



Scottish Association for Public Transport

SCOTTISH TRANSPORT MATTERS

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Last winter’s weather affected trains badly, but ferry services were particularly disrupted.

Entering and leaving ports are difficult in windy conditions. The “Lord of the Isles”, seen on the left berthing at Mallaig from Lochboisdale, missed 60% of sailings on this route in the autumn of 2014. Other routes were also badly affected.

Reliability could be improved in some cases by harbour works. But not all harbours are under CMAL’s control. For instance, Clydeport runs Ardrrossan Harbour. Funding to improve weather resilience of public transport is needed.

SAPT Members Meeting: All members welcome

Glasgow Monday 12th October 2015 18.30 – 20.30

Mercure Hotel, 201 Ingram Street, G1 1DQ

Topics: Glasgow area electrification priority, airport rail, HS2 update etc

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Abellio AGM Presentation

The guest speaker at the SAPT AGM held on 16th April 2015 was Mike Connelly, Communications and Public Affairs Director, Abellio UK. Mike started by outlining Abellio's philosophy in bidding for the ScotRail franchise. The Abellio team learned the needs, expectations and perceptions of the stakeholders through a comprehensive series of meetings. The strategic direction of the bid drew on the knowledge and insights of the 700 stakeholders and organisations contributing, with the top 100 receiving personal invitations to consult. Letters of support were received from 145 stakeholders. The bid was designed to exceed objectives that Transport Scotland and the Scottish Government set in the Invitation to Tender. The target is a bigger and better railway, benefitting communities and businesses across Scotland and boosting the Scottish economy.

Abellio are seeking to continue the successful growth of ScotRail, which has grown from 63 million to 87 million journeys per year during the previous franchise.

ScotRail is the most prestigious new business opportunity that Dutch Railways and Abellio have ever been given. The long and rich heritage of business and cultural exchange between Holland and Scotland will continue with a biennial rail summit between the two countries agreed at Ministerial level.

The heart of the bid is:

- The agreement for new Hitachi electric trains for Scotland, at a price and delivery schedule that is not open to challenge. The new, longer AT200 trains will serve Edinburgh-Glasgow, Dunblane/Alloa and Glasgow suburban routes. There will be 23% more carriages.

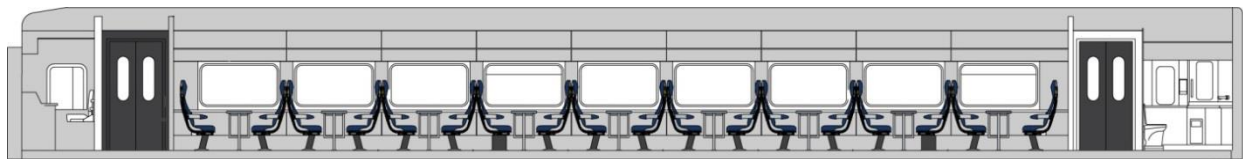


- A Deep Alliance with Network Rail, yielding significant savings and operational benefits
- Transformation of the Inter-City network, with fully refurbished, wi-fi enabled HSTs delivered by 2018 to connect Scotland's seven cities, together with station upgrades at Aberdeen, Inverness and Perth. Journey times will be improved. The trains will have power doors, improved comfort, on train catering, and compliance with PRM disability standards.



The Abellio Way of aligning business plans, performance measurement and cultural behaviour is based on EFQM (European Foundation for Quality Management) and underpins the plans for ScotRail.

Abellio will develop a pan-Scotland “Smart Mobility Scotland” solution that will transform public transport by offering passengers one payment and ticketing solution for journeys, integrating existing smart ticketing systems.



The Great Scottish Scenic Railway initiative will see a fleet of fully refurbished Class 158 trains with Tourist Ambassadors employed on the main tourist lines including the West Highland Line, with refreshed Class 156 DMUs on the Stranraer and Dumfries routes.

