



Scottish Association for Public Transport

SCOTTISH TRANSPORT MATTERS No 202

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Season's
Greetings
from
SAPT



*Ember is expanding its all-electric coach network.
See page 3.*

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1

ScotRail Electrification Progress

The Scottish Government has set 2045 for full “decarbonisation” of the rail network. Electrification has made much better progress in Scotland than south of the border.

East Kilbride is the latest line to be electrified. The £143M project has provided new stations at East Kilbride and Hairmyres with enlarged car parks. There is now a dynamic passing loop at Hairmyres (right). Busby, Giffnock and Clarkston stations have new footbridges.



The December 2025 timetable provides a half-hourly service of 4-car Class 380 or 385 electric trains (lower right). Some Class156 diesel trains will continue to operate additional peak hour services due to shortage of electric trains. The evening frequency has been improved to half-hourly.

Fife train services are being diverted or replaced by buses from January 17th to 25th to allow electrification between Haymarket and Dalmeny. This also affects Edinburgh-Aberdeen ScotRail and LNER trains which will be diverted via Stirling. This is the first part of plans to electrify 140km of track in Fife and the Borders, paving the way for battery-electric trains on these routes.



Photos: Network Rail

The Edinburgh-Dundee/Perth lines through Fife will end up with discontinuous electrification. This avoids problems with electrifying over the Forth Bridge, and through the Dundee area including Dock Street tunnel. Dundee station sits below the waterline of the Tay. Discontinuous electrification requires 25kV power supply to each of the sections of overhead line, which is costly, but reduces the total length of route needing to be electrified. Electric power feeder stations are being installed at Tweedbank, Thornton, Portobello and Newton with additional stations already completed at Ferguslie and Currie.

Transport Scotland has published a rather wordy report, “Rail Recharged: Scotland’s Fleet Transition Strategy”, confirming the plan for replacing Inter7City, suburban and rural train fleets.

Announcement of the replacement for the Inter7City HST trains, expected to be second-hand Class 222 diesel trains from East Midlands Railway, is still awaited.

The new suburban fleet of electric and battery electric units is due to enter service between 2028 and 2030. The contract notice specifies a minimum of 69 trains (41 EMUs and 28 BEMUs), with an option for 37 more.

Rural lines will have to await a Transport Scotland plan for “independently powered” trains to replace the antique Class 156 and 158 trains on the Inverness-Aberdeen, West Highland, Kyle, Far North, Dumfries and Stranraer lines. Given the world-class tourism potential of these lines, a sense of urgency is needed to formulate this policy. We suggest this could, like HST replacement, involve an interim solution instead of waiting for the ultimate zero-emission technology to be developed. A new train fleet based on Stadler’s Flirt modular design could, for instance, start now as a dual diesel/electric and subsequently be upgraded to battery/electric as battery technology improves.

2

Coach Competition Intensifies

Ember coaches, based in Edinburgh, are challenging Citylink and other coach operators. Ember is the first all-electric intercity bus operator in the UK, started in 2020. It was awarded a £5.5M grant from the Scottish Zero Emission Bus challenge fund for 26 electric Chinese-built Yutong buses.

Ember is building its own ultra-fast charging network.

Ember is rapidly developing an extensive coach network in competition with established operators. The latest route between Edinburgh and Inverness was launched in November 2025 with 12 return services. This follows the Glasgow-Inverness launch in October 2025 also giving 12 return services per day with a fastest time of 3 hours 17 minutes. In September a Fort William to Edinburgh via Callander route (photo on right) was added to the Fort-William-Glasgow service.



Other Ember routes include Aberdeen-Inverness (16 return trips per day) and Dundee to Aberdeen via the Cairngorms and Deeside, Inverness to Thurso and Dundee to Glasgow.

