



Scottish Association for Public Transport

SCOTTISH TRANSPORT MATTERS

Contents

- 1 **Scottish Rail News**
- 2 **Ferry Progress at last?**
- 3 **Scotland's Newest Station and first fully Electric City Bus Network**
- 4 **Rail Funding Announcement**
- 5 **HS2 Going Nowhere Fast**
- 6 **News Around Scotland**



Visualisation of Aventura hydrogen train for UK operation (section 1)



Four ferries have been ordered for the Western Isles (section 2)

Transport Seminar and AGM 2023

Friday 16th June Perth A.K. Bell Library, 2 York Place, Perth PH2 8EP.

10.00 - 10.30 Tea/coffee

10.30 - 10.40 Introduction by Stewart Stevenson, SAPT Hon President

10.40 - 11.10 Guest presentation on ferries/ shipping by **Professor Bruce Peter**

11.10 – 11.40 Rail Funding and Developments in Scotland 2024-2029

Transport Scotland will give an update on Scottish Ministers' Rail Plans

11.40 – 12.10 Bus and Coach Developments by **Paul White, Director of CPT Scotland**

12.10 – 12.40 **"Go Anywhere, Anyhour"** **SAPT Integrated ScotRail Timetable blueprint**

12.45 – 13.15 SAPT business meeting (members only)

Subscription Renewal

Annual subscriptions are due. If paying by standing order at the correct rate* (below), no action is needed. Others will find a renewal slip enclosed, to be returned with payment to the new address below (unless paying by bank transfer).

***Rates remain unchanged:** Individuals £15; Family Rate £20; Pensioners, students, unwaged £8; Voluntary Organisations £18; Commercial Organisations £30; Local Authorities £100; Transport organisations £200. Send a cheque (made out to SAPT) to: Robin McGregor, SAPT, 19 Whittingehame Drive, Glasgow G12 0XT or pay by bank transfer to: 83-07-06 / 00258248 / The Scottish Association for Public Transport. Please use your membership number or name as reference.

SAPT Email: sapt@btinternet.com web: www.sapt.org.uk Mobile: 07760 381 729
Treasurer: Robin McGregor, 19 Whittingehame Drive, Glasgow G12 0XT

The annual Rail Scotland Conference was held on 2nd March 2023 in the Radisson Blu hotel in Glasgow. This was followed by a Modern Railways “Fourth Friday” conference in Glasgow on 8th March.

At the Rail Scotland event, Transport Minister Jenny Gilruth announced by videolink that the 6-month trial of scrapping peak rail fares would start later this year. The Scottish Government has budgeted £4.2 billion over 5 years to support rail which is at the centre of public transport provision. The focus is on decarbonisation.

Bill Reeve, Director of Rail at Transport Scotland, confirmed that the Scottish Railway is now costing £1.4 billion per year. Scottish rail electrification policy will forge ahead, not waiting for DfT deliberations south of the border on forming Great British Railways. 325 km of track was electrified between 2016 and 2019, with the Barrhead and East Kilbride lines now being electrified. A total of around 1606 track km is planned for electrification. Hairmyres station on the East Kilbride line is being redeveloped as a transport hub.

Alex Hynes, Managing Director of Scotland’s Railway, announced that leisure rail travel has now recovered completely to pre-covid levels, but peak travel is 40% down. Nationalisation has meant that ScotRail can now deliver government objectives more easily. But, since the demise of Abellio, Transport Scotland now “feels the heat” a bit more.

Replacement of the older trains in the ScotRail fleet by electric or bimode electric/battery trains will be financed by leasing companies. ScotRail has 1037 passenger vehicles. 285 of these will be life expired between 2026 and 2028. A further 388 would be replaced as part of the decarbonisation programme. Modern diesels could be cascaded to rural lines pending replacement by zero emission hybrid electric/battery or hydrogen trains. (A correspondent to “Modern Railways” has suggested that due to high operating costs and unreliability, there could be a case for replacing the ScotRail InterCity HST trains with newer cascaded diesel trains from elsewhere, for instance Meridian Class 222 trains due to be displaced from East Midlands Trains).

