

INTRODUCTION

Since the devolution of rail powers in 2005/2006, Scottish Ministers have the opportunity to develop policy and operations across road and rail in a more integrated way. Key to this integration is the development of policies which encourage modal shift from road to rail, specifically to ensure that park and ride facilities and station car parks operate efficiently.

At the moment however, there is no nationally applied consistent policy on the provision of car parking, or charging for car parking, at train stations. To develop a nationally consistent policy Transport Scotland consulted with local authorities and transport partnerships to gather information on train station car parking policy and operation in their area.

There are 24 train stations on 10 local routes and 3 intercity routes in the North Lanarkshire Council area; 18 have parking facilities with 10 being signed as 'Park and Ride'. In total there is a provision of approximately 1250 park and ride spaces. The number of spaces will increase when another intercity route is added on completion of the Airdrie to Bathgate link in 2010.

North Lanarkshire Council has commissioned a number of parking studies; one of which concentrated on issues and opportunities at the three train stations to the west of Airdrie, to examine issues associated with the opening of the Sirdrie-Bathgate line in December 2010 and another investigated capacity and subscription at town centre and train station car parks. Evidence gathered from these studies suggests that there is high demand for park and ride facilities as 'on-street' parking was observed in the areas surrounding most of the train stations and some adjacent public 'Council owned' car parks were operating at over capacity. With reference to these two studies

SUPPRESSED DEMAND

Does Expansion of Car Parking Provision Just Service Suppressed Demand?

Evidence gathered as part of both studies demonstrates that there is high parking demand at most stations with most car parks operating at near or over capacity and some with high levels of 'on street' parking. Some stations however, have lesser parking demands. This indicates that there is a higher demand for the train service rather than the availability of facilities, an example of this is the demand at Croy Station where parking is oversubscribed in comparison to Greenfaulds Station where a recently provided 328 space facility currently operates at around 15% to 20% of capacity.

The provision of additional parking places at some stations could absorb existing 'on street' parking and this may result in additional vehicles parking at the now vacant adjacent roads. Expansion of parking provision would generally be a positive step.

Would creating more space at a particular time (pre 9am) by price interventions service 'pre 9am' suppressed demand?

Price interventions pre 9am could have the effect of increasing 'on street' parking or moving passengers onto another station, as has been found at one station in particular in the Council area. Demand along the line between Blairhill and Caldercruix will increase following the re-opening of the Airdrie to Bathgate link and it may be that new patrons of the service to Edinburgh would fill vacant parking spaces.

Station Car Parking Policy in Scotland Consultation Response

Real-time Information to Allow Passengers to Make informed Choices

Information in the form of VMS signs on the trunk road network may be more beneficial as this could alleviate congestion on the strategic road network. Text messages, particularly to someone driving a car could prove to be impractical and unsafe. Website information could be obsolete information by the time the passenger has driven to the station as all the spaces could be in use.

STATION CHOICE

As part of the 'Stations West of Airdrie' study an interview survey of passengers at each of the three stations was undertaken. As part of the survey passengers were asked why they chose a particular station. Generally around 80% of the respondents chose a station as it was the closest to their home. Service offered at the station was secondary with 10% to 20% choosing the station for that reason and availability of parking was the reason approximately 5% of respondents chose a station. It was noted that there were some passengers who drove to a station which wasn't the nearest and this was generally due to availability of parking and the service provided.

A general intervention is probably not required.

OVERPRICING FOR CAR PARKING DISSUADES PEOPLE FROM RAIL TRAVEL

The pricing regime at one of the train station car parks discourages commuter parking as the parking charge is refunded on day return tickets but not on weekly or season tickets. Evidence gathered as part of the town centre parking survey demonstrates that adjacent town centre car parks are being used as commuter car parks and operate at full or over capacity throughout the working day. Anecdotal evidence also suggests that commuters are travelling to the next station on the line where there is available 'on street' parking in the adjacent residential roads.

Overpricing may not dissuade people from rail travel though it can have an effect on station choice and leads to a migration of car parking to adjacent streets and car parks.

So as not to act as a disincentive to rail travel, any parking charges that might be applied should be redeemable against ticket costs. However, a mechanism needs to be established so that drivers who buy weekly or season tickets are able to have parking charges offset or otherwise nullified.

Any such station parking charges would probably only be required in town centres or other areas where they might be used by non-rail travellers.

SUPPLY AND DEMAND

As approximately 80% of surveyed passengers chose a station as it was the nearest to their home this shows that people will either chose to live in an area due to the proximity of a train station with a reliable service or chose to work in an area served by a train service local to their home. Service was found to be a larger factor in station choice than availability of parking. Therefore supply of alternative reliable train services could reduce parking demand at the busier stations.

Price interventions would be more successful if 'on street' enforcement was in place and if alternatives to particular stations and services were provided.
