

Clydesdale Rail Action Group – Response to Scottish Rail Franchise Consultation

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to this consultation. Our group campaigns for better train services in the Clydesdale Area of South Lanarkshire and in particular the re-instatement of services lost between 1965 and in the 1980's. The questions are wide ranging and some would not be a priority to our supporters. Some are not easy to understand. As a Group we have contributed to other organisations which have a wider remit for rail services and public transport. In this response it has been decided to make a response on a local service basis reflecting the relatively poor train service enjoyed by our area and the recognition that major conceptual changes are needed to restore an appropriate level of service.

Response to Question 1.

Some of these initiatives are completed and some agreed therefore it is difficult to make comparisons. We support re-opening of stations to include communities and provision of additional rolling stock but unhappy about excuses such as “Virtual Branch Lines” which appear to be brushing off real aspirations for essential services. We admit that rapidly rising train fares, above the cost of inflation and above the cost of car use, have diluted enthusiasm for longer distance rail travel.

Response to Question 2

There does not appear to be any schedule to comment on.

Response to Question 3.

The future priced options do not appear to be defined. If asked what should be done we would answer:

- Re-instate services between Clydesdale and Edinburgh via Carstairs.
- Re-instate a local service on the West Coast Main Line including re-opening local stations and connecting at Carlisle with services to the south.
- Improve the Lanark to Glasgow service which for most of the day is slow and affected by overcrowding and unreliability.
- Improve legislation to allow reliable bus links.
- Support NPPG17 and prevent adverse development on former station sites and disused rail routes.
- Support the Scottish Sleeper service
- Improve stations for passengers

Having said that there have been many improvements over the past 10 years, which we never thought we would get, such as Sunday trains and toilets on trains on the Lanark service and CCTV at Lanark and Carluke. All had been considered out-of-the-question at one time.

Response to Question 4

The question prioritises improved journey times. This must not be achieved at the expenses of cutting out stations or not re-opening stations or moving heavy freight onto the public road. We can only think of one station in Scotland with really poor performance involving stopping 60 trains per day with minimal passengers who could quite easily use a good bus service anyway. While asking for the Lanark to Glasgow service to be speeded up it has to be said that many SPT services are slow but that their quality of service, particularly their interconnectivity makes them very attractive to passengers.

In general (across Scotland and UK) trains should be speeded up by better track, electrification and resurrecting quicker routes. However, in most cases, it should be a case of running express trains and stopping trains. This is often taken as an alien concept but is used in many parts of Scotland and the rest of the UK. Therefore we do not want to stop the highest speed Virgin trains at little stations, which is what Transport Scotland officers tell ministers we want to do, but to re-introduce local services running in similar paths to freight trains. The improvements to the Lanark to Glasgow services would be by making more trains "Commuter Express" but still serving all stations by other, shorter distance trains, as initially ran on the re-opening of the Argyle Line but were later rationalised as financial savings. The extremely long journey times of the trains which run via Holyton and Airbles are not doing many people any advantage. Few people actually use them for these stops and when most needed, eg Lanark to Hamilton at office hours starting time, the trains do not run that route anyway. There are lots of opportunities to improve journey times without cutting out stations.

Other service improvements would be improved reliability, quicker rescue of broken down trains, and less overcrowding.

On the Carlisle-Carstairs-Edinburgh, 2 trains per day, service the priority is to run the trains when there is most demand. It is obvious, really. Very few trains, they must run when people need them which is a return train from Edinburgh at, say, 17.30. We do not need excuses about it being an operational rather than a public service, we have heard all that many times. The point is that that is the only train back for commuters and timing it correctly should be a priority which is not beyond the professionalism that is present on the railway. Some other trains, such as East Coast Main Line trains could make a stop at Carstairs as they are limited to 15 mph anyway but the professional answer is to re-instate the local trains which use to run between Lanark and Edinburgh, via Carstairs, as an everyday occurrence which was accepted as perfectly normal and sensible. The demand is a lot greater now than it was in the 1950's..

Response to Question 5

Easy, if the ticket office is not open then pay on the train. Large parts of Scotland are rural and will never have staff. Clydesdale is different in that all stations are staffed part of the day. However, if other stations re-opened they would not have staff. Station ticket machines are acceptable but for many people difficult to use and certainly quite slow if there are a lot of passengers as there would be at, say, Carlisle. When Alastair McPherson was Chief at ScotRail he made the commitment that nobody would be refused entry to a ScotRail train (to pay on the train) just because

ScotRail had not been able to sell them a ticket. Not so now. If there are barriers people are not allowed through without a ticket for any reason and first ScotRail blame Transport Scotland for that rule. In general ticketing is fine, with lots of options (season, zone card, family scratchcard etc.). Some may want to pay by phone or on-line but we do not get many complaints. Just the complaints about poor treatment through lack of discretion when things go wrong.