It's possible that the zero emission zone in Glasgow could lead to diesel trains being banned from using Central and Queen Street stations.

Electric multiple units (emus) have much lower operating costs than diesels. Battery electric multiple units (BEMUs) have slightly lower energy efficiency than emus, and higher battery maintenance and replacement costs. Hydrogen multiple units (HMUs) have much higher operating costs than emus or bemus but may be appropriate for some rural routes where there are hydrogen production facilities nearby

Technology is still advancing so final design decisions on rural zero emission trains cannot be taken yet. The Coradia iLint hydrogen train has now achieved a distance of 734 miles without refuelling, though there have been recent problems refuelling hydrogen trains in cold weather in Germany.

Battery trains can cover up to 50 miles on a single charge, taking around 30 minutes to recharge. Fast recharging technology developed for the now defunct Vivarail could reduce this time.

Alstom has announced development of a hydrogen train for the UK loading gauge, based on the Aventura design (see illustration on front page). This would have hydrogen tanks in the roof, avoiding the need to dedicate a coach to carrying the large volume needed to store hydrogen.

Iain Yeowart, Managing Director of Grand Union Trains, outlined his plans for new express rail services between Stirling and London Euston. The planned service would call at Larbert, Greenfaulds, Whifflet, Motherwell, Lockerbie, Carlisle, Preston, Nuneaton and Milton Keynes with an overall journey time target of below 5 hours. The plan is for competitive pricing with relatively cheap “walk-on” fares and comfortable standard class seats in 2+1 configuration. Plans for first class are still under development. Evidence shows that open access is a good thing. On the East Coast route, LNER is now at pre-covid levels of ridership while Lumo open access services are also performing well. By comparison, the West Coast route with no rail competition is only around 73% of pre-covid traffic levels.

Rail freight is doing well in Scotland. Morwen Mands of Highland Spring outlined the latest success: their new two-siding facility at Blackford. Highland Spring is the largest water brand in the UK. 450m litres of water is transported every year. Containers are loaded using a rubber tyre gantry onto trains which run six times per week. Each train is equivalent to 22 HGVs.

Ferry Progress at Last?

by John McCormick

There is hope that the worst period of unreliability for ferries on the Clyde and Western Isles may be coming to an end soon. The CMAL (Caledonian Marine Assets Ltd) ferry *Glen Sannox* was towed from the Fergusons yard at Port Glasgow on 22nd February 2023 to the Garvel dry dock in Greenock for the next stage of construction. There is still hope the ferry will go into service on the Ardrossan-Brodick route by autumn 2023. However this depends on no hitches with commissioning the engines which are now around six years old, though not yet used. This will replace the old "*Isle of Arran*", built in 1984 (also by Fergusons).

The expected service life for a ferry is around 30 years. So many other ferries in CMAL's ageing fleet are now due for replacement, including *Hebridean Isles* (built 1985) and *Isle of Mull* (built 1987)

Lord of the Isles, built 1989, and *Loch Fyne*, built 1991, both by Fergusons at Port Glasgow, are seen (right) on the Mallaig-Armadale route in May 2018.

Some of the smaller ferries used on short distance routes are also beyond their expected lives. For instance *Isle of Cumbrae* (built 1977) is now 46!

Due to shallow and narrow approaches to some piers, and high tidal range, finding second-hand ferries elsewhere in the world has proved difficult, though the Norwegian ferry *Utne* (launched 2015) was bought for the Oban-Craignure route in 2021, and now sails as the *Loch Frisa*.



Lord of the Isles and Loch Fyne (furthest from the camera) on the Mallaig-Armadale route in 2018. Photo: J.McCormick

Four ferries have now been ordered from a Turkish shipyard, each with a capacity for 100 cars. These will be hybrid diesel electric with 1 MWH batteries and 4 diesel generators. Each ship can operate with only 3 generators, allowing one to be switched out for maintenance. These ferries are due in October 2024 and February 2025 (for the Islay routes) , and January and October 2025 for Uig-Lochmaddy/Tarbert.

