



## Scottish Association for Public Transport

# SCOTTISH TRANSPORT MATTERS

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### SAPT 2025 AGM

### RAIL 200

The AGM will be on **Friday 30<sup>th</sup> May** starting 13.30 in the **Glasgow City Radisson Hotel**, Argyle St  
A rail theme will mark the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of the railway in 1825.

**Scott Prentice**, ScotRail Strategy and Planning Director, will update us on recent progress and future developments on Scotland's Railway.

**Dr. Ann Glen** will recount the fascinating history of the genesis of railways in Scotland from the 1824 Monkland and Kirkintilloch Railway Act and the E&G opening in 1842 onwards.

Latest progress on **ClydeMetro**, **local bus franchising and transport integration**, **HS2** and other issues will be reported by SAPT. Full details in the next *Scottish Transport Matters*.

**New SAPT website:** [www.sapt.org.uk](http://www.sapt.org.uk) has been redeveloped by designer squigglewebdesign. New content co-ordinated by Neil Wallace, SAPT vice-chair, includes latest news items, policy papers and powerpoint presentations. The website will give notice of forthcoming meetings.

### SAPT Membership

If you are not a SAPT member, you are welcome to join by visiting [www.sapt.org.uk](http://www.sapt.org.uk) **Join Us** or contact us at [scottishtransport@hotmail.com](mailto:scottishtransport@hotmail.com) to request membership and pay subscription at the relevant rate: **Membership rates:** Individuals £15; Family Rate £20; Pensioners, students, unwaged £8; Voluntary Organisations £18; Commercial Organisations £30; Local Authorities £100; Transport organisations £200.

Pay by bank transfer to: 83-07-06 / 00258248 / The Scottish Association for Public Transport, or send a cheque (made out to SAPT) to: Robin McGregor, SAPT, 19 Whittingehame Drive, Glasgow G12 0XT. Please use your name or organisation name as reference on bank transfers.

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Treasurer: Robin McGregor, 19 Whittingehame Drive, Glasgow G12 0XT

## 1 Notes from Inverness Meeting

A well-attended meeting organised by SAPT Vice Chair Neil Wallace was held in Inverness on 12/9/24. Neil outlined SAPT activity so far in 2024 including discussing Traveline website with Transport Scotland, bus reform with SPT, and suggesting various service upgrades to ScotRail.

In the Highland area, cancellations are still happening on the Far North line. There are also some bus cancellations on local services due to driver shortage, but priority is given to maintaining long distance coach services. One operator has used school buses with 3+2 seating on some Citylink services which is unacceptable. Accessibility to toilets on Citylink buses is poor.

Roy Pederson, former head of transport at HIDB, outlined ferry history in Scotland compared with Norway. The ABC ferries introduced on the Clyde in the 1950s used hoist loading for road vehicles from existing piers. In Norway ramps were constructed for vehicles to drive directly onto ferries which were manned by shore-based crews. Fast catamarans are used on some routes. Terminals are unmanned or have minimal staffing.

In Scotland, Shetland Council was first in Scotland to adopt the Norwegian system for inter-island ferries. In Orkney, the 15 knot Pentolina built on 2008 and used by Pentland ferries cost £7m and carries 70 cars, 247 passengers and 10 crew. By contrast, CalMac's 16 knot Finlaggan cost £24m and carries 85 cars, 550 passengers and 26 crew.

The ferry Utne had a crew of 4 when used in Norway, with no shore staff, a total of 4. CalMac are now operating the ferry, renamed as Loch Frisa, on the Oban-Mull route but employ 7 crew on board, with 5 shore staff at Craignure and 6 shore staff at Oban, a total of 18! (though staff at Oban also handle other ferries). Roy asked if we need bar/restaurant/café on the 50 minute crossings to Craignure and Brodick. Roy's full presentation can be seen at [www.sapt.org.uk](http://www.sapt.org.uk)

Ewan Tait of ScotRail outlined the extensive driver training programme involving 160 trainees. Accessibility to Class 158 trains which have high steps was also discussed. Level boarding can be difficult to provide, particularly on curves. Many platforms will need to be raised. Kimberley Cumming, Customer Experience Manager at ScotRail, outlined train adaptations for mobility scooters. "Access for All" adaptations have been completed at six stations, with a further four now being studied.