Scottish Citylink celebrated its 40th anniversary in 2025. Around 5 million journeys are now made per year on Citylink which serves around 200 destinations. Citylink evolved in 1985 from the Scottish Bus Group's range of coach services. After a management buyout in 1990, subsequent owners have included National Express and ComfortDelGro, with Stagecoach Bus Holdings now owning 35% of shares.



Meanwhile, Greenock-based McGills is partnering with the German company Flixbus in developing a network of Scottish coach routes. McGills has depots for local services in Greenock, Barrhead, Inchinnan, Johnstone, Dundee, Falkirk, Livingston and Balfron, with a new large depot planned for Tradeston in Glasgow.

The effect of this intensified coach competition on the future services of other operators and ScotRail is still to be seen. Around half the population are now entitled to free bus travel, with the Scottish taxpayer footing the bill for refunding bus operators 55% of the standard fare for each concessionary journey.

Coach operators can “game” the system by charging high onboard fares while offering much lower fares for online pre-booked tickets. This ensures the online fares remain competitive while earning the operator far more from the government concessionary rebate which is based on the standard onboard fare (even for journeys pre-booked online). In the case of Ember, 98% of fare-paying passengers book online. Most of the intermediate stops are for pre-booked passengers.

Ember are leading the way in zero emission long distance public transport. The growth in intercity travel options is welcome. Distortions in the market caused by free concessionary travel should however be addressed. A concessionary discount scheme for long distance journeys, applicable to fares on both bus and the state-owned ScotRail, could be the best way forward.

3

Granton to Bioquarter Tram Line

This response to the Edinburgh Tram consultation from the **Scottish Association for Public Transport** gives our overview of the issues and our views on the route options and was submitted to the consultation in December 2025.

3.1 Active Travel Growth

Congestion drives up costs and puts a cap on city productivity. Lothian buses average around 9 mph. This is slower than Glasgow, London, Manchester and Liverpool, which also have extensive rail-based systems. Edinburgh's population growth is forecast to reach +15% by 2041. To maintain Edinburgh's economic competitiveness, transport plans must overcome problems of slow journeys and worsening congestion. The Granton-Bioquarter tram line is a key development which will cut travel times and boost public transport capacity in Edinburgh. Improving connectivity will enhance economic activity within the city, generating more footfall and economic attractiveness for business and inward investment. The tram line is of particular importance given the major developments in the north and south of the city.

Transport policy seeks to encourage more active travel and less car use. Active travel includes walking, cycling and using public transport. Edinburgh's Public Transport Action Plan stipulates that public transport should be accessible for all. So the city's active travel strategy must include the elderly and people with mobility problems as well as walkers, cyclists, commuters and other people. In fact all members of society.

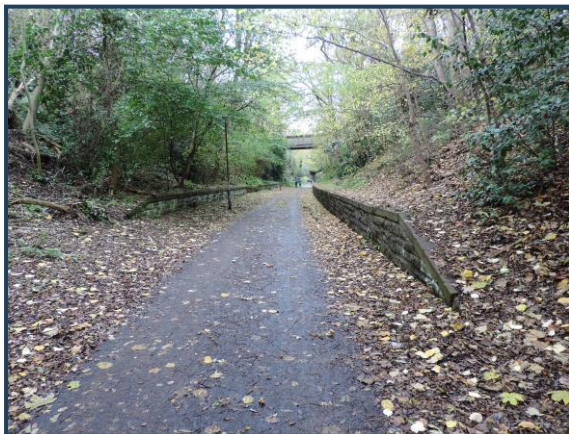
Decisions on the tram route should aim to balance the needs of all these travellers, keeping in mind that the Granton tram route is predicted to carry 4.25 million people of all ages and levels of mobility per year, while the Roseburn cycle path is used by 0.6 million cyclists and walkers per year (12 % of the total predicted tram+cycle usage). The priority should be to expand active travel while resolving any conflict between different modes of travel.