Response to Question 6

This does not really affect us. Train use must have priority over commercial development. Glasgow Central is probably at its limit without impeding passengers. Edinburgh may have gone over the top.

Response to Question 7

Not seen as a problem though improvements are always welcome. CCTV in the SPT area has been very good. Carstairs needs more security and quicker action by police or security staff.

Response to Question 8

Signage has generally been brought up to a good standard. There is too much silly signage "Rain may make floors slippery, etc". Listen to users and accept their views. Signs should be needed to the toilets at Lanark Station e.g. but the public toilets not far away, close at 17.00 so would it be useful?

Response to Question 9

Assistance appears good.

Response to Question 10

Yes but bus deregulation prevents it.

The few trains which serve Carstairs should be linked by bus with Lanark and Carnwath but this cannot be made to stick. Different operators wreck any attempt at co-ordinated travel and never want to wait for the train.

Lanark to New Lanark should connect with trains but the operator decides otherwise. At one stage they refused to let their buses come into the bus-train interchange!

Even buses which are supposed to connect with trains often don't. I personally complained again and again about people being stranded at Lanark when the bus had not waited for the train, sometimes leaving just as the train came in. Bus drivers always said they had not been told to wait or had been told Not to wait. And these were supported, specified services! A hopeless situation. Myself and many others just gave up.

We do need connections to Wishaw Hospital and Carstairs State Hospital. New halts should be considered. Glasgow Southern General and Edinburgh Royal are hopeless

for public transport but this is the fault of the health boards, not the railway businesses.

Response to Question 11.

Train fares are too expensive. Most people will not bother with the complexity or application for the many railcards. If it is worth it they will use it or at least try it. The railcards, especially family railcards, should be strongly protected. It is often the poorest people who have to pay most sitting alongside well off people getting reduced fares. At present some people are driving from Larkhall to Bellgrove to catch the train there because they consider the fare from Larkhall too expensive. More tinkering will just alienate people who do not get a good deal.

Response to Question 12

To be treated better by First ScotRail but First ScotRail blame Transport Scotland. Trains should have windows aligned with seats and corridor connections. Scottish trains really are not bad.

Toilets must be kept working and when locked out of use should have notices up, not just a continuous "Engaged".

Reduce overcrowding and rescue breakdowns quickly. Just last week I left Glasgow in an overcrowded train, nearly 100% overcrowded and it broke down for 1 hour 45 minutes with no seats available.

Response to Question 13

These services are most important to Clydesdale and are the only long distance trains serving the area. There have been many instances of not being able to book to use the sleeper from or to Carstairs. This may have improved, it is hard for us to monitor. I know at one time our MP stopped booking from Carstairs because it was unavailable or fully booked but found that if he booked from Glasgow it was ok. It does seem to be fully booked on many occasions for a service that is short of passengers. We do need better instructions for people travelling from Carstairs. It is the middle of the night, dark, no staff, complicated train movements and sometimes on train staff give no help or advice whatsoever. Staff should also supervise the seated section as previous passengers tend to take over other peoples reserved seats and then pretend to be asleep. We thought airline seats were in use already. Some catering should be provided for seated passengers. Conditions for berths have always seemed very good. The times of trains seem ok, Pity we cannot get sleepers on Saturday nights or get overnight services to Manchester or Birmingham.

Response to Question 14.

Not many problems are seen except the difficulties with ticket barriers which often do not work for interconnecting tickets.

Response to Questions 15, 16, 17

There does not appear to be an issue. Provision of connectivity may be an advantage for some passengers. Sometimes mobile and laptop users are considered a nuisance to other passengers. They are not much good on overcrowded suburban trains but mobile connectivity is important when trains break down.

Response to Question 18

This really does not affect us at this stage

Response to Questions 19 and 20

Our priorities are getting trains to serve our communities and work reliably at affordable fares. Trains are more sustainable than other forms of transport. Our trains are all electric but electrification reduced some services. The minutiae of sustainability is not an issue.

Response to Questions 21 and 22

Either we have not been properly informed or we have not made sufficient efforts on regeneration. No response.

Response to Question 22 and 23

Given the long lead times for rail developments it is probably too late. Only the Argyle line can serve the games or the venues after the games. It would need more rolling stock and more reliability. Interconnections are not that good. Possibly long distance trains could interchange with Argyle trains at Motherwell.

It is a pity the Tollcross Line was not kept in a re-openable condition to Whifflet. That would have provided a good legacy. Our railways do not seem good at handling crowd surges from sporting events.

Broader Issues and Questions

Response to Question 24

To stop this endless on off on off in rail projects.

Response to Question 25

We believe all categories will be helped and those categories preferentially helped. We have had many from those categories helping us and the answer was the same. The only issue was that many wanted fewer trains but more direct to more destinations to avoid changes. This does not seem practicable.

Ralph Barker

Secretary, Clydesdale Rail Action Group 30.11.08