*Above: An exhibition marking the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Far North Line was arranged in Wick, Thurso and Inverness by Friends of the Far North Line with input from SAPT, the Highland Railway Society, HITRANS and the Far North Line CRP. Neil Wallace set up the display in Inverness Library, photographed with John McCormick on 5<sup>th</sup> December.*

## 2 Passenger Trains to Grangemouth?

Re-opening the railway to Grangemouth emerged as a popular issue from the recent travel survey by Falkirk Council. Successful restoration of train services to Leven and the Borders confirms rail as a catalyst for economic regeneration. This is badly needed in Grangemouth. The Scottish and UK Governments are planning investment for Grangemouth following the threat to close the oil refinery. A rail link would soften the impact on the town by giving better access to employment and education in Glasgow, Edinburgh and elsewhere.

An initial review by the Scottish Association for Public Transport (SAPT) has concluded that restoring passenger rail services to Grangemouth should be easier and cheaper than recent railway and station re-openings due to the following advantageous circumstances:

- The railway to Grangemouth has remained in use for freight
- The line is electrified as far as the Malcolm Rail logistics terminal in Fouldubs
- Hourly trains from Glasgow to Falkirk Grahamston (FKG) terminate on the branch (below)
- The former Grangemouth station site is still vacant (see photo below left)
- The Glasgow-FKG timetable leaves enough time to extend the trains to Grangemouth



*Above: Site of the former Grangemouth station can be seen to the right foreground, just beyond the limit of electrification of the Grangemouth branch. There is vacant ground nearby for a Park+Ride car park.*



*Above: A Falkirk Grahamston-Glasgow train emerges from the Grangemouth branch. Hourly Glasgow-Falkirk trains park on the branch for over 30 minutes before returning to Glasgow and could be extended 2 miles to a new Grangemouth station.*

**Glasgow in 50 minutes:** The Grangemouth branch has a west-facing junction with the Edinburgh-Falkirk Grahamston-Glasgow line. The hourly FKG-Glasgow Queen Street service takes around 43 minutes. From Grangemouth trains should take 6 minutes to FKG and 50 minutes to Glasgow. In the current timetable trains have a turn-round of around 35 minutes so the service should be extendable to Grangemouth without needing extra resources.

**Edinburgh in 50 minutes:** By changing at FKG to Dunblane-Edinburgh trains, Grangemouth passengers could reach Edinburgh Park in 40 minutes and Edinburgh in 50 minutes. Minor timetable adjustments would be needed to ensure reliable connections every hour.

**Next Steps:** A rail service would need a new Grangemouth station consisting of a basic single platform with disabled access and car parking. Track and signalling changes would depend on future plans for the two existing freight lines (see photo above). A short extension of overhead electrification would be needed.

**Grangemouth Rail Opening Wanted (GROW).** Decommissioning the Grangemouth refinery has a short timescale. Fast tracking STAG appraisal and station construction could see trains restored by 2027, boosting access to job opportunities for the people of Grangemouth.

*The article above is being circulated to Transport Scotland, ScotRail, Network Rail, Grangemouth Community Council and local MSPs.*

### 3 Future Transport: Innovation & Inclusion conference

Following the Union Connectivity Review, the UK Department of Transport have set up a small group in Scotland. In November David Giles of SAPT attended a conference in Glasgow organised by the DfT to encourage networking between transport professionals and between the nations. There were around 80 attendees, about two thirds of whom were from Scotland. Transport Scotland, RTPs, transport providers and other organisations were well represented.