Other important highlights are Wi-Fi availability throughout the train fleet, 650 additional cycle spaces at stations, Bike & Go facilities at eight stations, improved waiting facilities at 41 stations, Community Liaison Executives to help develop community rail partnerships, the Club 50 Smartcard, and opportunities for local suppliers including for catering supplies.

Mike then invited questions from the audience which covered a wide range of issues.

New stations at sites where housing is being developed: Mike said that there was a list of 350 potential new stations but, as money is limited, a priority list is needed. STAG appraisal would help.

Steam specials: Abellio plan 3 or 4 per year, with more initially on the Borders Line.

The feasibility of the Abellio team handling all the planned initiatives was raised. Mike responded that the senior management team is still being put in place over the next month or two.

There is a need to improve access to stations on foot or by cycle, which would involve local authorities.

Mike referred to the “Fixing the Link” campaign involving Abellio and the Campaign for Better Transport, aimed at making good walking routes from stations to town centres. In Scotland, the “Paths for All” fund supported by the Scottish Government would need to be extended if station access is to be included.

The Glasgow “City Deal” includes a tramtrain link to Glasgow Airport. Would Abellio bid to operate this?

Mike said Abellio work closely with Transport Scotland so would run the Glasgow Airport link if it is added to the franchise. Abellio have no tramtrain experience at the moment.

The issue of the “not in service” smartcard readers at stations was raised. Mike confirmed that Abellio are committed to getting a system working.

The session ended with Professor David Murray-Smith proposing a vote of thanks to Mike Connelly.

Public transport developments continued apace during 2014 with new franchisees announced for ScotRail (Abellio), Caledonian Sleeper (Serco), and East Coast (Virgin/ Stagecoach), and the bidding process starting for CalMac ferry routes.

SAPT also responded to the Transpennine consultation for Scotland- north of England train services, where we suggested that the Glasgow/Edinburgh-Manchester routes merit high quality InterCity trains. We also suggested extending Manchester-Newcastle trains onwards to Edinburgh to increase Edinburgh-Manchester frequency to three trains every two hours. We were pleased to see that the ITT contained both these recommendations as options.

Most of the recommendations made by SAPT for the ScotRail franchise were incorporated in the successful Abellio bid, including better InterCity trains. Marketing of tourist trains will inject growth into the rural lines. Bus-rail co-ordination is promised on some routes. And the rollout of smartcards compatible with SPT's Bramble card should lead to a national card covering train, subway, bus and tram travel. The welcome introduction of 125 mph HSTs by Abellio from 2018 is an opportunity for SAPT to push for a Network Rail programme of speed and capacity upgrades on Scottish InterCity routes to Aberdeen and Inverness, with electrification following by 2025.

SAPT supports the planning application for upgrading Glasgow Queen Street station, provided that links to Buchanan Street Subway station, local bus stops and taxis are improved.

HS2 planning progress has continued. The High Speed to Scotland group, which includes SAPT, met several times during the year. Options for Anglo-Scottish high speed routes have been appraised by HS2 Ltd. The target set by Scottish interests is for a 3-hour journey time from both Edinburgh and Glasgow to London. A report is expected to be published some time after the May 2015 general election. Scottish Government Infrastructure Cabinet Secretary Keith Brown has expressed continuing strong support for high speed rail.

SAPT responded to a Scottish Government consultation on **Low Emission Zones (LEZ)**. The objective is to define standards for emission limits for vehicles allowed within zones in towns and cities to protect health. LEZs have been adopted in some continental cities, with Bremen quoted as an example in the consultation document. But the SAPT response points out that Bremen, together with many continental cities, already has an extensive network of zero-pollution electric trams and suburban trains, so the most effective solution for Scotland should be to replace diesel buses and diesel suburban trains in towns and cities by low emission buses, and zero-emission trams and electric trains.

SAPT contacted Edinburgh City Council to register our support for extending the **Edinburgh Tram** to Leith. We are also taking the initiative in highlighting the potential of TramTrains from **Glasgow Airport** which could be the first phase of a wider Greater Glasgow TramTrain network strategy.