There are plans for seven new small replacement ferries for shorter routes. These would have a standard hull design but three different detailed arrangements depending on routes. For instance the Iona ferry needs more passenger space and lower car capacity than on other routes. Each ferry would be zero emission with 5 MWH batteries. Batteries would be charged overnight with a need for 3-phase 415V shore power supply to be installed at eight overnight berths. The ferries would also have diesel generators for backup and also to cover for loss of mains power at the overnight berths. Wheelhouses would be on one side, instead of astride the car deck, to avoid having a height limit on vehicles. This leaves ferries on the Gourrock-Dunoon and Oban-Craignure routes still to be replaced.

Hydrogen ferry development using green hydrogen is being pioneered by a *HySeas* consortium comprising CMAL, Orkney Islands Council, Kongsberg Maritime (Norway), Ballard Power Systems (Denmark), McPhy Energy (France) and other organisations co-ordinated by St.Andrews University. Design is at the conceptual stage (right). One possible route would be the short Kirkwall-Shapinsay crossing, using H₂ produced locally by electrolysis using electricity generated by wind turbines.



Transport Scotland's Strategic Transport Projects Review 2 recommended studies should be undertaken of potential Sound of Harris and Sound of Barra fixed links, and a fixed link between Mull and the Scottish mainland. The scale of engineering and cost make these look very long-term prospects unlikely to affect ferry fleet replacement timescales. The most feasible project might be a bridge across the Corran Narrows replacing the busy Corran Ferry, linking via Ardgor to a possible new Lochaline-Mull bridge.

Some of the ferry information was provided by CMAL to a West Highland Steamer Club meeting.

Professor Bruce Peter will give a talk on ferries/ shipping at the SAPT AGM on Friday 16th June.

3 Scotland's Newest Station and first fully Electric City Bus Network by Neil Wallace

Minister for Transport Jenny Gilruth MSP opened Inverness Airport (IVA) Station on 2nd February. This two platform station with footbridge and lifts offers an additional passing place on the main Inverness (INV) to Aberdeen (ABD) line.

The overall project includes closure of a level crossing at the former Dalcross Station, now replaced by a footbridge. In addition, enhanced trackworks and signalling will assist proposed rail freight movements to/from a nearby wood panel factory.

The modern Airport terminal building is 1km walk from the station, via a new lit footpath which follows the perimeter fence and is exposed to all weathers.



Inverness Airport station and bus bay. The total cost for the entire project and wider associated works was £42 million. Photo: Neil Wallace

So Inverness bound passengers arriving at the airport now have the choice of:

- 20 min walk (Traveline Scotland) to IVA then 10 minute train ride to INV
- 5 minute journey by service bus to IVA then 10 minute train ride to INV
- 25/35/45 minute journey by different service bus routes which stop near INV
- 20 minute car or taxi journey to INV (free pick-up/drop-off areas at either end)

Waiting times can be significant as there is roughly one train per hour (not clockface). There are 3 buses an hour from the Airport to Inverness via IVA station, so the overall quickest public transport option may be to catch the bus and not change onto a train. This option may also be more convenient for visitors as buses stop close to well known city hotels etc, thus minimising handling of luggage between modes. Through Airlink tickets by train/bus can be booked in advance via ScotRail; code INB.

The train is perhaps a more attractive option for passengers to the east of Inverness, with trains to Nairn, Elgin and stations to Aberdeen. The station is also an asset for nearby housing developments at Tornagrain Village, which is connected to it by a new active travel route, and has 2 connecting buses per hour.

The Transport Minister also took part in the launch of the UK's first fully-electric city bus network in Inverness. Supported by the Scottish Government Zero Emission Bus Challenge Fund, Stagecoach now have 25 Yutong single deck buses for all city routes nos 1-8. (see previous Newsletter for article on these new electric buses). There have been ongoing problems with cancellations due to driver shortages - recent examples of over 20 individual city journeys being cancelled daily, plus some city areas not served by bus on certain days. Stagecoach and Citylink continue to operate many services on a commercial basis.