Topics covered in panel sessions included:

- **Putting inclusion at the heart of future transport strategy:** This led to an interesting discussion about the difference between urban and rural environments and the need to understand what journeys people are unable to make, and why. There was suggestion that public transport in NI may be better integrated because it is (almost) all provided by Translink.
- **Concessionary travel and community transport:** Several expressed concerns about the lack of equity arising from concessionary travel. Those in some areas (for example Edinburgh) benefit more per head than those in others (for example Western Isles). There was also concern about abstraction from rail, for example to Glasgow/Edinburgh/Aberdeen/Inverness express coaches, and from active travel, for example by students who formerly walked or cycled short distances.
- **Emerging trends: what next on the journey to Net Zero:** Largely an overview of new technologies, including: battery versus hydrogen (generally accepted by all that battery is intrinsically more efficient, but that hydrogen may have some value as a means of storing excess wind power), EV buses (urban/rural contrasts), tweaking flight plans (to limit contrails), drones (delivery), autonomous mobility in closed systems and electric hydrofoils (suggested as passenger ferries for Arran).
- **20mph implementation & lessons from Wales:** This is currently showing significant falls in accidents, but it is considered still too early to claim as a clear success. The proportion of roads excepted varies heavily (from 1% in Wrexham to 10% in Swansea). The exceptions are being reviewed. This faced very intense political opposition (possibly coloured by the election), but few of the arguments made against it (for example, delaying bus services) appear to have much evidence in support.

### 4 Possible Workplace Parking Levy for Glasgow

SAPT joined in a consultative discussion about the possibility of a Glasgow workplace parking levy (WPL) along with Glasgow City Council, SPT, ScotRail and Passenger Focus, led by Systra. Nottingham City Council introduced a WPL in 2012. Employers with 11 or more parking places are charged £550 annually for car parking spaces reserved for use by employees. The proceeds, around £9 million per year, are used to support public transport including the Nottingham tram. There are no other WPL systems in the UK at the moment.

Consideration of a system for Glasgow is still at an early stage. Legislation for WPL schemes was passed in the Transport Act (2019) Scotland. For a WPL scheme to work, the council would need to control on-street parking. Hospitals and possibly schools would be exempted. One of the complications is that ScotRail can't enforce parking rules at stations so employees of organisations could potentially park in nearby station car parks.

In Glasgow WPL revenue could be earmarked for developing Clyde Metro and to support bus services. The objective is to encourage a shift from car commuting to improved public transport.

## 5

## HS2 and Scotland

Scotland has a vital interest in the current re-appraisal of HS2 following the ill-thought-out curtailment by the last government. Anglo-Scottish air travel accounts for a considerable proportion of Scotland's aviation greenhouse gas emissions. There are over 50 flights each weekday from Glasgow and Edinburgh to London, making this the busiest domestic air corridor in Europe. Modal shift to zero-emission electric trains is an **obvious opportunity to cut emissions** on the way to net zero. But the unwise cut to domestic Air Passenger Duty (APD) by the last government has given air travel a cost advantage over rail and **reduced UK tax revenue by around £350M** annually. Frequent flyers benefited most. The APD increase in the last budget is welcome but too small.

**Scotland is losing out.** Truncating HS2 to a London-Birmingham rump means that future HS2 trains will not save much time from London to Scotland compared with the current Pendolinos as, unlike Pendolinos, the new trains have no tilt mechanism to allow higher speeds on the many curves north of Birmingham. Also the 8-coach HS2 trains would have 17% fewer seats than today's 11-car Pendolinos. So the £50 billion of UK taxpayers' money needed to build the truncated London-Birmingham high speed line is basically bringing no benefit to Scotland and could reduce West Coast Main Line train capacity and increase flights and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.

As a member of the **Scottish High Speed Rail Group**, which included Transport Scotland and Scottish business interests and held meetings over 10 years to 2020, SAPT identified a 3 hour 30 minute Glasgow-London journey time (an hour faster than now) as a target for cross-border trains via HS2. Faster, greener transport links will stimulate economic regeneration and reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.