The full environmental benefit of trams will be lost if, as in Edinburgh, they have to compete with, rather than replace, diesel buses. SAPT continues to argue for bus **Quality Contracts (QCs)** to establish efficient metropolitan transport networks, with connections, rather than competition and duplication, between buses, trams and trains. QCs have so far made no progress due to procedural difficulties. A new Scottish Transport Act may be needed to facilitate fully co-ordinated public transport in Scotland.

The SAPT Committee held eight meetings in 2014, in Glasgow, Edinburgh and Inverness (one). Glasgow and Inverness meetings were held in Mercure Hotel meeting rooms. Edinburgh meetings were held in the Transform office. We were pleased to welcome Mike Connelly of Abellio and James Wilkin of ACoRP to the October members meeting in Glasgow, where plans for the new ScotRail franchise, and progress with Community Rail partnerships in Scotland, were discussed.

Much work has been done by the committee in the last year. We are particularly indebted to Scott Simpson for maintaining the membership database and distributing membership renewals and newsletters, John Ferris as Treasurer, Arthur Homan-Elsy as Secretary, Robin McGregor for checking the final accounts, Vice-Chair David Murray-Smith for organising the AGM, and President Tom Hart for collating the interesting news section in "Transport Matters". Thanks are also due to Transform Scotland for allowing their office to be used for SAPT Edinburgh meetings.

John McCormick, Chairman

AGM held Thursday 16th April 2015 in Perth Library

Apologies were received from Councillor Watson, D. Carmichael, J.Meney, N.Jones, O.Barratt, P.Tetlaw, R.Samson, L.Marshall, and S.Simpson.

The Minutes of 8th May 2014 were approved.

The annual accounts were presented by John Ferris. The reserves declined from £7221 in 2013 to £6713 at year end 2014 but as the expenditure in 2014 included one-off payments of £1000 to Transform Scotland to support the InterCity Express campaign, and of £733 to replace the SAPT computer and software, it was agreed that the subscription rates could be maintained unchanged for yet another year.

Election of Office-Bearers: President Tom Hart indicated a wish to stand down. The Chairman thanked Tom for his enormous contributions over the years, and welcomed his decision to continue on the committee.

Stewart Stevenson, MSP, former Transport Minister, was nominated as President, unanimously approved.

Dr. Malcolm Reed, former Chief Executive of Transport Scotland and former Director General of SPT, was nominated as a Vice President and unanimously approved.

The existing committee members intimated their willingness to continue, and were re-elected en bloc (committee member Calum McCallum having resigned earlier in the year)

Inverness member **Bob Barnes-Watts** was elected as a Vice Chairman.

The SAPT office-bearers and committee, following the AGM, are:

President:	Stewart Stevenson MSP	
Vice Presidents:	Dr. Malcolm Reed	Lawrence Marshall
Chairman:	Dr. John McCormick	
Vice Chairmen:	Professor David Murray-Smith, Bob Barnes-Watts	
Secretary:	Arthur Homan-Elsy	
Membership Secretary:	Scott Simpson	
Treasurer:	John Ferris	
Area representatives:		
General:	Paul Tetlaw, Stewart Leighton	
Strathclyde:	Dr. Ann Glen, David Brown, Ralph Barker	
Lothian:	Alastair Reid	
Borders:	Professor Chris Harvie	
Fife:	Laurie Naumann	
Highlands:	Dr. John Logie, Rolf Schmidt	
South-west:	Tom Hart	

Vacancies in Central, Tayside, and North-east.

Subsequent to the AGM, new members David Giles and John Whyte, who both have extensive interest in public transport, agreed to be co-opted for Central and Tayside respectively,

Central:	David Giles
Tayside:	John Whyte

It was agreed that arrangements and accommodation for the AGM at Perth Library had been excellent, and that this would be a good location for future AGMs. The meeting closed with a vote of thanks to the chairman.

