



Scottish Association for Public Transport

SCOTTISH TRANSPORT MATTERS

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SAPT AGM **Wednesday 15th May 2013**

Deputy First Minister Nicola Sturgeon is the guest speaker at this year's AGM.

This will be held in **EDINBURGH JURYS INN (Castle Suite)**, 43 Jeffrey Street, Edinburgh, EH1 1DH (turn left from the southern exit from Waverley station onto Market Street, 2 minutes walk).

Coffee/tea will be available from **10.00** with the meeting **starting at 10.45**.

As Cabinet Secretary for **Infrastructure, Investment and Cities**, Ms Sturgeon will undoubtedly give a stimulating and informative talk on future transport investment policy.

The AGM business meeting will follow Ms Sturgeon's presentation and will start at 12 noon, lasting around 1 hour.

Questions: The opportunity to pose questions to Ms Sturgeon may be limited. To ensure we make the most of this, please pre-submit these by email to sapt@btinternet.com, or by mail to the Glasgow office, by 23rd April

Note that there is regrettably no access to the Castle Suite by lift, there is one flight of stairs.

Subscription renewal notices will be sent out with the next newsletter.

Scottish Association for Public Transport, 11 Queens Crescent, Glasgow G4 9BL
Email: mail@sapt.org.uk web: www.sapt.org.uk Mobile: 07760 381 729

The Problem: Journeys by Scottish local buses have fallen for many years, with a further 9% drop since 2009. Government funding through the Concession Scheme and Bus Service Operator Grant is being cut from £248 M in 2012 to £237 M in 2014 (2012 prices). Council funds for loss-making routes and evening services are under pressure. Fuel costs and free travel eligibility continue to rise.

Social implications of the decline in local bus services will be appreciable. More young people find car ownership and insurance unaffordable. Difficulties in accessing further education, employment, and entertainment from rural and urban areas with poor bus services will deter young people from living in these areas. Without bus services, people with no access to cars will be marooned.

A new approach is needed to reverse the decline. The Competition Commission's 2011 Local Bus Services Market Investigation identified a lack of head-to-head competition as a source of concern. But deregulated competition is not an objective in its own right, and may not contribute to the underlying objectives of increasing service quality, efficiency and passenger numbers. The Competition Commission's belief in market forces is simplistic for rural Scotland with low population density.

Long distance coach services like Citylink Gold are profitable, with around 30% of passengers switching from ScotRail. This raises the question of why limited concessionary funding and BSOG are spent to support profitable coach services, often competing with subsidised trains, while many local buses are being withdrawn, leaving some areas with poor (or no) public transport.

The debate on the future Scottish bus framework **should be informed by evidence**. Where bus services are still regulated and procured through a tendering system, bus use has grown. Between 1993 and 2007, **London bus use grew by 57%**. London Buses is part of Transport for London along with trains and the Underground, with Oystercard ticketing and planned intermodal interchanges. This integrated model is also used for most successful continental European urban transport systems.

The 2006 Transport Act in England and Wales (outwith London) simplified the procedure for Quality Contracts. Also concessionary travel is now no longer available on English coach services.

In Switzerland, a tendering framework underpins the very comprehensive rural bus network, integrated with trains. Car ownership is high, but buses are well used, and popular with tourists. Swiss rural bus use has grown 5% since 2009, contrasting with the 9% fall in local bus use in Scotland.

The interests of users and taxpayers should be pre-eminent in reviewing the Scottish bus framework. Ideas that have been mooted for overcoming funding shortfalls, and upgrading services, include:

1. *A greater share of road capital funding could be allocated to urban bus priority measures*
2. *Eligibility for the concessionary scheme could be linked to the state pension age*
3. *Concessionary travel could be limited to local journeys, with a low charge made for longer trips*
4. *An evidence-based comparison of tendered against fully deregulated public transport frameworks in urban and rural areas should be undertaken, including London, Switzerland and Scotland.*
5. *Bus Quality Contracts administered by councils or Regional Transport Partnerships (RTPs) could be a tendering model for Scotland. Funds for the concessionary scheme and BSOG could be transferred to an equivalent level of ring-fenced funds to support rural and urban bus networks, administered by RTPs and required to offer consistent travel concessions throughout Scotland*
6. *Publicity for bus services, both on-line and at bus stops, should be accurate and widely available*
7. *Bus/rail co-ordination could reduce duplication and overall costs, and improve transport links*

A new bus service framework is now needed. SAPT is seeking feedback on possibilities from bus operators, RTPs and local councils, and we welcome comments from our members (email: sapt@btinternet.com)

Members of the SAPT Committee have already met First Glasgow management to discuss bus issues, and are planning to meet the other major bus operators in the coming months.