Cancellation of HS2 north of Birmingham was clearly a setback to this aspiration. But since the general election, rail industry experts have new ideas for West Coast Main Line development linked with Northern Powerhouse Rail and HS2. Actions being looked at include:

- **Link HS2 from Birmingham via a new 155mph Stafford Bypass onwards to Crewe**
- **Complete HS2 from Old Oak Common to Euston (now agreed in the last budget)**
- **Upgrade West Coast Pendolino trains from 125 to 155 mph maximum speed (as in Italy)**
- **Re-signal the West Coast line with ETCS to allow up to 140 mph from Glasgow to Warrington**

These ideas could cut the Glasgow-London rail trip to around 3 hours 40 minutes and bring an increase in rail use and capacity for both passengers and freight. Edinburgh-London trains would continue to use the East Coast Main Line which has potential to be upgraded.

**The UK Government should involve the Scottish Government and Transport Scotland in taking these constructive ideas further. Otherwise HS2 cancellation will leave west central Scotland with poor connectivity to the south. An updated High Speed Rail Programme fulfilling the needs of Scotland as well as the North of England is now needed from the UK and Scottish governments.**



*SNCF high speed TGV trains (above left in Lille) can reach 186 mph and cover over 400 miles from Paris to Marseille in 3 hours. In Britain Pendolino trains (above right, in Virgin colours) have a design speed of 140 mph but are constrained by the infrastructure on the West Coast Main Line to 125mph. Glasgow-London trains typically take 4 hours 30 minutes to cover the 400 miles. Photos: J.McCormick*  
*New Pendolinos in Italy can now achieve 155 mph service speed on Italian high-speed lines.*

## 6

## The Role of Rail in Scottish Tourism

The spectacular scenery of Scotland's Mountains, Moors and Lochs is best viewed from the train. The Jacobite steam train carries thousands of Harry Potter fans every year over the world-famous Glenfinnan Viaduct, aka the Harry Potter Bridge (see photo on right). The Jacobite service has been described as a lynchpin of Scottish tourism, bringing an estimated £35 million per year into the sector, though recently there have been some adverse comments about quality of service.

The Royal Scotsman, "Scotland's poshest train", offers luxury land cruises on the West Highland Line and also on the Highland Main Line to Strathspey in the Cairngorm mountains.

ScotRail operates trains on the scenic rail network to Thurso for the island of Orkney, Kyle of Lochalsh for the Isle of Skye, and the West Highland Line to Oban, Fort William and Mallaig for CalMac ferries to the Western Isles. ScotRail trains also reach Stranraer in the south in the peaceful rural region of Dumfries and Galloway.



Many of Scotland's tourist hotspots are now attracting so many car-based tourists that congestion disrupts the unique Highland atmosphere. Arriving by ScotRail train at, for example, Glenfinnan station would avoid traffic and parking congestion and give an opportunity to visit the viaduct and Glenfinnan Station Museum which illustrates the history of construction of the Mallaig line.

The scenic line from Inverness to Kyle of Lochalsh brings visitors within sight of the romantic Isle of Skye. However catching a bus over the bridge to Skye is not straightforward as there are few reliable connections between trains and the deregulated buses. ScotRail and bus operator Stagecoach should co-operate to improve connections between bus and train at Kyle. A "Skye Line" tour from Inverness by train to Kyle, then bus to Skye, linking at Armadale with the ferry to Mallaig and the West Highland Line, and returning to Inverness by coach via Loch Ness, could be a popular expedition by train, coach and ferry showing the best of Scotland's spectacular mountains and seascapes crowned by viewing the world famous Loch Ness.

Rail plays an essential role in tourism in rural Scotland. Growing demand for leisure travel means that some of the services now need to be expanded. In particular, there are only three ScotRail trains per day between Glasgow and Fort William, a service level that has remained unchanged for thirty years. A more frequent service would boost rail's share of the travel market, increase ScotRail revenue, and help combat road congestion and pollution in one of the world's last remaining unspoiled natural terrains. Additional trains should run at times to attract the greatest potential revenue. The strongest growth is now likely to be optional leisure travel rather than "commuting".

