

General -
6c North East Transport Consultative Forum

- Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to outline for members' information the outcomes from the latest meeting of the North East Transport Consultative Forum (NETCF) held at Woodhill House on Monday 6th September 2010.

A note of the meeting and a summary of discussion at each of the tables is attached as an Appendix to this report.

- Recommendation

It is recommended that Members note the contents of this report.

KM/8 September 2010

Minute of the thirteenth meeting of the North East Transport Consultative Forum

Woodhill House, Aberdeen

Monday 6 September 2010 5:15-8:00pm

The meeting was attended by 35 of the Forum's members. The purpose of the meeting was to allow members to discuss the Draft Rail Action Plan which was circulated in advance of the meeting.

Kevin Stewart, Chair of the Nestrans Board, introduced the meeting and Derick Murray, Nestrans' Director, spoke briefly of progress and key achievements in transport in the North East over the previous year.

Rab Dickson, Nestrans' Strategy Manager, then gave a brief presentation on the key issues relating to the Draft Rail Action Plan.

Both presentations are available on the Nestrans website at <http://www.nestrans.org.uk/news/articles.asp>

● Discussion

A new, more informal format was trialled at this meeting and participants were provided with a short break and a light buffet following the presentations. Participants were then invited to circulate around four discussion tables, each dealing with a different topic in the Draft Rail Action Plan. The four topics for discussion were:

- Local rail facilities in North East Scotland – stations and services;
- External rail links – North East to elsewhere in Scotland and the UK, including freight;
- The appropriate balance of stopping and through trains; and
- Longer term aspirations, including electrification and High Speed Rail.

Participants were invited to circulate amongst the four tables as they wished and participate in the discussions, moving from table to table informally. The discussions at each table were facilitated by a member of the Nestrans team who provided a brief summary to the whole group in a plenary feedback session at the end.

A summary of the key issues raised at each table is provided in the appendices to this report.

Feedback on the new, more informal style of discussion trialled at this session was requested and this has been mainly positive. It is proposed that this will be used again and improved upon for future meetings of the Forum.

The date for the next meeting of the North East Consultative Forum will be advised in due course.

Notes from Table 1

Local Rail Facilities in North East Scotland – Stations and Services

Facilitator - Don Kent, Nestrans

The table was a lively mix of discussion and opinion. The table centred on local services and the use of the railway as a commuter/local access facility.

The main points were:

- Disabled people have a problem changing trains and therefore missing local stations would be a bigger problem for those travelling longer distances.
- Full access to all stations should be progressed.
- Ticket prices and discounts on longer trips from main stations were felt to be a problem.
- Cycle parking at Aberdeen Station was raised as an issue.
- Whole journey tickets were the subject of discussion with the view that the current Plus Bus and RailBus products were not widely understood and that for local trips an “oyster” type card would be better.
- The desirability and problems surrounding new stations on the network was discussed. The costs of Kintore being increased by the need to move track to its original formation being a problem.
- The poor service at Portlethen was felt to be an impediment to its greater use. The new service from Dyce in the evenings was a step in the right direction.

Notes from Table 2

External Rail Links – North East to Elsewhere in Scotland and UK, Including Freight

Facilitator - Rab Dickson, Nestrans

A general overview of the comments made at this table were:-

- It was generally felt that services to Edinburgh, Glasgow and Inverness were sufficient, although gaps in the services stopping at Stonehaven cause problems;
- It was noted that the “Eureka” proposals to speed up East Coast journey times were focused on benefits south of Edinburgh;
- Although it was agreed that maintaining through services to London was essential, that will have to be justified on the numbers travelling through. It was noted that the rail generally costs more than flying for longer distances but that passengers wouldn’t make the change at Edinburgh, Waverley would be unsuitable and numbers are considered to be high, particularly many are infirm or elderly;
- It was also noted that East Coast provide some 25% of seating capacity, which standard ScotRail trains could not replace;
- Although it had been suggested that High Speed Rail would not encourage people out of aviation, it was noted that journey times of up to 5 hours could be competitive when taking account of travel into Aberdeen and transfers;
- On the question of fare structures, it was suggested that Passenger Focus may be willing to take up the issue that promotional fares are only available from main stations, that long distance trips are not promoted and that fares seem to favour commuter journeys. It was noted that there is a fares matrix, which is a responsibility of Transport Scotland, who would need to lead on fares revision;
- On the issue of freight, it was recognised that a balance has to be struck, but that train speeds should be optimised and it was suggested that Nestrans should seek to influence Network Rail to ensure approvals for line clearance to enable more freight through to the north east;
- It was noted that proposals for improvements in the tay Estuary area may mean less need to stop intercity trains at minor stations, speeding up end-to-end journey times to Glasgow;
- The issue of making extra capacity available for major events such as Offshore Europe was raised;
- There is an opportunity for more/improved rolling stock being cascaded when the Edinburgh/Glasgow project is complete;
- It was suggested that there is a need to improve space to work, electric sockets and wi-fi capability, but this is likely only to be forthcoming with rolling stock upgrades.