Since January, several tendered services have been awarded to smaller operators, although some of these new contracts have cut services in a way which is causing considerable concern. This also marked the start of The Highland Council's own in-house bus operations, a pilot scheme which aims to deliver passenger and school transport services at a lower cost than commercial contractors. It will be interesting to see how this develops - watch for updates at our meetings.



Above: Highland Council electric buses for in-house operation.

4

Rail Funding Announcement

The Scottish High Level Output Statement (HLOS) and Statement of Funds Available (SoFA) for Network Rail in CP7 (2024-2029) were issued by Scottish Ministers in February. This defines targets to be met within the budget for CP7. The estimated grant and fixed track access charges funding to contribute to Network Rail net expenditure in Scotland is set at £4.2bn. This covers the projected net cost of Network Rail operations, maintenance and renewal activities. It does not include provision for railway enhancement/ improvement projects. More extreme weather events inevitably bring greater likelihood of damage and wear and tear so additional contributions from within the budget will be required just to maintain the assets, making the settlement quite tight.

For capital enhancement projects, Network Rail and Transport Scotland are looking for a big reduction in track renewal and electrification costs to achieve objectives within budget.

High level targets for the rail industry are stated to be improved journey times, higher customer satisfaction, growing passenger numbers and rail freight, enabling operation of charter trains, and maintaining cross-border and rural routes.

HLOS covers infrastructure. ScotRail and Caledonian Sleeper operations are funded separately, though the SoFA includes a contribution towards the fixed track access charges paid directly to Network Rail.

Transport Scotland will give an update on the next five year rail output statement and funding for Scotland's Railway at the SAPT AGM (June 16th).

5

HS2 Going Nowhere Fast

The news that the Birmingham-Crewe section of HS2 is to be delayed by another two years to 2036 is the latest in a series of disappointments. Firstly the eastern leg from Birmingham to Leeds and the East Coast Main Line was truncated. Then the Golborne Link connecting to the West Coast Main Line near Wigan was axed, lengthening journeys to Glasgow and Edinburgh. There have even been suggestions that HS2 may not reach London Euston, leaving passenger stranded somewhere in the London suburbs at Old Oak Common to continue by the Elizabeth line into the city.

The concept of High Speed Rail to Scotland, pioneered by the Japanese and French, has been promoted by SAPT ever since our “FastTrack North” conference in Glasgow in 2005. This envisaged a 3-hour journey time from Glasgow and Edinburgh to London. Network Rail's New Lines report in 2009 reported a detailed investigation into the need for new capacity on Britain's railway network. It concluded that a new 200mph high-speed line to the Midlands, North West and Scotland, halving travel time to Scotland to just over two hours, was the best option generating almost £55bn of value with a capital construction cost of £34bn.

HS2 Ltd was set up as a separate entity to take the project forward. Initial HS2 decisions have led to the current gross overspend and under-delivery. One initial HS2 idea was to create an isolated high-speed network built to higher continental loading gauge, with a top speed of 250 mph (well above the 186 mph of French TGVs). This decision increased the size and costs of tunnels and required straighter and therefore more disruptive and expensive alignments. It also meant HS2 trains would be unable to run on traditional UK railway lines so no phased extension of services beyond HS2 would be possible. The route chosen by HS2 through the Chilterns faced local opposition resulting in one third of the London-Birmingham route having to be built in unnecessary and expensive tunnels. As HS2 Ltd abandoned a connection to the HS1 Channel Tunnel Link, there was no point in adopting a continental loading gauge in the first place. The trains will now be built to be compatible with the existing UK network.

HS2 now looks like an incredibly expensive outer-suburban London commuter line. The 14-platform Old Oak Common station will cost £2 billion. Almost all HS2 spend will now go from Birmingham southwards.

With Net Zero now a top objective for both Scottish and UK governments, cutting air and HGV traffic, responsible for 27.5% of Scottish transport emissions, should be a high priority. Our original *FastTrack North* concept of 3-hour Anglo-Scottish rail journeys and more capacity for rail freight is more relevant than ever. Yet there is no evidence that HS2 Ltd or DfT have plans for north of Crewe, and their idea of a terminus (rather than a through station) in Manchester is unpopular with Transport for the North (TfN).

