



Inaugural North East Rail Forum Meeting

Wednesday 2nd July 2014

The Douglas Hotel, Market Street, Aberdeen

Attendees

Councillor Peter Argyle	Chair, Nestrans
Councillor Graeme Clark	Aberdeenshire Council/Nestrans Board
Derick Murray	Nestrans
Rab Dickson	Nestrans
Paul Finch	Aberdeenshire Council
Joanna Murray	Aberdeen City Council
Rachel Elliot	Aberdeen & Grampian Chamber of Commerce
Ian Armstrong	SCDI
Audrey Laidlaw	Network Rail
Jerry Farquharson	First ScotRail
Gordon Macleod	Transport Scotland
Peter Lloyd	Transport Scotland
Louise Calder	Nestrans
Calum Chomczuk	Pagoda PR
John McCormick	Scottish Association for Public Transport

Note of Meeting

This inaugural meeting of the North East Rail Forum was opened by Councillor Peter Argyle, chair of Nestrans, who welcomed participants and provided a context for the meeting.

He emphasised that rail forms a key element of the transport network in the North East and is a priority for Nestrans in helping to deliver its Regional Transport Strategy, a refresh of which was approved by the Minister of Transport in January 2014.

Councillor Argyle explained that in the North East of Scotland, Nestrans and its partners have a shared vision for rail. With the support of local authorities, Nestrans has developed a Rail Action Plan and takes the lead in rail issues in the area. The Rail Action Plan is available from:

http://www.nestrans.org.uk/db_docs/docs/RAP%20second%20draft%20sept%202010.pdf

It was noted that in 2012/13, Aberdeen station catered for 3.4 million passengers making it the 5th busiest in Scotland (with almost as many passengers as Haymarket and Dundee combined). Although the north east has just eight stations and effectively just one line (north/south across Aberdeen), around 4% of Scotland's rail passengers are estimated to be to, from or within the region. However, north east passengers tend to travel much more than average distances – 9.9% of Scotland's rail passenger miles are estimated to be from the area and the revenue they generate is hugely significant.

Growth in recent years has been phenomenal – passenger numbers have more than doubled at Dyce and Portlethen since 2004/05 and Inverurie has seen growth from 130,000 passengers per year to over 450,000 in those eight years, some 254% growth. The success of the reopening of Laurencekirk station in 2009 is further evidence that there is suppressed demand and investment in the north east will provide excellent return in terms of value for money.

It was also recognised however, that this success has created some difficulties. Overcrowding is becoming a serious concern and tales of passengers standing for an hour or more on trains to or from Aberdeen are not uncommon. Nestrans has commissioned studies on peak-time trains and reported that in November 2013, 16 of 42 peak-time journeys surveyed were carrying more passengers than there were seats available, and that occupation of more than 30% over capacity was observed.

Councillor Argyle welcomed the opportunity to bring together the agencies that can consider what can be done to improve the immediate issues facing rail travellers in the north east and to discuss what the medium and long-term plans are. He noted that investment in Aberdeen-Inverurie and then to Inverness and enhancements to reduce journey times between Aberdeen and the Central Belt were committed in the Scottish Government's strategic plans, as was bringing forward the proposed new station at Kintore.

The first presentation was from Jerry Farquharson, Director of Business Planning at First ScotRail. Jerry provided some further context to rail issues in the north east, noting the success of the reopened station at Laurencekirk, the increase in services between Inverurie and Aberdeen as well as the plans for further improvement at stations and service enhancements.

[Link to Presentation](#)

Following Jerry's presentation there was a discussion about balancing the need for local commuter services with long distance express services. Ian Armstrong of SCDI noted the need to offer services for people working in Aberdeen, from areas as far away as Dundee, given the supply of jobs available in Aberdeen but the shortage of hotel accommodation and

the housing market. It was also noted that there was a potential challenge in finding the supply of labour to deliver the infrastructure investment required to improve services.

