



Scottish Association for Public Transport

SCOTTISH TRANSPORT MATTERS 201

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Inverness Meeting

Wednesday 3rd September 2025 Palace Hotel, 8 Ness Walk, Inverness IV3 5NG

The Palace Hotel is a 10-minute walk from Inverness railway station or from the bus station.

Teas/coffees/biscuits available in Ness Suite from 1330

- 1345 Welcome and Introduction Neil Wallace, Chair, SAPT
- 1400 Roy Pedersen, Author & Consultant, Inverness
 Ferry services – including a comparison with policy and practices in Norway
- 1445 David Summers, Principal Transport Officer, The Highland Council
 Andy Gilbert, Bus Officer (Operations), Highland Council Buses
 Now operating over 20 public services around Inverness, Ross-shire and Caithness
 Update on growth and progress in the 3rd year of operation and work on future projects.
- 1530 Frank Roach, Partnership Manager, HITRANS
 A Rail Development Strategy for the Highlands and Islands
- 1615 General Discussion
- 1630 Close

SAPT Membership

If you are not a SAPT member, you are welcome to join by visiting www.sapt.org.uk **Join Us** or contact us at 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.

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

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Election Transport Issues

Transport hugely influences people's lives. Access to employment, education, health facilities, entertainment and social contacts usually involves travel. Good connectivity is vital for the community and the economy, but this is threatened by worsening road congestion, declining local bus services, and relatively modest rail usage compared with some other European countries. Initiatives are needed to overcome these problems.

The 2026 election is an opportunity for political parties to develop transport strategies that deliver better public transport, increased modal share for bus and train, greater value for money for users and taxpayers and lower congestion and emissions. A brief overview of the issues follows.

- 1. Rural Bus Growth:** Declining rural public transport disproportionately affects young people and the elderly with limited access to car travel, risking depopulation. In some European countries governments guarantee to support an acceptable level of service to most settlements: bus schedules connect with other bus routes and with train and ferry services where appropriate. This approach widens the destinations that can be reached on the national transport network, and attracts growth in passenger numbers and revenue on both buses and trains, as demonstrated in several continental countries. ***Greater bus co-ordination and funding may need amendments to the 2019 Scottish Transport Act***
- 2. Urban Public Transport Decongested:** Mounting car traffic extends road journey times to work and education. Building more roads generates more traffic (and emissions). Investment in new public transport routes, segregated from car traffic, will shorten journey times by public transport, boost efficiency and economic growth, and attract modal switch from car. Development of the **Clyde Metro** segregated light rail system is crucial for unblocking travel in the **Glasgow City Region**. Extension of the **Edinburgh Tram** network is needed for growth capacity in **Edinburgh**. In other conurbations **bus priority schemes** and **active travel routes** should take precedence over road schemes. Bus franchising or local authority ownership will give more certainty of getting value for money from public transport investment.
- 3. Rail:** ScotRail passenger numbers are recovering to pre-covid levels. ScotRail's train fleet replacement plans, plus redeveloped timetables, higher quality of service and increased marketing should target to double annual rail passengers to 180million by 2030. But see Section 7 "Finance" below.
- 4. Rail Re-Openings:** After successful reintroduction of trains to Leven and previously to Larkhall, Bathgate, Alloa and Tweedbank, there is much local interest in re-instating trains to other rail-isolated communities like **Grangemouth, Hawick, St.Andrews, Peterhead and Fraserburgh**. A programme of new rail links transforming travel and economic prospects for these towns should be systematically assessed.
- 5. Highland Rail Connectivity:** Train travel in the Highlands could be revolutionised by new Hourly Express timetables linking **Inverness** and **Aberdeen, Perth** (and the south), and **Tain**. These lines were mostly singled in the 1970s. New passing loops near Orton and Delmore are needed to enable hourly timetables. On the Highland Main Line new passing loops near Ballinluig and Newtonmore would improve reliability and capacity for freight and passenger trains. These should be included in Network Rail's CP8 programme (2029-34). There should be further investment to improve infrastructure resilience against the growing incidence of storms.
- 6. Tourism and Trains:** The **West Highland, Kyle, Far North, Stranraer** and other scenic lines should be world showcases for Scottish Tourism. But 35-year old trains offer a poor travel experience for locals and visitors alike. New zero-emission electric/battery trains are expected by the early 2030s. A strategy to upgrade service quality and frequency should include evaluating the re-instatement of some passing loops (eg at Corrour) to improve line capacity and reliability.
- 7. Finance:** The 2025/26 Scottish Government budget allotted £2.6 billion for public transport. Rail accounts for £1.5 billion with bus services including concessionary travel amounting to £468M. Co-ordinating and rationalising local bus services with rail, as recommended above, could grow overall public transport revenue while reducing bus costs. Doubling the use of ScotRail train services to 180 million journeys by 2030 equates to about £350m extra revenue. But this is unlikely to be achievable while long distance private coach operators can offer free concessionary travel, funded by the taxpayer, in competition with state-owned ScotRail. Concessionary travel terms for long distance journeys should be made more equitable between **coach journeys** and **ScotRail InterCity journeys**. Within existing overall budgets it should then be possible to **increase revenue support for lifeline local bus services**. Ring-fenced local bus funding including concessionary travel should be channeled through local transport authorities.

