by Rail Campaigner, Ann Glen who notes . . . 'It is revealing to travel (by road or cycle track at present) along the route of the Airdrie-Bathgate line. The quantum of housing in settlements along the route has to be seen to be believed. Clearly, housing firms were convinced that the project would happen and took steps to stake their claim to land there. The whole zone from Airdrie east into West Lothian is being revitalised by the reinstated line' and also by Stephen Joseph, Director Campaign for Better Transport who notes . . . 'In England, the action on [rail] reopenings is coming from housing-led developments. Kilbride Community Railways is proposing to reopen the line to Tavistock in Devon by pooling the planning gain from 750 houses there. East-West rail from Oxford to Milton Keynes has a 'roof tax' proposal. The Community Infrastructure Levy, now in the Planning Bill, will help this. Some of the eco-town proposals also involve rail reopenings'.

Ken Sutherland comments 'Possibly those points could also have some input to accelerating further desirable new/reopened lines in Scotland?'

First Draft of our response
(closing date is Oct 17th)

Compiled by Donald MacPhee following our Committee discussions. This is not as yet our 'official policy'.

A report commissioned by the UK Government found that there is a business case, as well as an economic, safety and accessibility case for high speed rail in Britain.



<http://www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/rail/researchtech/research/avisionforthehighspeedlinehs1>

Railfuture Scotland actively supports further High Speed lines (300 km/h or higher) in Scotland (and the UK). Rail usage in Scotland (and the UK) is expanding fast and the network needs new capacity. Enhancements on existing lines are highly disruptive to current train services and new high speed lines can offer much greater capacity for the money invested, with much less disruption.

High-speed Rail has been very successful in economic regeneration of run down areas. This is particularly true when local planners have welcomed the high speed trains and encouraged new development in locations close to stations. One of the best examples is Lille in France where unemployment reduced from 40% to 13% following the introduction of high speed rail services to London, Paris and Brussels.

High-speed rail generates much less pollution than air transport and the replacement of landing slots from short haul air services to long-haul reduces the pressure for airport expansion. Railfuture Scotland would advocate a long-term rolling programme to build a network of high-speed rail lines, rather than a single north-south high speed line, so that unit costs of construction can be reduced, improving the overall economics of building high-speed lines.

High speed lines should extend north of the central belt (or at the very least existing lines should be electrified to north of the central belt) to allow the new high speed trains to reach Aberdeen, Dundee, Perth and Inverness without passengers having to change trains.

High-speed trains need to access city centres, not the edges of cities where access other than by car is difficult. Parkway stations on greenfield sites should not usually be encouraged unless they are designed as public transport hubs. Where commercially practical, trains running on the high speed routes should be able to access other large towns and cities not served by the high speed route via connections to the current rail network.

Railfuture Scotland does not wish to see a reduction of investment in the current classic rail network as a result in investing in new high speed lines. We would expect the investment in the classic rail network to increase as a result of building high speed lines through the provision of increased rail capacity required to access the stations served by the high speed route.

A target journey time of 3 hours from central Scotland to London should be the aim.

Any line or lines that emanate from Scotland should be planned in conjunction with high speed line proposals in England / Wales. It is expected that London will be the main destination point for traffic from Scotland but a network strategy which includes other destinations in England and Wales should be developed. Direct trains to Europe should also be a feature of any Scottish high speed rail development.

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