It is time for priorities to be redefined. Transport Scotland and TfN should be fully involved in a new plan for rail development north of Crewe. Decision making by DfT in London has proved questionable. A new organisation involving TfN, TS and DfT should be set up to focus on developing a Net Zero integrated plan for Anglo-Scottish and Northern Powerhouse passenger and freight rail transport.

6

News around Scotland

Contributions from John Wilson and John Yellowlees collated by John McCormick with excerpts from the Scotsman, Evening Standard, Herald, Press & Journal, Courier, Times and other press releases.

Rail

ORR statistics for the last quarter of 2022 show ScotRail passenger journeys were still only at 58% of pre-covid levels for the equivalent quarter of 2019. This is the lowest recovery of the 22 UK train operating companies. Caledonian Sleeper was at 72%, Avanti West Coast at 61% whereas LNER has reached 96% of pre-covid levels, despite strikes.

Chair of the ScotRail safety, health and environmental committee Nick Brown was revealed to have registered his concern at the involvement of Transport Scotland in the possession planning of Network Rail renewals and enhancement work which was going to have medium and long-term safety implications. In addition to Jenny Gilruth asking for postponement of the Fife-Edinburgh line closure between Christmas and New Year for electrification, sports minister Maree Todd had requested that Dundee-Aberdeen track renewal work be shelved to avoid disruption to football fans travelling to the Aberdeen-Rangers Scottish League Cup semifinal at Hampden on 15 January. Scotsman transport correspondent Alastair Dalton claimed that the rail industry was not pulling together behind the scenes. He had detected a continued lack of cohesion, with rail chiefs concerned that ministers did not appreciate the implications of delaying engineering work, but Nick Brown's suggestion about safety being put at risk was not supported by Network Rail.

Publication of the Scottish Government's High Level Output Statement revealed a view that in complete contrast to railway policy south of the border there was no business case for ETCS Level 2 digital signalling in Scotland and the money would be better spent electrifying our railways. Transport Scotland wanted a combined Network Rail/ ScotRail train planning office located in Scotland by 2024. A report, commissioned by Scotland's Railway and undertaken by Sustrans revealed more than 26 million active travel journeys were taken to stations last year. Almost half of journeys taken to Scotland's railway stations were on foot, wheelchair, mobility device, or by bike.

Avanti's new Class 805 bi-mode train undertook the 560-mile inaugural round trip from Alstom's Oxley depot in Wolverhampton to Glasgow Central. Great Western Railway acquired the assets of Vivarail needed for their Greenford trial. ScotRail announced that commencing 27 March a Class 153 Highland Explorer carriage would be attached five days a week to the 1822 Queen Street-Mallaig, returning on the 0605, and the £10 surcharge would be withdrawn.

ScotRail also launched a new campaign "your ticket goes further than you think", featuring drivers, ticket examiners and station staff. Transport Scotland responded to the Scottish Greens claim that scrapping peak fares would begin in September and run for six months by saying that no timescale had yet been set. ScotRail terminated with immediate effect a £5 First Class upgrade offer to Institute of Directors members launched last April because of poor take-up. Claire Baker MSP wanted greater clarity on the scrapping of peak fares. Ayr MSP Siobhian Brown urged over-50s to take advantage of ScotRail's discount card - ScotRail's "Club 50" members could travel off-peak anywhere in Scotland for just £15 between February 13 and March 26, with return travel up to a month after the outward journey. Ronnie Collins, chair of the West Fife Villages Forum, urged Fife Council to apply for Levelling Up funds to re-open the line from Dunfermline to Kincardine and Alloa.

A pebble-styled pavilion area and 133 parking spaces will be among features of Leven Station, alongside the town's sports centre, whose ground-breaking was attended by Scotland's Railway MD Alex Hynes.

According to information seen by the Courier, at Dunbar in the May timetable there would be a net loss of two northbound services per day Monday to Friday and a net loss of four services heading south throughout the week. On a Saturday, there would be three fewer services stopping at Dunbar on their way south and two fewer stopping heading north. On a Sunday, there would be three fewer stopping at Dunbar as they travel south and one fewer stopping in the town as it heads north. Ben Simkin, regional director for north east and Scotland at CrossCountry, said: "We are currently engaging with stakeholders regarding changes to our May 23 timetable.