Lothian Buses was the first Scottish bus operator to invest in double-decker hybrid buses. Fifteen joined the fleet in September 2011 (above). Diesel-electric double-deckers reduce emissions. They also help to make city streets cleaner and quieter.

On 19th March, Transport Minister Keith Brown announced that more new low-carbon buses will take to Scotland's roads thanks to the latest round of investment from the Scottish Government's Green Bus Fund. Four operators will benefit from the pot of cash, which will support Scottish engineering jobs at Falkirk-based Alexander Dennis Ltd (ADL) and help reduce the nation's carbon footprint.

The Scottish Green Bus Fund (SGBF) has already allowed bus operators to purchase 70 of the eco-friendly vehicles, which produce 30% less emissions and use 60% less fuel than a diesel bus, since the scheme was launched in 2010. Now a £2million payout to companies throughout the country will see an additional 25 Green Buses added to the growing fleet of Scotland's low carbon public transport vehicles.

Lothian Buses have confirmed that the Double Deck Hybrids they bought in the first SGBF are producing a fuel efficiency of 56.7% improvement over the standard diesel vehicles previously used. Lothian Buses will add 20 new buses to their fleet from this round of funding. SWestrans (Dumfries & Galloway) is buying its first Green Bus through the fund, possibly for use on the route from the ferry terminal at Cairnryan to Stranraer railway station. Stagecoach Bluebird will order three green buses for Aberdeen from its share of the investment.

SAPT welcomes this development as a positive move to cutting CO₂ emissions, and unhealthy particulates particularly in city streets. However, SAPT Committee Member Calum McCallum has pointed out that progress is too slow. Also First Bus, the main operator in Glasgow, is not included in the latest order for green buses. The capital cost for hybrid buses is higher than for conventional diesel buses. On the other hand, fuel costs are much lower. More capital investment is needed.

3

Community Rail in Scotland

Transport Minister Keith Brown launched the Scottish Government's drive for Community Rail Partnerships (CRPs) at a meeting in Edinburgh on 19th February 2013. The government is keen to see CRPs formed as a way of encouraging greater use of railway lines, and bringing railways to the notice of the public, including overseas tourists. There have been spectacular increases in usage of some rural lines in England as a result of CRP promotional activities.

The Scottish Government is funding the Association of Community Rail Partnerships (ACoRP) to appoint two part-time officers to cover north and south Scotland. ACoRP staff are to provide support for forming and running local CRPs, which will be expected to work closely with Regional Transport Partnerships, ScotRail and local community and business interests to promote the success of the railway.

Local line groups already exist in some areas, for instance SAYLSA on the Ayr-Stranraer line, and the Friends of the West Highland, Kyle and Far North lines. It is to be hoped that formation of CRPs can continue to harness the useful volunteer contributions and progress made by these organisations.

4

Oban Train Service to Double

Following years of canvassing by SAPT and the Friends of the West Highland Lines, and pressure from HITRANS and Argyll and Bute Council, the Scottish Government has secured a doubling of the train service to Oban as part of the conditions to give an extension of the ScotRail franchise to First Group. The additional rolling stock will become available when the Cumbernauld line is electrified (See section 5).

Currently, Oban has only three trains per day, the least frequent train service in Scotland. From May 2014, this will increase to six. The projected weekday timetable (**new services in red**) is:

Glasgow Queen St	0515	0821	1037	1221	1637	1821
Oban	0810	1127	1345	1528	1943	2124
Oban	0521	0857	1211	1441	1811	2037
Glasgow Queen St	0837	1159	1529	1747	2118	2330

The 1037 Glasgow-Oban train and 1441 return (both March-October only) have potential to boost tourism and day trips from the Central Belt to Oban. Oban's popularity is reflected by the fact that its tourist office is second busiest in Scotland (after Edinburgh), and it is the main CalMac ferry terminal for the Western Isles.