AVIATION

With a recommendation from the Airports Commission due, the Scottish business community has continued to favour both expansion of direct flights and an early decision to expand Heathrow as the leading airport for worldwide connectivity. The Airport Commission Report has been delayed a further few weeks pending deeper assessment of the air quality impacts of expansion at London Heathrow.

Across the UK, Air Passenger Duty for those under 12 was abolished on 1 May but pressure continues for devolved APD to be abolished as quickly as possible by the Scottish Government to encourage a more rapid growth of in-tourism. Air travel has resumed strong growth which is already increasing APD income. The risks in abolition would be to find alternative funding and prejudice to the aim of accelerated cuts in carbon emissions. If APD is abolished, English airports are seeking variable rates of APD to minimise adverse impacts from Scottish APD abolition.

Charter flights from Zurich to Inverness are to start later this year, bringing an estimated extra £1m to the local economy. A study for Edinburgh Airport has concluded that a 50% cut in APD could benefit the Scottish economy by an additional £1 billion by 2020.

Business travellers have complained that the British Airways monopoly of Glasgow-Heathrow routes leads to London flights up to £250 more expensive than from Edinburgh. Edinburgh Airport is introducing a second departure route from the runway for a six-month trial. This will allow a take-off every minute at busy airport times

Transport Minister Derek Mackay has announced an extra Glasgow-Tiree flight at peak summer times. Argyll and Bute Council has reached agreement in principle with Hebridean Air Services to continue flights from Oban to Coll, Colonsay, Tiree and Islay for a further three years at a cost around £2m. The Council is also seeking government support for flights from Oban to Glasgow and Barra.

Scotland's charity funded air ambulance at Perth is to upgrade its helicopter with £3.3m announced in the UK Budget. Prestwick and Machrihanish are both in the running to become the UK's spaceport

FERRIES & SHIPPING

CalMac report a 1.3% rise in passengers to 4.65m in the past year. Cars at 1.1m are the highest since 2009. Commercial vehicles were up 0.16% but coaches fell by 0.54%

Technical issues affecting vessels are impacting service quality on many CalMac Routes. There have been particular complaints from Arran, Islay, Mull and Colonsay about disruption of normal timetables and the inability of island residents to find vehicle space at busy times. Islay residents and hoteliers report a disastrous two weeks over Easter when services were reduced as only one ship was available

The extension of RET to Bute and Mull in October is expected to bring a big rise in visitors by car. SAPT has suggested that fares policy should include larger fare reductions for passengers not using cars.

Work is to start in June on an £18m terminal and expanded car parking at Brodick in Arran. Delays with new linkspans have also postponed full vehicle use of the new German-built Ullapool-Stornoway ferry Loch Seaforth. Full transparency is being sought on this Scottish Government private sector contract – there is suspicion that this involves paying over £5m a year to Lloyds Bank – payments seen as reducing the ability to support improved service operations across the network.

Campbeltown-based Kintyre Express is to add a summer service from Ballycastle to Port Ellen, Islay, to its existing Ballycastle-Campbeltown 12 seater RIB passenger service. The Port Ellen timetable is designed to permit day trips from Northern Ireland. The area still wants restoration of the Campbeltown vehicle ferry which operated until 1999.

Cruise ships brought a record 401,000 passengers to Scottish ports in 2014. The trend to larger ships is expected to see this rise to 435,000 in 2015. Some Lothian businessmen are promoting a £300m cruise terminal at Cockenzie which could bring an extra 500,000 cruise visitors to Scotland and also cater for outgoing potential. Construction could take 10 to 15 years

The Caledonian Canal was closed in March after storm damage to a weir but Scottish Canals were able to have the canal reopened by the end of April.

Highland Council has agreed to limit fare increases on the Corran Ferry to 2%.

WALKING & CYCLING

Walking and cycling groups and sections of the general public have shown greater common interest in more 20mph limits on most urban streets. Lower speeds and fewer vehicles link well with air quality, safety and public realm objectives (Scotsman 20Feb & Herald 30Apr). Longer times are being sought for pedestrian phases at traffic lights (S10Apr). Edinburgh City Council is proposing 20mph limits on 80% of city streets by 2017. The Scottish Government has committed to spend a further £10m on cycling and walking infrastructure in the coming year bringing the total active travel budget to £36m. Scottish Greens claim this is a £3.1m fall in 2014-15 level. Dundee City Council is reconsidering its opposition to 20mph limits.