3.2 Environmental Impact

Electric trains and trams are energy-efficient and carbon-free forms of public transport, with a track record of attracting motorists to switch from using their cars, reducing road congestion and emissions. Design of the tramway through the city is an opportunity to upgrade the city streets, creating a much better environment for pedestrians and cyclists as well as reducing car traffic and providing a high quality, fume-free public transport service.

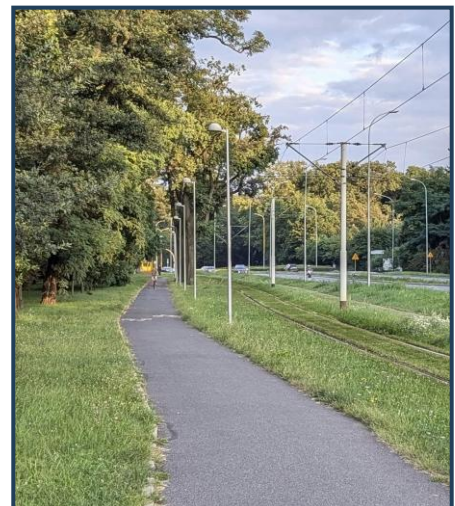
Use of the former Granton railway for the section of tramway from Haymarket towards Granton was approved by the Scottish Parliament in the Edinburgh Trams Act in 2006. The disused railway, which has become a rather overgrown green corridor (photo below left), is now popular with cyclists, walkers and joggers along the section of former railway which is now known as the Roseburn Path

Co-existence of cycle tracks with tramways has been shown to be perfectly feasible in other parts of the world, including the Netherlands. An example of a pleasant green corridor incorporating a tram line is illustrated below right.



*Left:
Rosebank
path with
cycle track
and trees*

*Right:
Green
corridor
with cycle
track,
tramway
and trees.*



3.3 Granton needs good public transport

The proposed Granton Tram Line is a ground-breaking opportunity to provide a high-capacity and faster public transport link from Granton to the city centre and beyond. Granton's £1.3 billion waterfront development of 3,500 new homes will need a step change in transport to enable the expanding community to access jobs, education and health facilities in Edinburgh. The bus journey from Granton to the Royal Infirmary takes 56 minutes averaging only around 7.5 mph. The alternative to the tram development would be unacceptable ever-increasing road traffic and worsening conditions for motorists, bus users, cyclists and pedestrians using city streets.

Orchard Brae option: The Orchard Brae route would mean excavating busy streets causing massive and unpopular disruption for residents, car drivers and the many buses using Queensferry Road. Excavating the road across the Dean Bridge would potentially be a can of worms (and wires and pipes) and could escalate construction costs unpredictably.

The resulting route would involve trams sharing the route with heavy road traffic including many buses. Congestion would be exacerbated by the trams. The street tram tracks would increase skid risk for cyclists.

The Orchard Brae route misses the Haymarket connection, extending journeys from Granton to the Airport and Edinburgh Park and to destinations on the rail network.

Roseburn Path option: The Roseburn Path is an important part of Edinburgh's active travel network, with 0.6M trips annually (about **1600 trips per day**). For comparison, Edinburgh Tram Line 1 is used by 12M annually (**33,000 journeys per day**). Built to rail standards as the **Caledonian Granton branch**, it would cost less to lay tram lines than on the Orchard Brae route, and would give the trams a fast and reliable route free from road congestion

The option of having a single tram track section with cycleway alongside is suggested in the consultation as the best compromise to improve public transport while continuing to encourage cycling and walking.

