

Meeting of the Cross Party Group on Rail in the Scottish Parliament
Minute of the meeting held on Tuesday, 25th November 2014,
5.30pm

Present:

John Mason MSP (SNP; Glasgow Shettleston), Neil Bibby MSP (Labour; West of Scotland), Allan McLean (Secretary), Kirsten Sweeney (SPT), Mike Connelly (Abellio), Geoffrey Evison (Campaign for Borders Rail), Keith Robson (Keith Robson Consultancy), John Webster (Capital Rail Action Group), Callum Chomczuk (First ScotRail), Richard Ardern (Friends of the Far North Line), Iain MacDonald & Vic MacKinlay (Light Rail Transit Association), Jim Harkins (Light Rail UK), Roderick McDougall & Allison Cosgrove (RailFuture Scotland), Ian Richard & Ken Sutherland (RailQuest), Paul Tetlaw (Transform Scotland), Martin McKinlay (Transport Scotland), Damien Henderson (Virgin Trains).

Apologies:

Eric Guthrie (TACTRAN), Norrie Innes (Action Barras Calton), Maureen Watt MSP, Jamie Hepburn MSP, Iain Wilson (First ScotRail), Cameron Buchanan MSP, Steven Coventry (Siemens PLC), Steven Young (Steven Young & Associates), Bruce Kiloh (SPT), Richard Carr (SAYLSA), Gordon Martin, Michael Hogg, Jim Gray & Phil McGarry (RMT).

Welcome from the Chair:

John Mason opened the meeting and observed that the planned AGM of the CPG would have to be delayed to later in the agenda until Neil Bibby MSP's arrival so that the meeting could be considered quorate.

Allan McLean then introduced Martin McKinlay of Transport Scotland.

Presentation from Martin McKinlay of Transport Scotland:

Speaker Martin McKinlay, Head of Rail Technical Services at Transport Scotland, gave a presentation on future rail developments in Scotland. He focused on the Edinburgh -Glasgow Improvement Project (EGIP), which involves electrification between Edinburgh and Glasgow via Falkirk, and the Borders Railway project, which aims to link Edinburgh and Tweedbank, near Melrose.

Mr McKinlay also outlined the plan for a new Edinburgh Gateway Station which will provide a link via tram to/from Edinburgh Airport. He said there would be an electric trains' timetable between Edinburgh and Glasgow by December 2017. The Cumbernauld/Glasgow line had already been electrified this year. He said that consultation was under way on redevelopment of Glasgow Queen Street station. Issues to be dealt with were renewal of slab track in the Queen Street High Level tunnel and work in Winchburgh Tunnel for electrification.

The Borders Railway was due to be ready for driver-training in June 2015 in time for public services in September 2015. The specification was for a journey time of 44 minutes between Tweedbank and Newcraighall, where trains would run onto existing track to/from Edinburgh.

Questions for Martin McKinlay of Transport Scotland:

(Answer summaries are within brackets)

- 1) Paul Tetlaw of Transform Scotland asked if the platform at Galashiels would be as long as the one at Tweedbank alongside a query regarding the Scottish Tapestry. (Yes, though Martin was not in a position to confirm anything about the Scottish Tapestry absolutely.)
- 2) John Webster of the Capital Rail Action Group asked whether there would only ever be two trains per hour on the new Borders line. (For now, yes. If the project was successful this could increase.)
- 3) Allison Cosgrove of Railfuture (Scotland) asked how long Queen Street Station in Glasgow was liable to close for. (17 weeks.)
- 4) Jim Harkins of Light Rail UK asked what provisions were in place for future investment in tram-train connectivity. (Going forward Tram-Train light rail may have a role, but for now heavy rail is the priority.)
- 5) Roderick McDougall of Railfuture (Scotland) asked, in the light of the stated intention that the Almond Chord will be built in the future, what is the logic behind closing the Winchburgh Tunnel, thereby causing massive disruption to users of Scotland's flagship rail service for several weeks, before building the Almond Chord when, by reversing the order of construction of the two projects, you could avoid such disruption and the associated needless compensation costs? (The Almond Chord was not necessary to achieve the immediate aims of EGIP.)
- 6) Richard Ardern of Friends of the Far North Line enquired as to the date of the next stage of GRIP3. (There is no date as the refranchise has made organising this difficult.)
- 7) Ken Sutherland of Railquest asked who was responsible for deciding to cut the dynamic passing sections of double track rail line on the Borders Railway from 15 miles to 9 miles. (Network Rail demonstrated that 9 miles met Transport Scotland's targets.)
- 8) Geoff Evison of Campaign for Borders Rail also questioned Mr McKinlay on future issues to do with these projects, including the decision to only construct single track bridges. (There was a lack of capital to twin all of the bridges and the single track met targets.)

- 9) Jim Harkins of Light Rail UK asked what provisions had been made for tram-train delivery in East Kilbride. (Not aware of any but lots of electrification taking place.)
- 10) It was asked why, on a new line, thirty year old 158 trains were being used instead of more Modern 170s. (This is a matter for Abellio to consider.)

At the end of the Q&A Mr McKinlay was thanked by the Chair and attendees for his time, presentation and answers.

AOCB:

Jim Harkins advised that the CPG should consider making use of a website. He recommended basing it upon the “**All Party Parliamentary Light Rail Group**” at Westminster’s site.

There was some discussion about potential sponsorship opportunities that the CPG might like to consider looking into.

AGM

With Neil Bibby MSP’s arrival during the presentation the CPG on Rail was able to officially hold its annual general meeting.

Co-convenor Neil Bibby MSP reported that the CPG had been a worthwhile experience and that there was lots of work to be done in the future.

John Mason MSP echoed Neil Bibby’s remarks and then nominated Mr Bibby to reprise his role as Co-Convenor of the CPG on Rail. Neil Bibby was duly elected to the position he had already held and nominated John Mason to reprise his own role as the other Co-convenor. John Mason was also re-elected to the position.

Secretary Allan McLean was further approved by the group to reprise his position and commented that he hoped to hold a future meeting on the new franchise with a presentation from Abellio.

Iain Richard of Railquest said that he hoped more MSPs would attend in the future.

The meeting closed at 19.25 with a date for the next meeting to be confirmed in due course.