The 1637 Glasgow-Oban will be useful for Lorn locals returning from trips to Glasgow.

The 0515 Glasgow-Oban is planned to provide school transport into Oban for pupils from Dalmally, Taynuilt and Connel (an extra 1611 Oban-Dalmally return school train is planned but not yet agreed).

The 0521 Oban departure gives an early arrival in Glasgow at 0837 which could be useful for business travellers or students, though this train is not likely to be overcrowded! (this is the current 0710 Arrochar-Glasgow commuter train extended to start back from Oban).

The final train from Oban at 2037 enables long day trips to Oban and Mull, and will connect with the West Highland sleeper to London at Crianlarich. Due to the timing of the northbound sleeper in the morning, it is not possible at the moment to provide an equivalent northbound connection.

The success of this increase in train services will depend on good marketing to the tourist sector, focusing on the "Tourism and Trains" agenda announced in "Scottish Transport Matters 2010/2". Perhaps formation of Community Rail Partnerships will help to give Oban rail traffic a major boost.

AVIATION

DfT has again revised downwards estimates of future growth in air travel. Manchester Airport has acquired Stansted Airport for £1.5bn. The current UK Aviation Review should finish in 2014.

Edinburgh Airport has set-up a £15m fighting fund in a bid to win long-haul customers from Glasgow. After a three year break, direct Edinburgh-Oxford flights resumed in March, operated by Minoan Air. Glasgow Airport will complete a £10m revamp of the international arrivals hall before the Commonwealth Games. Technical problems with the new Boeing Dreamliner may delay its introduction on longer-haul routes, including Scottish routes.

Western Isles Council has withdrawn support for the Barra-Benbecula service and is seeking more support from NHS to keep the present level of Benbecula-Stornoway flights. A study by HIE, HITRANS and Highland Council has urged formation of a Scottish Government Steering Group to consider reintroduction of a subsidised air service to Skye.

SHIPPING & FERRIES

Ministers have ruled out any early prospects for the return of a publicly-funded vehicle ferry between Gourock and Dunoon. However, an improved passenger ferry vessel is being considered for the coming winter to reduce major weather disruptions on the present passenger-only service.

Environment Secretary Richard Lochhead has increased the fund for emergency harbour repairs from £400,000 a year to £1m. Bruce Watt expects to lose the contract for the Knoydart Mallaig-Inverie ferry which it has operated for 40 years. The replacement ferry supported from a reduced Highland Council budget may only take 12 passengers compared to the 81 maximum for the present vessel, seriously worsening access to Knoydart, which has no road access.

BUS

The level and nature of bus funding from public sources remain in the news. The Welsh Government is introducing a new system of bus support on April 1 designed to improve the fit with Welsh regional priorities. In England, Bus Service Operator Grant is being replaced by Better Bus Areas funding aimed at better results from reduced funding. In Scotland, bus operator compensation for free concessionary bus travel is being cut from 67% of single fares to 58.1% by 2014/15 with total spend capped at £192m.

Scottish Labour is promoting a Bill which could include franchising of local bus networks in a similar fashion to trains. Franchising powers would rest with local councils or groups of councils. They could also include local rail franchising powers as are being considered in England.

First Glasgow has consulted on sweeping changes in Glasgow area bus routes. Under a SimpliCITY logo, key inner corridors will have improved frequency, reversing the change from 10 to 12 minute frequencies on many routes made last year, but also involving removal of some services and reduced frequencies further out from the city. SPT has objected to the very short 2 weeks allowed for consultation and is seeking meaningful changes with major alterations taking place over the period to November rather than all in May. The First Glasgow strategy is to reverse a loss of patronage in 2012, and will include new buses and the fitting of wi-fi. First Glasgow is also providing real-time passenger information at 9,000 bus stops in Glasgow.

