

Rail 2014 – PUBLIC CONSULTATION

RESPONSE BY SENIORS TOGETHER IN SOUTH LANARKSHIRE:

TRANSPORT, HOUSING AND SURROUNDINGS TASK GROUP

Introduction.

The Task Group welcomes the opportunity to respond in this public consultation and does so largely, but not solely, from the viewpoint of those of whom the organisation is representative – those over the age of 50 in the South Lanarkshire Council area. By the same token, the response concerns itself mainly with those aspects in the Document which impact most directly on that group.

South Lanarkshire is a diverse area with differing needs to be met by a rail network: long-established rail services between the older burghs and towns and with Glasgow, a large rural area that has limited services and the new town of East Kilbride whose spread and increasing diversity may require fresh consideration. The recent extension of the railway beyond Hamilton to Larkhall has been a marked success in terms of added value for the community, increased use and the potential for environmental protection. The location of stations between Hamilton and Larkhall, with ‘park-and-ride’ facilities, points to the importance of accessibility, convenience and proximity as factors in adding to the number and the range of rail-users, together with ancillary community benefits.

General.

The Unthinkable.

Unsurprisingly, the Consultation Document stresses concerns such as value-for-money, efficiency, revenue-generation and cost-reductions. Such prime considerations are accepted. However, the importance of ‘service’ as a community resource receives inadequate recognition (2). That the Document contains what has come to be known as “thinking the unthinkable” is, similarly, to be expected. However, any serious contemplation of extreme propositions should stop; the ending of through-journeys at either Edinburgh or Glasgow (8); the ending of the Caledonian sleeper services (11) and the further delegating of service frequency and quality decisions to the franchisees (4).

Integrated Travel Services

Devolution of key aspects of rail provision would lead to the sorts of inequities that have proliferated – and continue to do so - following the de-regulation of bus services (4-7).

Rather than further dis-integration by handing-over service decisions to a possibly increasing number of rail franchisees, we see the greater need as further integration of transport services for the benefit of communities. Thus, the continued existence and development of bodies such as the Strathclyde Partnership for Transport (SPT) are considered by us to be vital to the integration, maintenance and enhancement of travel

services to the community. Presently, SPT provides an effective vehicle for integration of travel across the former Strathclyde Region. Picture the ‘guddle’ that would exist in bus schedules for cross-authority routings and infrastructure development without an STP.

SPT has played a key role in the on-going renewal of the Hamilton Bus Station. The Bus Station is mere yards from Hamilton Central Rail Station, yet it appears impossible to achieve the incorporation of the two facilities - because of ownership and regulation issues: a poor example of integration in the interest of service to the community.

Access (7, 8).

As the immediately preceding section indicated, location is one key factor in easing access to rail services. The earlier example of the Larkhall line extension is one good example of provision for access via the intervening stations and the opportunity to park-and-ride. The popularity of the development clearly marks the effectiveness of appropriate supply meeting demand – indeed, in creating a measure of that demand. However, that is not to argue that added charges ought to be levied to recoup expenditure, for why should users pay extra for what others already have because of some accident of history? Easing access will repay increased usage provided that appropriate planning has been carried through.

As a significant part of the travelling public, seniors have particular requirements in terms of accessing rail service, though the Document scarcely mentions them directly. We have already acknowledged that station location is important overall and that effective co-location is advantageous wherever feasible. And then there are matters surrounding physical access. It is comforting to know that 73% of Scotland’s 350 stations have step-free access to and between platforms. But more than 90 do not meet that basic criterion. Again, we are informed that 8 stations have been made step-free since 2006: at that rate, it will take some 70 years to have all existing stations conform. Not an express service, then?

In the early stages of planning change, seniors - and other community interest groups - need to be involved in consultations. “Don’t talk about us without us.”

Accountability (4).

The complexities of station ownership/leasing/operation must go a long way to explaining the bleak character of so many of our stations. One solution would be to place stations clearly in the SQUIRE criteria and lay the onus on the franchisee/s as a more significant contribution to assessment and evaluation of performance (PPM). On the other hand, in terms of simplification, it might be more appropriate to have ownership and responsibilities allocated to one single body – Network Rail, probably – and so bring all stations under that organisation while setting high, common standards.

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