There was further discussion about suppressed demand in the northeast. Jerry noted that an increase in seating capacity between Aberdeen and Inverurie of around 250% had been matched by additional demand. It was agreed that there may be a case for re-examining the modelling used to project passenger usage, given that demand is consistently exceeding expectations.

Gordon MacLeod from Transport Scotland then presented an outline of key aspects of the ScotRail franchise Invitation to Tender (ITT) and noted the increased focus on passenger expectation from rail services. Specifically, he highlighted that rail services will need to demonstrate links to other modes of public transport; and the role of smart ticketing to both assist in tackling fare anomalies and to move towards deliver integrated ticketing.

Gordon emphasised that most routes in Scotland require the benefit of Government subsidy and around £5 billion has been committed over the five years of the High Level Output Statement 2014-19. He also highlighted Government commitments to deliver electrification in the Central Belt and then a further 100km of line annually.

Peter Lloyd of Transport Scotland then spoke about Serco's successful bid for the Caledonian Sleeper, how all rolling stock would be replaced following handover in April 2015 and that the new carriages will have four classes of seating.

He also reported on the collaboration between Transport Scotland and the DfT on the East Coast franchise ITT on which an announcement is due February 2015. Three bidders are working with DfT and Transport Scotland have an advisory role. The bids will identify the possibility of additional services to Aberdeen and possibly Dyce and in particular opportunities for better linkages between north east Scotland and north east England.

In relation to High Speed Rail, there are two on-going issues – High Speed line to Scotland on which work is progressing; and the proposal for a high speed service between Glasgow and Edinburgh, which is now with the Minister but has concluded that Edinburgh-Glasgow HSR is stronger when North-South journey times are also improved, rather than as a stand-alone option.

Audrey Laidlaw presented on Network Rail's investment programme over the next five years as it has just started CP5 in April 2014, for the period to March 2019. This has identified £1.4 billion for line enhancements, including the £170m for the Aberdeen to Inverness Phase 1 route improvements. Although the money covers the cost of infrastructure improvements, it does not meet the cost of the new planned stations at Kintore and Dalcross. Information on the Infrastructure Delivery Plan was requested to enable Nestrans to secure funding for the proposed new Kintore station. **Action:** Audrey to feedback when the delivery plan is available.

[Link to presentation](#)

However, there is £148m of ring-fenced funds available to enhance the network across the country including £31m from the Stations Fund, for which bids should be coordinated through Regional Transport Partnerships. Audrey also noted that the consultation on CP6, which will cover the period 2019 to 2024, will commence in autumn this year.

Following this presentation, it was asked how RTPs and local authorities could work with Network Rail at an earlier stage to agree priorities and Audrey agreed that there was an opportunity to collaborate with stakeholders more fully going forward.

There were then specific questions about the priorities for electrification and both Jerry and Audrey explained that the priority was to connect the network rather than electrify different areas of country in isolation. There was broad agreement about the importance of Aberdeen as an engine of the Scottish economy and that the journey times from the central belt were disappointingly long. Network Rail are currently reviewing opportunities to enhance this section route in conjunction with planned renewals where possible. Nestrans welcome the commitment to deliver a 20 minute reduction in journey times to the central belt, although a recent survey of business leaders in the north east had indicated a desire for a 45 minute journey time reduction. Jerry Farquharson noted that to deliver this level of change may require a radical infrastructure overhaul, but suggested that it may be better to focus on a vision which would deliver real benefits.

There was general agreement that the Forum had provided a useful platform and should reconvene in around six months' time, by which time the new ScotRail franchise operator and East Coast franchise preferred bidder will be known. There is an opportunity to progress projects and have something further to report by that time also. It was suggested that a railfreight interest would be a useful addition as well as other operators and that further consideration should be given as to whether MPs and MSPs should also be invited to attend.

23 July 2014

RD/Nestrans/Rail Matters/Forum/2014