Cabinet Secretary Alex Neil has announced plans to extend the National Walking and Cycling network by 500 miles by 2020. There will be 30 new long-distance routes. Nestrans claims that having too many bodies involved in active travel is hampering progress. RTPs and local authorities need a larger role with a stronger focus on action to influence behavioural change.

On the other hand, London has reduced targets for increased cycling and the Scottish Government has been criticised for unrealistic targets to increase cycling to 10% of urban trips by 2020 when present cycling is only just over 1% of trips. New research has indicated that Scots are shunning jogging outdoors and making greater use of indoor facilities, including swimming.

The Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park is half-way through an £8.7m plan to improve paths, cycle routes and other outdoor activities. A new path has opened from Callander to Inversnaid on Loch Lomond.

On Edinburgh trams, May will see an experiment allowing cycles on trams until 7.30am and from 9.30 to 16.00 on working days though with only two cycles allowed on board at any one time. Also in Edinburgh, work has started on a £1.2m scheme to link the Innocent path cycleway in the east via the Meadows to the Union Canal towpath.

ECC is in talks with T C Decaux on a bike-hire scheme while Abellio will also introduce schemes at Waverley and perhaps Haymarket. Gordon Casely has called on Abellio to give more attention to increased cycle space on trains. Glasgow is increasing bike-hire points from 31 to 41.

Keith Irving, the new Chief Executive of Cycling Scotland has extolled the benefits of cycling in a 13 April Herald feature. This follows a Scotsman feature by Jim Eadie on 23 March 2015.

ROADS & PARKING

A worsening of broken wires on the Forth Road Bridge has been reported but Bridgemaster Barry Colford says there are no safety problems for users. Starting from June, Transport Scotland is to pay £31.8m to Amey over five years to manage the Queensferry road crossings. A five year extension may follow. Construction costs of the new road bridge are now expected to be £1.35bn rather than £1.4bn

Users of the Skye Bridge continue to complain of excessive closures due to high winds. Thresholds for closure are to be reviewed.

A TomTom survey has found Edinburgh to be the third most congested city in the UK with congestion rising in 2014. Neil Greig of the Institute of Advanced Motorists says that trams have increased delays with 'the only solution being to try to make trams more attractive to car drivers'. But congestion has also been rising at Gogar and Newbridge. Columnist John McLellan says the time may have come to reconsider the congestion charging rejected in 2005.

Lower speed limits on urban streets could aid a reduced use of irritating speed bumps. The rate of serious and fatal traffic collisions in Scotland remains above the English average with particularly poor outcomes on roads in rural areas – especially in north-east Scotland. Police are cracking down on careless rural driving.

BUS, TRAM & TAXI

Glasgow Subway passengers rose to 12.95m in the past year, due to a 1.2m rise in usage during the Commonwealth Games. Excluding the Games usage fell 1.1% but smart ticketing, some developments around stations and the higher frequency allowed with driverless trains are expected to boost usage. City stores now offer Subway card top-ups.

Edinburgh Trams have carried almost 5 million passengers in the first year of operation, 370,000 above target. Revenue is 3% above target. 70% of Edinburgh tram users are 'very satisfied' with the service. Leith residents favour a tram extension there by 2 to 1. The tram inquiry will take two years to complete, reporting after Scottish Parliament elections in 2016. The proposed Edinburgh City Deal sees tram potential in the south-east of the city.

There are complaints that the tram signalling system has delayed buses in Princes St but also opposite claims that too many buses have been delaying trams and affecting the public realm quality of Princes St. Opportunities exist for re-routeing buses or terminating more at the edge of the city centre (with tickets including tram use) or at other interchanges. Edinburgh is proposing to ban coaches from Princes St but a Scotsman letter argues that allowing visiting coaches to drive along the street is a popular feature for visitors before disembarking at their hotels. Cuts in local buses using Princes St would be preferable.