This paper is being sent to Scottish political parties ahead of the 2026 election. Further coverage of the issues will be in future issues of *Scottish Transport Matters*.

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Annual General Meeting: Railway 200

The well-attended 2025 AGM was held in the Glasgow Radisson Hotel on 30th May (right).

After an interesting introduction from SAPT President Stewart Stevenson, **Scott Prentice, ScotRail Strategy and Planning Director**, gave an outline of rail use across Scotland.

East Renfrewshire and West Dunbartonshire have the highest proportion of rail users, with 34% of people in West Dunbartonshire using the train at least once per week. Lowest was Perth and Kinross where 34% of the population never use rail. Overall, 17% of the population use rail at least once per week.



Passenger growth continues since the pandemic. For instance Williamwood station was used by 403K people in 2024, compared with 248K ten years before. Monifieth saw passenger use rise from 6685 in 2015 to 54401 in 2024, attracted by a much better train service. Overall, ScotRail usage is still growing towards pre-pandemic levels. ScotRail's new Tap & Pay app will make it easier to travel without needing to buy traditional paper tickets.

All ScotRail's existing train fleet except the Class 380 and 385 electrics will be life expired by 2040. Replacement will be through three separate procurements for InterCity, suburban and rural fleets.

Matt Powell, Head of Route Sponsorship, Network Rail, outlined some relatively low-cost improvements. Many West Highland line platforms have been lengthened to accommodate 7-car trains between Glasgow and Crianlarich, and 5-car trains onwards to Fort William. A new pedestrian access to Gorebridge station on the Waverley route has been opened. The East Kilbride rail enhancement, with electric trains due to start in December, includes a relocated Hairmyres interchange station with 176 parking spaces. The next step after East Kilbride is Fife and Borders, with discontinuous electrification awaiting government funding.

Integration across transport modes, making train services easy to use, modal shift from cars, more competitive fares, attracting more leisure travel, making better use of assets, engagement with communities and carrying more freight are eight strategic rail priorities.

Dr. Ann Glen MBE, SAPT committee member, and railway author, journalist, and historian, serves on the advisory panel for the Railway Heritage Trust. Ann gave a fascinating illustrated talk on early railways.

This started from Scotland's first railway, the 1722 Tranent - Cockenzie waggonway (waggon illustrated upper right). The Battle of Prestonpans, the first battle of the "45", was fought over the track!

Much of the early development of railways served the needs of the industrial revolution, such as the Gartsherrie Ironworks built in 1828 (see illustration lower right).

Early passenger lines such as the Glasgow & Greenock (1841) and Edinburgh & Glasgow (1842) involved impressive engineering works like the Bishopton tunnels and the 36-arch Almond Valley viaduct which are still very much in use today.