A mid-morning departure from Glasgow Queen Street (between the 08.21 and 12.22) and a mid-afternoon departure from Fort William (in the long gap between the 11.40 and 17.37) would generate extra leisure journeys from the Central Belt to all stations on the line to Fort William, as well as giving a greater choice of departure times for longer distance Anglo-Scottish travellers.

Initially this could be resourced by retaining one or two Class 156s from the East Kilbride fleet which will otherwise go off-lease at the end of 2025. In the longer term a full revision of the West Highland Glasgow-Oban/Fort William-Mallaig timetable is needed to increase train utilisation, service frequency and passenger numbers.

*Contributions from John Yellowlees and excerpts from press releases collated by John McCormick.*

## Rail

Peak ScotRail fares returned from September after the Scottish Government confirmed it would end its pilot scheme. The policy was brought in on ScotRail services in October last year by then-first minister Humza Yousaf in a bid to make transport more affordable while lowering emissions.

The Scottish Government announced that ScotRail would go out to tender for the replacement of the HST fleet on its intercity routes.

FirstGroup has taken over the access rights for the Stirling-London services due to start in June 2025. The open access operation was previously planned by Ian Yeoward's Grand Union Trains Ltd. Four daily services are planned from Stirling to London Euston, calling at Larbert, Greenfaulds, Whifflet, Motherwell, Lockerbie, Carlisle, Preston, Crewe, Nuneaton and Milton Keynes. This gives FirstGroup a west coast open access operation to complement its successful Lumo services on the east coast from Edinburgh.

Ticket office opening hours are being reviewed by ScotRail. Passengers are served by more than 2,000 daily train services through 359 stations, of which 143 have staffed ticket offices across the country. The way people purchase tickets has changed, and it will continue to do so in the future. A 12-week internal staff consultation has been launched on the proposals to change ticket office opening times on the rail network in Scotland. The consultation is expected to conclude at the end of March 2025.

Scotscladder was Scotland's least used station last year with 124 journeys: others included Barrhill, Breich and Kirkconnel. The Herald asked if ScotRail's quiet new station at Reston was a white elephant.

A station adopter at Mallaig has said that some passengers on the Jacobite steam train cannot see out of the dirty windows. There were also complaints about cancellations and poor ventilation in the coaches.

Five companies have signed the contract to share Network Rail's £150 million Signalling Power and Communications framework in Scotland. They are AmcoGiffen, QTS, Story, Taziker and VolkerRail. Likely projects include South West Scotland signalling life extension work and Glasgow Central station telecoms.

A two-year biodiversity project to improve the natural habitat near the Glenfinnan Viaduct is now complete. Network Rail and Forestry and Land Scotland have invested £300,000 to improve biodiversity by expanding the rainforest and peatland.

"RAIL" claimed that the Almond Chord was again being looked at by the Scottish Government so as to bypass Winchburgh Tunnel which is prone to flooding.

LNER are funding an "off" light to Platform 4 at Perth allowing their northbound train to use it from December, and are working with ScotRail to improve the zoning, add seats and create additional waiting areas there. A new family lounge will open at Waverley in 2025, with the travel centre moving to existing LNER facilities adjacent to Platform 5

Between 4 January and 12 February 2025, Caledonian Sleeper will temporarily amend their Aberdeen and Fort William timetables to free up coach availability so as to facilitate additional cleaning, modification and maintenance tasks, reducing these portions to three services per week to each destination.

Elon Musk's Starlink technology is to provide internet access across the Far North line via Clarus Networks Group on Class 158 trains, delivering unparalleled connectivity.

Bodycams are being introduced for staff on the Caledonian Sleeper after some passengers have been verbally abusing staff after drinking until dawn. The cost over three years is about £200,000.

CrossCountry will start the first service between Scotland and Wales in December, with trains from Cardiff and Penzance to Edinburgh via the ECML joining at Birmingham New Street. Southbound trains will divide at Gloucester before proceeding to Cardiff and Plymouth.