Stagecoach has ordered double-deck sleeper coaches to expand Anglo-Scottish overnight bus routes. Coaches can also convert for day operation. These coaches will be made in Belgium but the majority of Stagecoach's total order for 432 new buses in 2013 will be made by Falkirk-based Alexander Dennis.

Police in Edinburgh are to crack down on car drivers parking at bus stops.

RAIL

Richard Brown, commissioned to report to the UK government on rail passenger franchising, has recommended a more even spread of franchise renewals, greater commercial training for civil servants dealing with franchising and consideration of devolution of some local and regional franchises, especially in northern England. Management contracts or concessions are also suggested for city-region related services with relatively high levels of public funding but significant regional benefits.

Virgin Group has expressed interest in bidding for the East Coast franchise when it is taken out of public operation, but some prefer this profitable franchise to stay in public hands. The Easter weekend saw substantial disruption of Anglo-Scottish services for engineering works despite previous NR promises. Passenger Focus has called for travellers at such times to be compensated and replacement bus services confined to small sections of route – not the entire distance from Preston to Glasgow and Edinburgh.

Though the construction contract for Borders Rail has now been signed, this project continues to be criticised for a low benefit to cost ratio of only 50p per £1 spent. The Scottish Government says that this ignores wider benefits from the scheme and a longstanding commitment to provide it.

Network Rail has awarded a £40 million contract to Carillion to electrify the Springburn-Cumbernauld line. This is due for completion before the Commonwealth Games in 2014. There are hopes that Glasgow -Falkirk-Edinburgh electrification will be integrated with reinstatement of electrification to Stirling, Dunblane and Alloa before 2019. NR is also considering low-cost electrification schemes which could see the Glasgow-East Kilbride and Whifflet lines electrified soon, following the Paisley Canal success.

FTA is concerned that higher track charges for coal trains could encourage undesirable shifts of coal traffic in Scotland and elsewhere in Britain from rail to road. ORR is proposing an extra charge on rail-hauled coal to power stations from 2016. At the same time, environmental regulations are increasing the cost of coal-fired power stations. Both these cost increases threaten Scottish opencast coal sites utilising rail. Imported coal is also expected to fall in the longer-term.

Train Operating Companies have promised to be more open in publicising information on the lowest fares between any two points. At present, separate fares for different parts of a trip can be significantly lower than a through fare. Since the new information will be web-based, this remains a source of public disquiet and has not stopped calls for a more radical restructure and simplification of fares. A £54,000 pay rise for Stephen Montgomery, ScotRail Manager, has also been attacked at a time when fares are rising but with little progress being made in reducing annual subsidies for ScotRail despite rising usage. Passengers thinking that ScotRail fares offer good value have fallen from 58% to 52%.

Deputy First Minister Nicola Sturgeon has announced that 20 stations in Strathclyde are to have a £2m revamp ahead of the Commonwealth Games. 53 years after closure, Conon Bridge station has reopened as a low-cost £600,000 project to provide both a useful continuing facility and an alternative travel mode during major repairs on the Kessock Bridge this spring. Initial results have been very encouraging.

On Saturdays this summer, the recently introduced hourly Glasgow-Irvine trains are to be extended to Ayr. All Monday-to-Saturday Irvine trains will extend to Ayr by 2014, giving 4 trains per hour to Ayr.

In partnership with other bodies, ScotRail is planning further expansion of park and ride, with some schemes to be completed before the present franchise expires in 2015.

Higher penalties for disruption caused by operators of charters excursions are being considered by the Office of Rail Regulation. This could threaten the operation of charters and the steam-hauled Jacobite services between Fort William and Mallaig.

HIE is seeking a new operator for the Cairngorm Funicular Railway but will retain ownership of land and infrastructure.

There have been no passenger deaths on Britain's railways since the Cumbria accident in early 2007.

27th March 2013 marked 50 years since publication of the Beeching Report on the *Reshaping of British Rail*. News features on 4th March contrasted this with the much more favourable attitude to rail travel now prevailing 'The question we should be asking is not how routes (like Borders Rail) can be made more economically attractive, but can we really afford not to invest in railways?' (Herald 4th March)