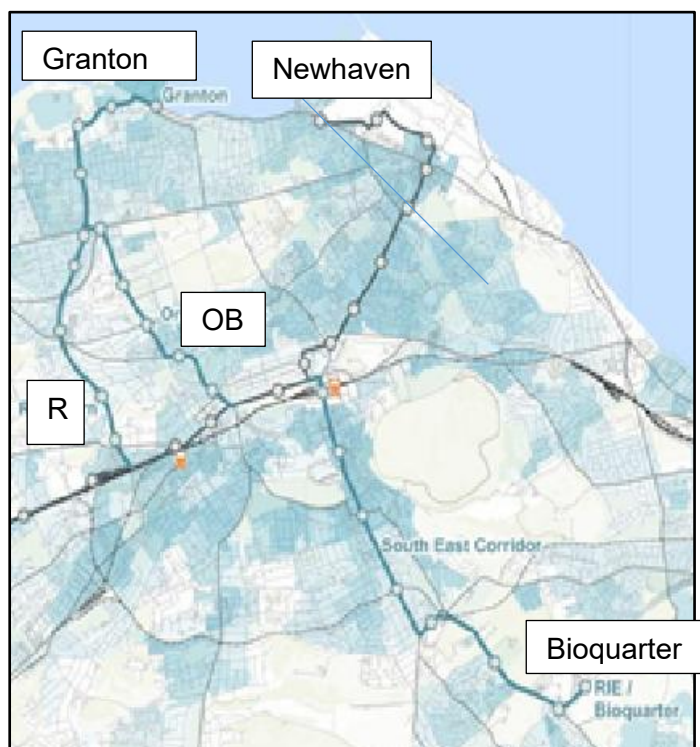
The Roseburn path is now around 4 metres wide. The proposal for a shared tram/cycle route would reduce this to 3 metres width. (the same width as the Airdrie-Bathgate cycleway which was provided alongside the Airdrie-Bathgate railway line at a cost of £7.3 million in 2010). The cycleway would be separated by a fence from the tram track, making it safe for cyclists. Use of the combined route by trams would heighten the sense of security for many walkers and cyclists particularly in the evening.

The full width of the Granton railway corridor was in some places wider than the existing path. We recommend that the feasibility of providing a **passing loop or longer section of double track** on the proposed single track section between Craigleith and Roseburn should be fully assessed, **improving tram punctuality**. This could also allow an important **tram stop at Ravelston Dykes to be provided**.

Routing trams via the Roseburn line will reduce traffic on Queensferry Road, benefiting buses, cyclists, pedestrians and cars.

Conclusion: We strongly support using the Roseburn route to provide a quality public transport tram link from the Granton developments to Edinburgh city centre and beyond. The Orchard Brae option would be slow, increase congestion, and cost more to build, and should be rejected.

In the future, building a connecting line between Granton and Newhaven (Phase 2 of the original tram strategy) should be evaluated. This would open up new transport connections and provide resilience against any interruptions on either the Newhaven or Granton tram routes.



Edinburgh Tram Granton to Bioquarter

R: Roseburn option OB: Orchard Brae option

4

HS2 Reset and Scotland

The HS2 Reset to control spiralling costs of the project is welcome. But losing sight of the initial objectives (to cut north/south rail congestion and journey times) would reduce HS2 to an extraordinarily expensive 225mph outer London commuter line to Birmingham.

The WCML and ECML have already reached capacity, as can be seen from ORR's recent rejection of bids to add additional train services to meet demand. With HS2 now expected to reach Birmingham years late, the HS2 reset must therefore avoid pushing any rail capacity benefits to Scotland and the North of England even further into the future than necessary.

Key to being able to bring any benefits in the foreseeable future to Scotland and the North of England is to preserve legal powers for the 37-mile line from Handsacre (near Rugeley) to Crewe. This section is critical to bypassing the bottleneck constricting passenger and freight capacity on the WCML to Manchester, Liverpool and Scotland. Allowing legal powers for building that line to lapse (deadline February 11th 2026) will be the latest bad decision in the sorry HS2 saga. Selling land already bought between Handsacre and Crewe would be a short-sighted waste given that money has already been spent on some land acquisition. Any prospect of alleviating rail congestion north of Birmingham will then have to await a repeat of protracted and costly public enquiries and parliamentary procedures to regain legal powers to reach Crewe.

