

Jamie Hepburn MSP:

Response to Transport Scotland Consultation on Initiatives Related to the Scotrail Franchise Extension

November 2008

Introduction

This is a welcome consultation, given the Scottish Government's decision to extend the Scotrail franchise to 2014. The extension provides an opportunity for Transport Scotland and Scotrail to plan with confidence for the Glasgow Commonwealth Games, and to ensure the Government's priorities for the development of the rail network are delivered.

The rail network is one of the most important parts of Scotland's national infrastructure, and increasingly so as the need to promote alternatives to car use for environmental, social and economic reasons becomes clearer. While Scotrail remains a private company, it is nevertheless providing a public service and received a subsidy of nearly £300m in 2007/2008 towards delivering this¹. The company therefore has a very serious obligation to put service delivery and customer satisfaction at the very top of its priorities.

Many of the proposals in the consultation document are to be commended, and indeed in years to come it is to be hoped the rail network will develop even further than current ambitions suggest.

The consultation may well have benefited from being open to individual members of the public to respond, rather than being simply targeted at specific organisations.

Attention is drawn to Jamie Hepburn's several Parliamentary Motions on the subject of Scotland's rail services, and in particular to his Members' Business debate on Central Scotland Rail Improvement held on 21st February 2008, and the associated Parliamentary Motion²:

S3M-916# Jamie Hepburn: Central Scotland Rail Improvements—That the Parliament welcomes the Scottish Government's plans to electrify the Glasgow to Edinburgh and Cumbernauld railway lines; believes that this will have a positive effect on the commuting experience for people across Scotland, particularly those in central Scotland; recognises the importance of providing alternatives to the private car to reduce congestion and pollution and of opening up social and economic opportunities to the 32% of Scottish households that do not have access to a car; notes the campaigns by various rail user groups calling for the introduction of a national

¹ Parliamentary Question S3W12699

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/Apps2/Business/PQA/default.aspx?pq=S3W-12699>

² See Official Report:

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/business/officialReports/meetingsParliament/or-08/sor0221-02.htm#Col6301>

railcard scheme which would provide discounted travel to all regular train users, and believes that such a scheme should be considered for introduction in Scotland.

Answers to specific questions

Q4 – Where should we concentrate our efforts on improving services, in particular journey times.

As an MSP for Central Scotland, Jamie Hepburn is particularly concerned with improvements across that Parliamentary region. The Glasgow Queen Street to Edinburgh via Falkirk High line covers much of the area, and is a key arterial route for the whole network. The plans to electrify the line will make a significant difference to journey times, which should have consequential benefits elsewhere on the network. Delivering this improvement as soon as possible is extremely important.

Completion of the Airdrie-Bathgate link is also of crucial importance to the people of Central Scotland. The possibility of additional stations along this line should also be considered.

Q5 – How can buying a ticket be made easier?

While online advance purchase tickets, and automatic vending machines have important roles to play, the benefit of staffed stations must not be overlooked. The range of online advance purchase tickets should also be available for purchase from ticket counters, and the ability to buy a range of tickets from a Scotrail employee rather than a machine should always be available to passengers. The presence of a ticket machine at a station is not a guarantee that a passenger will be able to purchase a ticket before boarding, and passengers should not be penalised for wishing to buy a ticket on board a train if the only facility available at the starting station was a ticket machine.

Q6 - To make the best use of available space at stations, how should we balance the use between commercial outlets and other facilities that offer further passenger benefits?

The key here is to ensure an appropriate balance. A railway station is not a shopping centre, but passengers clearly appreciate good value, well-stocked, swift-service concessions such as news-stands and food outlets that serve items useful for the intended journey. Too much emphasis on commercial outlets can make stations busy and lead to passenger congestion. Key commuter stations across central Scotland, such as Croy, would benefit from facilities were presently there are none. Community-based initiatives are also very welcome.

Q8 – How could signage be improved at stations?