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Annual Report

After development work by Highland-based Squiggle Web Design, co-ordinated by Neil Wallace, the new SAPT website www.sapt.org.uk went live. This gives more flexibility to add news items, features, articles and illustrations. The ability for people to join SAPT online has attracted a number of new members.

The SAPT autumn meeting in Inverness in November was attended by 22 delegates. Speakers covered buses, ferries, rail developments and accessibility. SAPT also contributed to the Far North exhibition in Inverness and other locations in the Highlands.

A number of SAPT committee members attended the two Rail Scotland conferences in Glasgow in January and March 2025. These gave informative updates on a wide range of rail topics, Clyde Metro, and Glasgow Subway modernisation. Climate change is an escalating issue for maintaining rail infrastructure and train services.

There was also a bus conference in Glasgow in March. Road congestion, rising costs, driver shortages, and tight local authority budgets were amongst the challenges facing the bus industry.

John McCormick participated in a Teams meeting with Glasgow City Council, ScotRail and other organisations for a preliminary discussion on the idea of a Workplace Parking Charging system for Glasgow.

SAPT committee members David Murray-Smith, Ray Flint and John McCormick met Scott Prentice and Ewan Tait of ScotRail in March to discuss rail progress. HST reliability is poor but £20M is being invested to improve it. Tenders for replacement of the HST fleet are expected to be received later in 2025. The long-term plan is for resignalling to support an additional hourly Aberdeen-Glasgow train, allowing faster limited stop services to be introduced from Aberdeen. East Kilbride electrics will go live in December, but there still be some residual diesel train services until additional new electric trains are procured. SAPT also suggested a high-quality level of on-board service needs to be provided on the trains being procured to replace the HSTs.

SAPT had a meeting (jointly with Friends of the Far North Line) with ScotRail and ScotRail Holdings Heads of New Fleet Procurement to discuss the features recommended for new Tourist Trains, though these are not expected until the early 2030s. By this time battery technology should have improved for rural operation. We also had a meeting (jointly with the Friends of the West Highland Lines) with ScotRail MD Joanne Maguire to suggest improved West Highland rail services and more vegetation clearance.

The deteriorating standard of service for Calmac ferry passengers was discussed by the committee. In addition to frequent disruptions to sailings, the passenger gangway at Stornoway has been out of commission for over a year, with passengers having to disembark via the car deck after the vehicles have driven off. Diverting Arran crossings to Troon because Ardrossan Harbour has not been upgraded to support the Glen Sannox, despite this ferry being delivered nine years late, means the direct Ardrossan Harbour rail connection is no longer available. Passengers are instead bussed to Troon station.

SAPT responded to a number of consultations including:

- 1 SPT Regional Bus Strategy and franchising policy. This could be crucial to developing Clyde Metro
- 2 GB Rail. Railfreight and Anglo-Scottish services will be affected by changes, though ScotRail less so.

Thanks are due to John Yellowlees, John Wilson and John McCormick for contributing news items for Scottish Transport Matters. Thanks are also due to Robin McGregor and David Giles for maintaining membership records and looking after the accounts, and to David Brown for checking the accounts.

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Treasurers Report

SAPT Treasurer Robin McGregor reported that subscription income is stable and covers annual expenditure. There are no immediate requirements or plans to spend the legacy money. David Brown was thanked for checking the accounts.

5 Minutes of SAPT AGM Business Meeting 30th May 2025 Radisson Hotel, Glasgow 12:30.

Apologies: Richard Ardern, Mike Lamport, Stevon Ardron, Raymond Convill

Minutes of 2024 AGM Business Meeting: Approved.

Approval of Annual Accounts for 2024: Approved.

Election of Office-bearers and other Committee Members:

Dr. John McCormick indicated he would not stand for re-election as Chair, after 37 years in the post.

Neil Wallace was unanimously elected as Chair.

David Giles was elected as Vice Chair.