The **Northern Powerhouse Rail** (NPR) objective to integrate NPR planning with a possibly amended HS2 route on the approaches to Manchester and Liverpool is to be commended. But this doesn't obviate the need for an extension of HS2 to Crewe. This could be built (possibly to lower speed specification and cost) from Handsacre to double the rail capacity to Crewe, whence WCML routes to Manchester, Liverpool and Glasgow diverge. This HS2 extension is well south of any potential NPR alignment which is likely to be routed near Warrington.

Boosting Anglo-Scottish rail passenger and freight traffic is pivotal to **cutting cross-border road and aviation emissions**. **Scottish interests need to be properly represented** concurrent with the reset of HS2 and development of Northern Powerhouse Rail. Scottish issues include:

- can new or upgraded Pendolinos operate at 155 mph on HS2 to bring Glasgow/Edinburgh-London journey times down towards 3 hours 30 minutes?
- can passenger and freight capacity on the northern section of the WCML be expanded, for instance by upgrading the GSW route via Kilmarnock as an alternative for some freight trains?
- How passenger traffic from Birmingham via Sheffield and Leeds to Edinburgh, with connections to Dundee and Aberdeen will be accommodated (if at all) by High Speed Rail and Northern Powerhouse Rail, given that Phase 2b of the original HS2 plans are no longer to be pursued? This route is currently largely covered by Cross Country

We note that on 25 July 2024, the UK Government introduced the High Speed Rail (Crewe to Manchester) Bill to the House of Commons, and that this Bill is currently in Committee Stage.

To progress Anglo-Scottish rail development and to suggest appropriate amendments to this Bill, it would be very useful to set up a joint task force involving the UK and Scottish governments. The objective would be to formulate, within a short-time frame, a visionary cross-border rail strategy to align with HS2 and NPR progress, but crucially, also to influence the evolution of the present High Speed rail legislative proposals currently in the House of Commons.

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

Bus and Tram

More than 250M bus journeys had been made by young people since free travel for under 22s was introduced three years ago. The Scottish Greens have pledged free bus travel for all. The Scottish Government is to work with HiTrans and ZetTrans to deliver a Regional Bus Fare Cap Pilot scheme covering Highland, Moray, Argyll and Bute and the Western and Northern Isles.

At the Global Light Rail Awards the Richard Brown award for customer service went to Edinburgh Trams for Tap On Tap Off. "Tram-Trains for Edinburgh" were launched as a campaign at Edinburgh City Chambers on 7 October. An ICE award went to Heriot-Watt students led by Corey Boyle for their tram-train proposal on the South Suburban.

Platform screen doors have been installed at Govan subway station as a further step towards introducing unattended train operations.

Air

CAA suspended the Wick-Aberdeen operation as Eastern Airways gave notice of its intention to appoint an administrator. Maree Todd MSP called for Scottish Government intervention, and Jamie Stone MP wondered whether Loganair might take over the Wick-Aberdeen route. ScotRail and other rail operators offered free travel to passengers of the airline, which had provided a supported route between Wick and Aberdeen.

Ferries

Western Ferries made a profit of £3.46 million for the year ending March, up from £2.87 last year. Two new highly efficient ferries were ordered in May 2025 from Cammell Laird. Delivery is expected in autumn 2026. Each ferry will hold 220 passengers and up to 40 cars.

Delivery of the long-awaited Glen Rosa has been delayed for a further six months because of corroded pipework and damaged hull coatings. The vessel was ordered in 2015 and supposed to be sailing on the Arran route by 2018.

Rail

Two Inverness city-centre retailers indicated their intention to relocate, thus clearing the way towards a possible transport interchange

Transport Scotland said that a clear case had not been made to progress a rail or tram link to St Andrews, but they offered to work with operators on exploring options to improve bus-rail links.

Fife Council backed a call by Cllr Lynda Holton to change the name of Glenrothes with Thornton to Thornton.

At the Golden Spanner awards ScotRail won a Silver Spanner for the 318s and a Golden one for the 385s.