Notes from Table 3

The Appropriate Balance of Stopping and Through Trains

Facilitators - Jenny Anderson and Kirsty Morrison, Nestrans

A general overview of the comments made at this table were:-

- Reducing journey times to the central belt could actually increase journey times for people at intermediary stations who would have to travel further to get to a station served by an express train.
- It was however felt by most that reducing the journey times from Aberdeen to Edinburgh / Glasgow was a high priority and key to encouraging mode shift.
- It was generally agreed that the region needs both express trains to the central belt and local services.
- Some groups agreed that the three tier approach to station classification proposed in the Draft Rail Action Plan is appropriate due to the significant differences in numbers of passengers using each station. Others however questioned whether the lower passenger numbers at some stations were a direct result of the lesser numbers of trains stopping there. This group considered a two tier classification to be preferable, with all local stations being equally served by a local service, unless the resultant demand at a later date indicated otherwise.
- It was generally agreed that the same principles of express trains and local stopping trains applied equally to the Aberdeen to Inverness route as it does to the Aberdeen to Edinburgh / Glasgow line.
- From a tourism point of view it was felt that the region needs both express and stopping services.
- Although both express and stopping services were desired it was recognised that the current infrastructure poses significant limitations to providing such services as currently there are limited opportunities for express trains to pass local services.
- It was discussed that perception of journey time is important and that reducing the number of stations that a train stops at can create the perception of a significantly faster service even if it doesn't reduce journey times significantly. The example of recent improvements made in Fife was given.
- In terms of the extent of the local network it was generally agreed that this should primarily be aimed at meeting the needs of those within a commuting distance of Aberdeen e.g. stretching from Laurencekirk to Inverurie. Those who preferred an intercity service direct from Aberdeen to Dundee however noted that in this case the local service may need to extend to Dundee.
- In determining a pattern of services it will be important to think about the times of day and what types of services are most needed e.g. a fast direct train to Edinburgh and Glasgow would likely be beneficial early in the morning while stopping trains on the way into Aberdeen in the AM peak would be most appropriate.

- In relation to the potential for new stations, it was felt that serving key employment destinations should be a key consideration in the identification of any potential new stations.
- It is crucial that new local stations are developed as interchange hubs with good access to other public transport provision for onward journeys.
- Although it was questioned whether new local stations would merely abstract from those up or downstream, the overall opinion was that recent improvements have shown evidence of latent demand for local rail existing in the north east.
- It was agreed that a fairer structure for ticket prices at local stations is required to avoid discouraging travel from them.

Notes from Table 4

Longer Term Aspirations, including Electrification and High Speed Rail

Facilitator - Derick Murray, Nestrans

A general overview of the comments made at this table were:-

- Assessment of High Speed Rail and Electrification should be part of an overall strategy – probably at Scotland level
- A general acceptance that due to cost and return, High Speed Rail is unlikely to extend beyond the central belt
- What would be the detrimental impact on the North East if High Speed Rail stopped at the Central Belt?
- Is electrification to the central belt a cheaper and easier option than High Speed Rail?
- A general view that trying to tie electrification to the central belt with the introduction of High Speed Rail to the central belt (allowing through trains to the North) was worth pursuing
- Bi-modal trains (for through running to London on the East Coast or for High Speed Rail) is a risk because only the UK is contemplating such trains. The continent have more extensive electrification systems
- No views were expressed on the options for central belt station location (i.e. City Centre, Parkway type or one Scotland stop)
- Re-opening of the Deeside or Buchan/ Formartine lines was discussed. General view that if this was to be pursued it should be:
 - In the longer term
 - Investigation would need to be done into the routes as the current routes were not considered ideal
- Concern that existing uses of the disused routes was important and should not be lost