Professor David Murray-Smith did not stand for re-election as Strategy Officer but continues as Vice Chair

John McCormick took over as Strategy Officer.

Other members of the committee were re-appointed.

The 2025/26 Office Bearers and Committee are:

President Stewart Stevenson

Vice Presidents: Tom Harris, Lawrence Marshall, Dr Malcolm Reed, Tom Hart

Committee

Chair: Neil Wallace

Vice Chairs: Prof David Murray-Smith, David Giles

Treasurer and Membership Secretary: Robin McGregor

Strategy Officer: Dr John McCormick

Minutes Secretary David Giles*

Regional Representatives

Strathclyde David Brown, Stewart Leighton

Lothian Paul Tetlaw

Borders Graham Atkins

Central and Tayside David Giles

Southwest vacant

Fife Ray Flint

North-east Scotland vacant

Highlands and Islands Dr John Logie, Rolf Schmidt

Shetland vacant

Elected member Dr Ann Glen MBE

*David Giles also maintains the membership register



SAPT Vice Chair Lawrence Marshall presented John McCormick with a Swiss rail poster before John congratulated Neil Wallace on his appointment as the new SAPT Chair.

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News Around Scotland

Contributed by John Yellowlees and John Wilson with excerpts from press releases collated by John McCormick

Buses and Trams

The 12-week consultation on building a new North-South tramline from Granton to the Royal Infirmary and beyond will start on August 25. Anturas MD Catherine Leech who had helped deliver the Newhaven tram extension told a meeting that there needed to be a more sophisticated debate about how to secure capital for the proposed north-south line, but Scott Arthur MP commented to RAIL that public ownership of transport was a "model that we must protect". Despite passenger numbers passing 12M for the first time, Edinburgh Trams made a loss of £9.6M last year, the seventh in a row, prompting Conservative spokesperson Sue Webber to say that taxpayers were told this project would eventually pay for itself but it continued to bleed money.

An Edinburgh black cab driver has called for a cap on private hire cars which are like "the wild west". Some pupils will have to walk for two hours a day to attend school at Cumbernauld Academy following the withdrawal of the school bus by North Lanarkshire council, leaving a three-mile hike from the Carrickstone area to the school

Passenger Focus issued results from its survey of regional bus user satisfaction:

Rank	Area	Satisfaction 2024 followed by 2023 figure		
1	Strathclyde Partnership for Transport (SPT)	88%	89%	-1%
2	South East of Scotland Transport Partnership (SESTran)	85%	86%	0
3	Highlands and Islands Transport Partnership (HITRANS)	84%	83%	+1%
4	South West of Scotland Transport Partnership (SWesTrans)	82%	87%	-5%
5	Tayside and Central Scotland Transport Partnership (TaCTran)	82%	80%	+2%
6	Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire (Nestrans)	81%	80%	+1%

Ferries

An experienced military shipbuilder has been drafted in to lead the nationalised Ferguson Marine shipyard. Graeme Thomson, previously programme director for Babcock at Rosyth, has promised to restore the reputation of the troubled site.

The second of the long-delayed ferries for Arran, the Glen Rosa, has left dry dock in Greenock after painting of the hull. It has returned to Fergusons for fitting out the interior and is expected to be handed over in the second quarter of 2026, eight years late! In the meantime, the Arran ferry service has deteriorated as the two ships currently maintaining the service, Glen Sannox and Alfred (chartered from Pentland Ferries), must operate a longer route from Troon as the Clyde Port Authority has failed to do anything to upgrade Ardrossan Harbour. But the linkspan at Troon is to close for essential work from 8th to 14th September with the ferry service suspended. During this time Arran will have to depend on the smaller vintage ferry Isle of Arran to provide a restricted single vessel service from Ardrossan. This is the latest chapter in the sorry saga of chaos caused by Transport Scotland's ferry planning problems.

