

railfuture

SCOTLAND | ALBA



Winter 2022/23

Teachdail Rèile na h-Alba

Dear Members

Welcome to our Autumn newsletter, after what has been and continues to be a difficult period on the railway.

Although we were able to have an in-person AGM, we are aware that many members are not yet happy with face to face meetings, so took the decision not to have an Autumn meeting this year. However we hope to be back to normal in 2023, with Spring and Autumn meetings as usual. By the time you read this, we will have participated in Falkirk Model Rail show, returning this year, and will on the Railfuture stall at Warley Model Rail Show in Birmingham at the end of November.

The repercussions from Covid in terms of lack of driver training and staff absences across the network continue to be keenly felt. Although Scotrail services have not been as affected as some operators south of the Border, we are still seeing cuts of up to a third in the number of services, and short running days on some routes.

On a more positive note, work towards the re-opening of the Levenmouth line with two new stations at Leven and Cameron Bridge, is proceeding with a mile of track laid already; and the rebuilding of East Linton Station is well under way, after the re-opening of Reston in May of this year.

The news that the Caledonian Sleeper franchise would end in June 2023 was a surprise to many of us, and we look forward to hearing how the service will continue – although the possible introduction of a Saturday night service will undoubtedly be welcomed by the many tourists visiting Scotland.

Allison Cosgrove, Chair



Beattock Station Action Group

The Beattock Station Action Group held their AGM on July 30th 2022. 30 people attended, among them were local MSPs and ward councillors. The STAG (addendum) was handed over to Transport Scotland by Swestrans on 27th of August with no feedback so far from Transport Scotland.

The Regional Transport Strategy for Dumfries & Galloway for the next twenty years (draft for consultation) will go out for public consultation from the 3/10/22 to 06/01/23 in it the reopening of Beattock/Thornhill/Eastriggs Stations are mentioned also

Opportunities which should be investigated include running a local service on the WCML between Carlisle / Edinburgh /Glasgow.

We had two information stalls, one each at the Beattock Bash and Moffat Academy & Beattock Primary Cluster open evening, both were very busy with people asking about the reopening of the station.

East Linton Station Works

Work is proceeding rapidly on the bridge and lifts at East Linton Station – pictured.

It is intended that the completed bridge will be the “ribbon” style installed at Reston, which is less visually intrusive than an older style, solid bridge.

East Linton residents are looking forward to the return of their Station, closed in 1964. The village has grown hugely since that date, with a large number of commuters to Edinburgh every day.



Tom Dickson

RAILFREIGHT

There is some mixed news but on the positive side railfreight is up to and slightly above pre-covid levels. Now the extensive industrial disputes on our railways must have knocked confidence in railfreight rather than roadfreight but the vast majority of railfreight movements have run avoiding the actual strike days.

Scotland still has a surprising level of bulk freight, typically oil, cement, aggregate and sulphate. These traffics are mainly within Scotland and Northern England. The bad news here is a serious derailment on 20th October of a Scotland bound Castle Cement train at Petteril Junction just outside Carlisle with derailed wagons being dragged across and off the river viaduct. The Newcastle and the Settle lines will be blocked for at least several days and some of the modern bogie cement tankers are badly damaged

On merchandise traffic fridge containers have been introduced for the supermarket sector, in particular on DRS – Tesco's Tilbury to Scotland Service. While rumours of operators switching back to diesel because of the rapidly increasing cost of electricity seemed rather unlikely more diesel traction is in evidence even where it means double heading.

On infrastructure a short summer blockade of Scotland's main freight route allowed a £2 million upgrade of track to welded rail and concrete sleepers at Whifflet South Junction between Mossend Yard and Coatbridge Freight Liner Terminal. This junction provides an electrified link between the North and South Clyde electric networks. The yellow HST track recording train traversed the line on 27th October

Parcel operator Varamis is starting a train service between Birmingham and Mossend, initially using modified Electric Multiple Unit passenger trains developed by Eversholt as the Swift project. Trial runs have been made but Covid prevented a previous earlier start to operations.

Crazy World! Ravenscraig was once Scotland's biggest industrial site and still has the main electrified freight line running through it. Private enterprise thought it an ideal site for a major freight terminal. Unbelievably, North Lanarkshire Council has promoted massive house building across the site so there have been 600 objections to the freight terminal. Result: The freight terminal can go ahead but they has to reduce the number of freight trains that will use it!

Overall, there seems no understanding in UK or Scottish Government that NET ZERO cannot be achieved without moving more freight onto the railway. They seem to rely on rail becoming 10% more efficient but with better motorways and heavier lorries road haulage will become 20% more efficient and UK Government is being pushed towards 60 tonne lorries. Neither is there any understanding that HS2, as presently planned, will reduce capacity for freight on the West Coast Main Line north of Manchester and into Central Scotland. The only alternative for Freight will be the M6 and M74.

Ralph Barker, October 2022

Those of us who have observed the success of Lumo, the Open Access service from Edinburgh to London, may wonder what Railfuture's view of Open Access should be.

The undernoted article is by Stewart Palmer, a Director and Vice President of Railfuture and who worked in the rail industry for 38 years.

Open Access Passenger Operation in Britain, what should Railfuture's position be?

The last few years have seen the passenger railway in a state of turmoil in Britain. Revenue has collapsed, train service delivery has been poor and there appears to be no sense of strategic direction for the industry. Railfuture has consistently held the view that as a non-political organisation we want a railway that works for users and taxpayers and how that is delivered is not our primary concern. However, the news that the government's plan to create "Great British Railways" is now in reality a "dead duck" means that the passenger railway is now facing a further period of hiatus with the DfT micro managing the operation and an obsession with cost cutting, instead of bottom-line optimisation. This is bad news for users and taxpayers. Duplicate services operated by different TOC's have been systematically removed to allegedly save money and frequencies that were reduced on many routes as a result of Covid have simply not been restored.

As a general principle most people support the idea of choice for consumers. Nobody would seriously suggest for example that there should only be one chain of supermarket, one model of car to buy, or one type of restaurant to eat in. So where do Railfuture stand on the issue of "Open Access" passenger services in Britain? As older members will recall, one of the fundamental ideas of rail privatisation was the creation of more choice. In truth, open access operation has had limited impact on genuine choice, with only the East Coast route seeing any long- term serious competition from open access operation. Various other operations have come and gone, even those backed by people with deep pockets, like the Wrexham to London service, funded by DB; or have never got to the stage of launching a service despite good intentions, like the Blackpool to London and Cardiff to London proposals. The reasons for this are many, but most people simply have no understanding of the complexity (and therefore cost) of regulatory compliance to operate, or understand the basic economics of any passenger rail operation in the current industry structure.

So, in the context of what looks like a worse service for users in the years ahead being supplied by DfT (who are now effectively calling the shots in what was the franchised railway), should Railfuture support all proposed and existing open access operation going forward? As with so many things there is no simple answer to that question. If we support choice, and therefore best value in terms of quality and price, then the answer logically should be "yes". But if the open access operation simply extracts revenue from existing rail operations as the market is simply not capable of supporting the required growth in total demand and the revenue "cake" is being cut up into smaller pieces, then logically the answer is "no". My conclusion is that Railfuture's position on this should therefore be to consider each proposed open access operation on its merits and using local knowledge and experience decide whether any proposal is in the long-term interest of rail users and taxpayers before deciding whether to support it, or not.

Food for thought.