Phil Haigh suggested in RAIL that Britain's long spindly branch lines like Oban, Mallaig, Kyle, Wick and Thurso sat beyond battery operation, so could lend themselves to hydrogen - or to continuing with diesel, since their handful of trains would be producing emissions so low as to barely register.

Duncan and Manja Gibson formerly of Glenfinnan House Hotel took over operation of the Glenfinnan Dining Car from John Barnes and Hege Hernaes. The Station Restaurant at Corrour advertised for staff ahead of seasonal reopening on 25 March. A £329k pilot was described as the most ambitious biodiversity enhancement project ever to take place on Scotland's Railway : an industry-leading pilot project to enhance natural habitats near the iconic Glenfinnan viaduct began as Network Rail Scotland is committing for Forestry and Land Scotland to compensate for biodiversity lost during safety-critical tree and vegetation management works across Scotland's rail network.

The Jacobite's 2023 season will run from 3 April to 27 October inclusive, with the afternoon train also seven days a week from 1 May to 25 September

Mossend International Railfreight Park was predicting a solid year ahead, with launch of the site's fifth daily intermodal working. The Rail Freight Group's Martin Bignell reported that Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil was being used to power Freightliner's new Southampton-Coatbridge trains as far as Crewe for Ocean Network Express, and with Varamis launching an overnight electric service being trialled by several parcels networks between Mossend and Birmingham International the signs were that the parcels market once served by fondly-remembered Red Star Parcels might just be flickering into life again.

Scotscaldar was Scotland's least used station in the year to March 2022 with just 116 visits, nearly 20% higher than last year but half as many as pre-pandemic. Waterloo regained its position as Britain's busiest but with less than half the number of two years ago, and Scotland's busiest (Glasgow Central) was twelfth in Britain at 15.3M up from 5.3M in 2020/1.

More than 4500 people applied for 116 ScotRail driver jobs. Salary increases to £50,063 after nine months.

Rail line closure for engineering work could be shifted from weekends to weekdays due to changes in travel.

Ferries

The National Farmers' Union claimed the livelihoods of Scotland's island farmers and crofters are being undermined by ailing ferry connections that are not fit for purpose, possibly leading to further depopulation.

But CalMac claimed only 15% of cancellations were caused by technical faults, with the majority caused by bad weather.

Fares on ferries to some of Scotland's most remote communities will be frozen this summer to help islanders recover from widespread disruption.

Green Freeports have been announced for Firth of Forth (Leith/Grangemouth/Rosyth) and Cromarty Firth.

Air

Ryanair boss Michael O'Leary announced record bookings for foreign trips over Easter and summer, with over 2 million flight bookings made in one weekend in January. However fares are expected to rise due to high fuel costs. Fares as low as £9.99 will not return "for the next year or two". Ryanair is launching six new routes from Edinburgh Airport, to Venice, Rhodes, Belfast, Bournemouth, Cornwall and London Stansted. This is in response to the UK government reducing air passenger duty on domestic flights by 50%. (this, together with the continuing freeze on road fuel duty, is at odds with the UK government's net zero aspirations.)

Easyjet has increased its fleet based in Edinburgh from 8 to 9 aircraft.

Ivan McKee, the business minister, told MSPs that Prestwick Airport is only connected to ten tourist destinations in Spain, Italy and Portugal. Passenger numbers in the year to March 2022, at 118,000, were sharply higher than the 47,000 for the previous twelve months. There are now an average of 36 flights per day in summer, dropping to 15 to 25 during the winter. The airport employs 300 people and supports an estimated 1700 jobs through its supplier network. The airport made pre-tax profits of £1.21 million in the year to March 31st 2022, on a turnover of £35 million.

New flight paths at Scotland's three main airports are to be devised as the first stage of the biggest redrawing of UK airspace for 70 years. The changes include a new shorter route from Edinburgh to London down the east coast, rather than the current path over Manchester. Changes could cut journey times and emissions by up to 20%.