The Scottish Government has set up a £4.4 million support fund for island businesses affected by the Calmac ferry fiascos. The Island Business Resilience Fund is available to businesses in South Uist, Colonsay, North Uist, Eriskay, Benbecula, Berneray, Grimsay and Arran.

Tighnabraich pier on the Kyles of Bute is closed due to storm damage. The paddle steamer Waverley is unable to call at the village, with no date for repair.

The number of passengers using the Rail and Sail ferry service between Scotland and Northern Ireland has fallen to 12 a day. The service carried 4,400 passengers in 2024/5 compared with 15,000 passengers five years earlier. The rot set in when Stena moved sailings from Stranraer to Cairnryan. Passengers must now take a coach link from Ayr station to Cairnryan. The service was cut back due to Covid to only one connection per day and has not since been restored to pre-covid frequency.

An ex-US navy diver fell overboard from a Western Ferries Gourock-Dunoon ferry on Sunday 15th June. Ferry services were suspended during the subsequent search which was unsuccessful.

Rail

Scottish Rail Holdings Chief Operating Officer Graeme Cook was appointed Director of Rail at Transport Scotland in succession to Bill Reeve.

ScotRail peak fares are being scrapped from 1st September. The largest percentage will be on the Glasgow-Edinburgh line with the return fare reduced from £32.60 to £16.80.

The Royal Household announced decommissioning from next year of the Royal Train, to be replaced by two new helicopters. DB described this as an "incredibly sad day for rail". The Kensington Treaty of friendship and cooperation between the UK and Germany provided for direct trains between London and Berlin.

Transport Secretary Heidi Alexander pledged that Great British Railways would be run by rail professionals not by civil servants.

Alexander lifted safeguarding of HS2's Leeds leg to allow disposal. But Northern Powerhouse is expected to be brought before the Labour Party conference in Liverpool. The proposed Liverpool-Leeds new line would require part of phase 2b of HS2 from Crewe to Manchester to be built.

ORR rejected three West Coast open access bids on grounds of insufficient capacity but approved extension of some Lumo services to Glasgow from December while blocking its King's Cross-Sheffield bid.

LNER saw revenue rise from £866k to over £1bn last year, while cancellations fell from 4.8 to 3.8%, but those on Northern were at 8%. Lumo accepted 16 new apprentice customer driver recruits, some from the rail industry but others from completely different backgrounds, to begin nine months of training for its Stirling-Euston service. Chiltern signed a contract accepting the Mk5s which had been declared surplus by TPE. The final 807 no 807010 was delivered by Hitachi to Avanti West Coast on 3 July when it ran from Newton Aycliffe via Edinburgh and the West Coast Main Line to Wembley.

ScotRail published a Market Engagement Notice seeking 69 new electric and battery trains to replace existing diesel and electric units but not until the 2030s. ScotRail currently has the third oldest fleet of trains on the British network, with an average age of 24.3 years as of March 2024. As well as HSTs (which are up to 49 years old) operating inter-city services, the state-owned operator has a significant fleet of British Rail-era multiple units. These include Class 153, 156 and 158 DMUs and Class 318 and 320 EMUs. The order would be for 41 EMUs and 28 BEMUs, the latter in association with partial electrification of the Fife and Borders routes. RAIL understood that the Scottish Government was actively looking at green bonds or other non-conventional method of funding new trains.

Knorr Bremse was on course to complete its project on integrating Wheel Slip Protection on ScotRail HST cars by next month. ScotRail expanded its partnership with OptimiseAI to provide digital modelling at 25 stations, with energy modelling to follow at eight major locations.

ASLEF suggested that that one penny in every ten from farebox income was going to rolling stock companies.

SSE applied for planning permission for a substation for future electrification at Stannergate in Dundee.

Scottish Borders Council appointed Turner Townsend to lead feasibility studies and the business case for extending the Borders Railway to Carlisle. Scottish Borders Council gave approval to a substation at Tweedbank. "Old Gala Club Goes By Train" was an exhibition on until end-September. HRE proposed scour protection measures for the disused Eden Viaduct near Carlisle. HRE's proposal to Cumberland Council or waterproofing and parapet repairs to the Waverley Viaduct in Carlisle, closed since 2009, provided for Railway Paths Limited to take it over in the future.