HS2 engineers hope that their trains will have the most comfortable seats on the UK network. They will recline in the same way as Eurostar services, with the bottom part of the seat sliding forwards and the back downwards to avoid encroaching on the space of the person behind. An "HS2-Light" railway line between Birmingham and Manchester could be built under plans before ministers. Supporters believe the line would be up to 40% cheaper than the previous HS2 plan. Lord Hendy, Rail Minister, is believed to be a staunch supporter of improved connectivity. Replacement of Louise Haigh as UK Secretary of State for Transport by Heidi Alexander will hopefully not adversely impact progress.

## Buses and Trams

Spiralling costs threaten rural bus services as some tenders for school transport are rocketing by up to 40%. Argyll and Bute council, for instance, are facing increased costs of £876,000 for school transport in Islay, Helensburgh and Lomond, Mull and Mid Argyll.

Rural local bus networks operate on the back of school transport in many areas. Local authorities are legally obliged to provide statutory school transport but general public transport services are not a statutory function. The cost of operation covers provision of the bus and driver, and overhead costs of depots and management support. Adding further public transport journeys incurs only marginal costs for fuel and additional driver hours but nevertheless this can be a challenge for local authority budgets.

Alexander Dennis has announced a redundancy programme at its bus manufacturing sites in Falkirk and Larbert following the UK budget which increased national insurance payments.

Megabus is shutting routes across England and Wales as demand for services has failed to recover from the pandemic. Megabus is continuing routes in Scotland and cross-border routes.

A gang of youths are using free bus passes to go on shoplifting sprees. The group of 42 youths is accused of stealing merchandise worth £37,000 in 160 incidents.

## Ferries

CalMac services on the Clyde and to the Western Isles have been devastated by breakdowns and late delivery of new ferries on top of the usual bad weather. Caledonian Isles, the main Arran ferry, has been out of action since February and is not expected to return to service until March 2025 due to steelwork having to be replaced. The new Glen Sannox, now expected to start service in the early new year, will be unable to berth at Ardrossan so will have to operate from Troon. The Troon-Brodick crossing is significantly longer. Troon Harbour has no railway station so passengers will be bussed from Troon station. There is no news of work to upgrade Ardrossan Harbour. Meanwhile, Hebridean Isles had to be withdrawn in November 2024 with no replacement available, leaving the fleet short of two major ships.

Ferry fares are to rise by 10% in 2025 on Northern Isles and CalMac routes.

SNP ministers have been accused of a "sham ceremony" after it was revealed that the funnels on the second new ferry, Glen Rosa, launched from the Ferguson shipyard in April will have to be removed as they were fitted without essential components. Meanwhile, the first new ferry, Glen Sannox, has been handed over to Caledonian Macbrayne but one of the anchors was constructed incorrectly and is not able to be retracted correctly once it has been deployed. A permanent solution will be installed.

Four out of six CalMac directors have never visited any outer isles port in their capacities as non-executive directors. Three have never been to any CalMac port in the entire network.

The Paddle Steamer Waverley was voted Glasgow Business of the Year.

## Roads

A9 dualling will not be completed until 2035 at a cost of £3.7 billion. The original plan announced in 2011 predicted it would be completed by 2025 at a cost of £3 billion. However, only 11 miles have been completed leaving 77 to be upgraded. The £185 million Tomatin to Moy section has had worked pushed back from 2027 into the following year.

Production of electric cars fell 26% in September as demand waned. Britain's public charging network is so expensive that the cost of driving an electric vehicle is up to twice the price of running a petrol car.

## Air

University researchers have been branded hypocrites for condemning air travel as bad for the planet but then flying to conferences.

Jet2 reported a 12.4% rise on sales over the summer following a surge in late bookings. Ryanair boss Michael O'Leary has said that passengers should be restricted to two drinks at airports to reduce aggressive behaviour on planes.

## Correction to STM 2024/2 page 4

**The SAPT office-bearers after the SAPT 2023 AGM include:**

Vice Chairs: Prof David Murray-Smith, Neil Wallace

Minutes and Membership Secretary: David Giles

Treasurer: Robin McGregor