CAR PARKING CONSULTATION – SCOTRAIL RESPONSE

Suppressed demand

- the level of on-street car parking at some stations (for example, Inverkeithing and Kilwinning) would suggest that expansion, at least at some key commuter stations, would simply service suppressed demand. However there is some variation – car park expansion at Cupar and Glengarnock, for example, has accommodated suppressed demand but still have capacity for further growth.

- the question suggests that pricing could be used as a means to ‘choke off’ pre-9am demand. This may well be the effect but it would have to be handled with extreme care because we can’t be certain of passengers’ sensitivity to price increases (though see later Inverkeithing example). The passenger will likely look at the ‘whole cost’ of commuting, rather than just the rail fare element in isolation. The risk is that passengers will drive all the way, as is acknowledged by the Passenger Focus study. Equally, it is possible that targeted changes to the charging regime could have the effect of inducing demand at lesser used car parks close by – for example a charge at Croy might encourage passengers to drive to Greenfaulds, which is only a short distance away and whose car park is underused. We are not recommending such an approach, merely pointing out the possibilities. In any event, as things stand, relatively few station car parks are chargeable and any change to this position would be a matter for Transport Scotland

- we would in principle support any measures which increased the amount of information available to customers, and the technology to provide this information already exists. It would nonetheless involve certain costs in terms of infrastructure and feeding the information back to customers via mobile phone etc. and it is likely that it would only be justified at the key commuting car parks – though it could also be used as an opportunity to relay information about underused car parks to customers

Station choice

- we agree that that there is some evidence of this, for example where passengers who live near stations on the Fife Circle will drive to ‘mainline’ stations such as Kirkcaldy or Inverkeithing to benefit from more frequent train services

- certainly, efforts to increase car parking at stations have tended to focus on locations where there is known demand or where there is evident suppressed demand (on-street parking), and in some cases this will be in response to motorists chasing quality and service frequency. A longer term solution would be to try to align train service frequency with demand generators so that there will be less need to drive longer distances to find the desired service quality and frequency. In practise, operational and other constraints may make this difficult.
As suggested previously, it may be that interventions can be made in certain situations to induce demand at underused station car parks and reduce demand at very busy car parks. Local road conditions will also no doubt play a part in influencing demand. Slow and congested roads on the approach to a car park at a station with a very frequent service may be less attractive than less congested roads leading to a car park at a station with a less frequent (but still reliable) train service. Time spent searching for a parking space at the station may also be a factor which influences demand.

**Overpricing for car parking dissuades people from rail travel**

- we would not fully agree that rail fares act as rationing: the rail industry, including ScotRail, are required to abide by strict RPI+x pricing formulae and we cannot simply use rail fares as a way to dampen down demand. There may have been some consideration given to “rationing” within the overall formulae but we cannot, for example, substantially increase fares on a year-to-year basis simply in response to higher than expected demand.

- there is likely to be resistance to car parking charges, especially where there are none currently (for example, in much of Strathclyde) and, as indicated previously, there is a delicate balancing act in ensuring that people do not drive all the way by car. We would also re-iterate that charges are a matter for Transport Scotland.

- pricing could initially service suppressed demand, although unless a uniform pricing regime were introduced it could simply have the effect of shifting demand between stations. In any case, it is not always clear that pricing will necessarily have the desired effect (see Inverkeithing example below).

- currently there are 130 ScotRail station car parks and 45 local authority car parks at ScotRail stations. Of these, only 21 are pay car parks and at most of these, the car parking charge is discounted against the price of a rail ticket (effectively free car parking). So, as things stand, charges at station car parks in Scotland are much less common that with some train operators in England and Wales. The processes we have in place for refunding charges etc. are manageable.

**Supply and demand**

- wider changes in working patterns, along with on-going issues around traffic congestion and the cost of motoring, will likely influence future demand for parking at stations. ScotRail also works with bus operators to bring about improvements to integration between rail and other public transport modes – for example through enhanced infrastructure (bus turning circles, waiting shelters), ticketing arrangements or in a few cases co-ordinated timetables. These efforts will continue to have a part to play.
in making alternatives to the car a more attractive option for getting to the station. But they are only likely to be fully effective in conjunction with many other measures. Some initiatives to manage demand have been tried in the past – for example, Fife Council introduced a charge at one of the Inverkeithing station car parks for cars entering before 0900, with free parking thereafter. However we understand that, since peak demand exceeds supply, the car park still fills up before 0900.

- demand for train services can be heavily influenced by the extent and location of car parking – we have cited already the example of Inverkeithing, where many passengers will be driving from outlying towns in Fife to take advantage of the large car park and good train service. Any changes to the availability of car parking is likely to have some long term effect on the train service pattern at affected stations