Buses, Trams and Roads

First Bus, McGill's, Stagecoach, West Coast Motors and JMB travel ceased issuing ticket receipts for concessionary travel on 20th February 2023. First Bus will save over 850,000 small pieces of paper each week. It will speed up bus journeys in Scotland overall by 220 minutes per day and reduce litter.

Leith Walk reopened to two-way traffic and the last wiring was put in place ahead of tram testing to Newhaven starting in March. Shopkeepers in Leith's Bernard Street claimed they have been "forgotten" and "ignored" in the revamp of the area for the Capital's new tramline. They say the road outside their shops has been used as a "dumping ground" during the construction works for the Trams to Newhaven project. And now they have discovered the new design for the street has no parking or loading bays within easy reach. Cllr Arthur said that plans for Line 1b from Granton to Little France would go out to consultation once the Newhaven extension had opened this spring for completion by 2035. Councillors pressed for consideration of a route to Newbridge. Edinburgh Trams terminated at West End during 13-19 February for connection of the wires on the Newhaven extension, which would commence public operation by 21 June.

Stagecoach, now owned by German asset manager DWS Infrastructure, has announced a shake-up with chief executive Martin Griffiths and chief financial officer Ross Paterson both departing. Ray O'Toole becomes executive chairman, and Bruce Dingwall becomes chief financial officer.

A survey of West Lothian bus passengers has found that passengers will continue to desert local services unless they improve. There has also been a 40% drop in older people using buses in the Borders compared with pre-covid. Overall usage is sitting at 78% of pre-covid usage in the Borders. Fuel costs are 33% higher.

Local bus fares in England have been capped at £2 until the 30th June 2023, funded by a £155 million government grant.

Bus services in Scotland are on the brink of collapse, according to Scottish Labour. Fares in Scotland have risen by 6% in real terms over the past five years, compared with 3% over the UK. Passenger journeys fell from 487m in 2007 to 363m by 2019 (with only 127m in 2020 due to covid). The Scottish Government points out that under-22s, over-60s and disabled people get free bus travel.

The Friends of the Far North Line hoped the Scottish Government "avoids the temptation" to fully dual the A9 and listens less to the "powerful" roads lobby, believing the rail network should be the focus of investment instead, and the road's most-feared junctions should be fixed instead to save lives. Cllr Trish Robertson wanted the A9 dualled all the way to Caithness, and the Press & Journal commented that both road and rail improvements were needed. Jenny Milne of the Scottish Rural and Islands Convention warned that dualling of the A9 could take until 2040.

The Old Military Road diversion route at the Rest and Be Thankful A83 is to be widened as a £30million stopgap until a bypass, which may cost up to £900m, is built.

The Chancellor froze fuel duty for another year in the budget, despite the net zero government target.

The "Spaces for People" covid schemes of mostly temporary bike lanes cost the taxpayer £26million. But new analysis by the DfT shows that cycling is now over 50% above pre-pandemic levels. The boom has been due in part to soaring fuel prices caused by the war in Ukraine.

Electric vehicles accounted for 22.8% of new registrations in 2022. But a mass market in affordable electric cars will not happen soon because of the difficulty of producing them on a viable basis. The boss of Kia in the UK said that battery costs will defeat the mass market. There is also concern about the reliability of Scotland's public electric vehicle charging network. Mass charging in urban areas also needs to be solved. The cost of rapid charging of electric cars has risen by more than 50% in eight months. Ultra rapid chargers with power over 100kW cost up to 75p per kilowatt hour. But home charging is much cheaper. Only 37,055 public chargers were available in UK in January 2023, compared with a target of 300,000 by 2030. The rate of installations is failing to keep pace with the number of electric cars, now topping 1.1 million split 60-40 between fully battery electric and plug-in hybrids. (There are around 100,000 petrol and diesel forecourt pumps.)

Owners of electric vehicles will no longer be exempt from vehicle excise duty from April 2025.

Further concern has been raised about a shortage of lithium for batteries. The government-backed Advanced Propulsion Centre believes that some larger vehicles including SUVs and larger vans may in future be designed to run on hydrogen.