SOLVD MD Valerie Mitchell told The Herald that her company had been formed to run the shared services division of Abellio and now employed 150 people, but her ambition was to expand beyond transport. ScotRail customer relations staff presently in the employment of Abellio spinoff SOLVD faced transfer to French call centre specialist Teleperformance, prompting complaints of second-class treatment. USS sold Atrium Court to Longstock.

South Lanarkshire Council announced the opening of the new 321-space north park-and-ride at Hairmyres. Ground was broken on 22 July for the £18M new station at Balgray on the Neilston line due to open in autumn 2026. Scotland had shown on new stations as on electrification that having a rolling programme, learning from each project and applying those lessons to the next, was a model that was well worth following. Scottish contractor McCulloch Rail's remote-controlled Trac Cable Transporter was among RAIL writer Chris Howes' top 20 products from Rail Live. Network Rail would be delivering a new £5.9M bridge over the railway at Bowling over the festive season so as to open up the former Exxon site for development under the Glasgow City Deal.

Struck by the lack of restaurants and bars, comedian Susan Morrison claimed that Queen Street had been given a makeover by a 12-year-old who hated the travelling public, and the toilets had no cashless option whereas at Waverley they were free. Colin Mason of Kilmarnock asked ScotRail to explain the ludicrous pricing whereby the price of a Glasgow-Dundee return on a Senior Railcard was £33 at the ticket machine but a split ticket option at the ticket office was £21.30. Unite called more Subway strikes over working conditions for 11-13 July to coincide with the TRNSMT festival at Glasgow Green. However an interim offer accepted by the union saw the strikes called off. Deploing restrictions on traffic which would make bus travel slower, Ian Harrison of Glasgow cited trains not restored by ScotRail since CoVid as another example of public transport being made less attractive.

Engineering works affected routes as follows : Glasgow-Edinburgh via Shotts 6 July; Glasgow-West Calder 13 July; Glasgow-Cumbernauld 20 and 27 July; Argyle Line via Glasgow Central 20 and 27 July. Platform renewal meant trains not calling eastbound at Hamilton West and westbound at Hillington West. Forestry and Land Scotland worked with Network Rail to remove lineside trees at Culloden Woods on 26/27 July. Cowdenbeath residents had been disturbed by loud noises in the middle of the night, with some taking to social media in search of the cause which was identified as lineside tree-cutting. A level crossing at Dingwall was closed for five days for maintenance. The Kyle Line would close from 19 October to 10 November for a £4.5M renewal of track between Achnashellach and Strathcarron. Waggon Road Crossford was closed for an overnight inspection of the railway bridge. Network Rail said that a £2.7M programme of track renewals would take place in August at Pollokshields West, with also refurbishment of junctions at Cathcart and repairs to a boundary wall.

Lib Dems obtained FoI figures which showed that the worst ScotRail stations for cancellations with one in twenty trains affected were Helensburgh Central, Craigendoran and Cardross. Scott Miller of Joppa wrote that every station mentioned was on the Edinburgh-Helensburgh route, and if it was unreliable people would turn to their cars. Citing the more than 17k cancellations last year on ScotRail, Labour's Jackie Baillie MSP wrote that it was a shame we did not have the infrastructure to match our scenery.

The UK government could raise rail fares by 5.8% as inflation rose to 4.8% in July. The Department for Transport has not yet confirmed the methodology for increases in 2026, however ScotRail fares are separately regulated by the Scottish Government.

Mark Wild, the chief executive of HS2 Ltd, said that he "can't apologise for complying with the law" as he defended spending £100M of taxpayers' money to build a bat tunnel. The law says that HS2 must mitigate damage and harm to protected species. "It is an extraordinary amount of money but it is in the context of a scheme that is costing tens of billions and it's built for 120 years."