Alison Taylor MP and Neil Bibby MSP of Scottish Labour called for revival of the Glasgow Airport Rail Link as a standalone scheme since the Clyde Metro feasibility plan would not be completed until 2027. Architect Edward Dymock of Queen Street architects BDP, writing about Glasgow 850, believed that projects like Clyde Metro, often misunderstood as being about an airport rail link, were driven by a desire to connect communities.

Mark Ruskell said that the £850k cost of reopening Newburgh station was peanuts compared to roads project.

The Railways Bill was laid before Parliament on 5 November to create Great British Railways as a publicly-owned company bringing together the management of passenger services and rail infrastructure. Transport correspondent Simon Calder hoped that GBR could bring in a national railcard from day one, but feared it could be hamstrung. Trainline believed it was winning the fight against being locked out of the new industry structure. A Government Impact Assessment for the creation of GBR revealed a potential cost of £200-400M. Network Rail launched its new property company Platform4 which would support Scotland's Railway on selected projects.

Lumo's Stirling-London Euston service using non-tilt Class 222 diesel trains will start in spring 2026. Southbound trains will leave Stirling at 06.05, 08.49, 12.22 and 17.09. Northbound trains will leave London at 06.11, 10.19, 13.19 and 16.36. Journey times will be between 5 hours 30 minutes and 6 hours 30 minutes, though Lumo hope to be able to improve these timings.

Avanti West Coast's 0428 Glasgow-Euston with 390117 carrying 65 passengers derailed on hitting a landslip at Shap Summit on 3 November. The driver receiving their praise for his quick reaction, and the train had been doing 80 mph. Over a third of November's average rainfall over Cumbria had fallen in three days. After complex repairs, the line reopened at 1919 on Tuesday 4 November in time for the Caledonian Sleeper. The Scotsman's Alastair Dalton reported that there had been a failure of inclinometer landslip sensors. First minister John Swinney commented that the derailment must have been a terrifying experience. Lorna Slater MSP said that we should commit ourselves to a future where railway staff were valued.

Next year's Carmont Fatal Accident Inquiry might now last only a couple of weeks. An RAIB inquiry into the Shap derailment found similarity with Carmont.

Alex Hynes' two-year secondment from Scotland's railway ended when he was appointed to succeed Robin Gisby as chief executive of the DfT train operator. The SG published a Fleet Transition Strategy to replace its Decarbonisation Plan. Battery-only and hydrogen trains were technically and commercially immature and time was needed to allow the supply chains to scale up so in the meantime trains from Fife and the Borders would be moved to the rural network. Frank Roach of HITRANS urged acceleration of the process as rural routes might be operating with Class 158s over forty years old.

In the December "Modern Railways" Ian Walmsley reported on a visit to Scotland by the Superannated Anoraks which reached Inverness 91 minutes late after a ScotRail HST came to a stand owing to low adhesion which he attributed to leaf-fall from trees growing within the railway boundary. He nominated ScotRail Turbostars as Britain's dirtiest trains.

Saturday 8 November was ScotRail's busiest day of 2025, with 337,441 passengers making it the second-busiest in public ownership with thousands taking the train for Scotland's sellout rugby match against New Zealand. Removal of peak fares might have contributed with customers using their seasons for leisure travel. It would be months before ScotRail could see what was happening on the impact of peak fares abolition but, declaring an expectation that every adult in Scotland would see something of ScotRail's current campaign 12 or 13 times, chief operating officer David Ross told RAIL that their big focus was modal shift, whether that was for a single big event or coming into the office "if we deliver a good service, they will come."

As a possession ended 10 November on the Kyle Line, so a week of engineering work ran 8-16 November between Fort William and Crianlarich. More than £1M was being invested during the closure from 28 November in future-proofing the Stranraer line, including drainage improvements, a level crossing upgrade and inspection of structures to ensure that it would remain a trusted connection to Southwest Scotland
West Lothian Council sought government funding for a new station at Winchburgh.