Maps of the local area should be available at every station, no matter how small the station, in an immediately obvious location for passengers, possibly with written direction to key local landmarks. As well as showing the immediate vicinity, a map of the wider area may be helpful where this does not already exist.

Q11 – Which pilot scheme changes to fares should we make to encourage modal shift?

Serious consideration should be given to the introduction of a National Railcard scheme that builds on the existing series of railcards for various groups. Research carried out in 2003 and 2004 for Railfuture and the Strategic Rail Authority showed that a number of different combinations of up-front price and percentage discounts could be profitable. Railfuture found that a UK-wide scheme could attract 2.7 million users of such a card and achieve an 11 per cent increase in passenger miles, with industry profits of £50 million. In south-east England, The Network Railcard that is in use there turns a profit for the rail industry while encouraging greater use of the network that connects with central London.

There are also concerns about limitations in existing concessionary schemes, especially that operating in the Strathclyde Partnership for Transport area. The ten-mile limit is particularly rigid, and has a disproportionate effect on passengers travelling from stations just outside this limit into central Glasgow.

Q12 – When travelling on the train, how could passengers' experiences be improved?

Where a train has a large number of reserved seats, systems should be in place to provide additional non-reserved seating, including extra coaches as necessary. A large number of reserved seats should indicate a high demand for that particular service and an expectation that more non-reserved seating will therefore be required.

On longer journeys, especially connecting urban with rural areas, and especially at peak tourist and holiday times, additional space for luggage and bicycles, for example through the reintroduction of a guard's van or luggage carriage, should be considered.

Q13 – Where should we concentrate our efforts in improving the Anglo-Scottish sleeper services?

The sleeper service is a vitally important part of the Scotrail service, and efforts should be made to improve awareness and use of the service. Scotrail must remain committed to provision of the sleeper service, irrespective of its profitability. The environmental benefits of rail travel over flying could usefully be advertised with particular reference to the central Scotland-London business route serviced by the sleeper.

Scotrail may wish to monitor the impact of the decision by First Great Western to only provide twin berths to passengers travelling together on the attractiveness and profitability of the service and consider whether it would be appropriate to introduce this to the Caledonian Sleeper.

Positive passenger experience of the sleeper is important in attracting repeat and additional word-of-mouth custom. Consideration should be given to ensuring especially that first-time users of the sleeper service feel comfortable and are provided with all relevant information about the nature of the service. Route progress

information, departure and expected arrival times announcements should be considered.

Q14 – How could we improve the travel interchange at stations?

Schemes such as the ‘oneticket’ and ‘plusbus’ initiatives should be massively extended, so that inter-modal tickets are routinely and affordably available. The use of ‘smartcard’ technology such as the London Oystercard and even the existing SPT Zonecard show how easily and successfully this kind of system can be implemented, and there is little excuse for delaying the wider introduction of such systems in Scotland.

Timetable connections with bus and other transport services must also be constantly monitored. Connections between trains on rural routes must also be made to work properly, including where necessary holding connecting trains for late-running incoming services.

Car parking and park-and-ride facilities at key interchanges should be monitored and expanded to meet, stimulate and increase demand.

Q15, 16, 18 – What should our communications connectivity priorities be? etc

Wireless internet technology, free at the point of access, should be rolled out across key commuter and long-distance routes.

Poor mobile phone reception along the Glasgow Queen Street – Edinburgh via Falkirk High route needs urgent attention.

Q23 – What additional services or projects in furtherance of the Commonwealth Games Bid commitments do you feel would most benefit the city during the Games period?

The Glasgow Crossrail and East End Extension are of importance not just for 2014 but for the whole Central Scotland region.

Jamie Hepburn MSP
30th November 2008

Respondent Information Form:

Key details reproduced here as this form was not available electronically.

Name: Jamie Hepburn MSP

Address: The Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP

I do not object to this response being made available to the public.

I am content for the Scottish Government to contact me in relation to this consultation response.