Balfour Beatty is starting work on the £25m Edinburgh Gateway station close to Maybury. This will provide a major interchange hub, possibly with some buses from the west terminating there. However, rail with a 10 minute trip time to the city centre may attract more passengers than a 20 minute tram ride.

Herald editorial on 1 April welcomes joined up thinking by Abellio and SPT to create an Oyster-type Scotland wide ticketing system encouraging rail/tram/bus co-ordination. The new Scottish Transport Minister Derek Mackay is 'open-minded' about Labour proposals to re-regulate Scotland's bus industry despite strong opposition from operators. After the Supreme Court ruling, bus firms are under pressure to reduce localised air pollution in cities with the added gain of cuts in carbon emissions. CPT Scotland responded that better bus services attracting more people from cars can cut carbon but that low or zero emission buses involve higher capital costs in return for cuts in nitrous oxide and diesel particulates.

Scottish Government grants have allowed operators to introduce hydrogen buses on two routes in Aberdeen but they have had several breakdowns. Battery buses also continue to have a limited range, especially if used on hilly routes. But the number of hybrid city buses is rising.

SPT says the Glasgow City Deal includes £30m of bus investment – including improvements to Buchanan Bus Station and a new bus hub on the south edge of the city centre. A full business case is being developed but there is a question over priority for a Bus Fastlink extended west through the Glasgow South Hospital hub, or for an agreed action programme for fewer but better loaded and more reliable buses across the city centre. Revenue to Glasgow City Council from penalties for using the Nelson Mandela Bus Gate has risen 22% to £4m a year. Fines are now falling due to motorists getting the message not to use the bus gate though better publicity is being sought to cut the number of fines. In Glasgow, an amnesty has been granted to motorists using bus lanes at Christmas and on New Year's Day. More bus lanes are likely to be limited to 7am to 7pm operation.

SPT and Glasgow City Council have agreed a statutory Quality Partnerships ensuring higher standards for bus operators using the City Centre-South Glasgow Hospital Fastlink. Peak services to the new transport hub in the hospital will rise to 68 buses per hour, all provided commercially. Additional services from other parts of the city are being provided through Kickstart arrangement by SPT aided by NHS transition funding. There are still fears of extra congestion close to the hospital, influencing the potential early withdrawal of services by operators unhappy with the added running costs of a 'dogleg' into the hospital rather than a more convenient east to west route through the hospital hub.

Borders Council may cut bus charges for use of the new Galashiels transport interchange in order to encourage full use of this bus/rail facility.

Lothian Buses has introduced free bus travel for children in care for a six-month trial. Scottish Labour has promised free bus travel for apprentices. Lothian has raised the £3.50 fares for day travel and £4 for airport singles by 50p. The Scottish Government has tightened rules on free bus travel for the disabled. Around 9 in 10 bus users in Scotland are satisfied with services. Stagecoach Tayside had the highest score at 93% with First North-east having the lowest satisfaction at 83%. Fares in the north-east were considered too high but 83% considered Lothian fares good value. McGill's was poorest for punctuality. Users are unhappy with the lack of shelter and longer walks to taxi ranks at Waverley and Haymarket stations. A new taxi app, Get Taxi, in Edinburgh is offering £5 taxi rides for every passenger in the city centre. 150 drivers have already signed up and there are claims that this could 'finish' established black cab firms in the city. GetTaxi already operates in 30 other cities. The Court of Session has upheld a Glasgow City Council decision not to allow rickshaw (pedicab) operation due to safety issues. But such cabs already operate in Edinburgh.

Freak winds have been blamed for a coach accident injuring 19 on the A83 near Rest and Be Thankful. The coach stopped within yards of a loch. Motherwell-based MCT Group Travel has been banned due to lack of evidence of sufficient funding. Ralph Roberts, McGill's Bus manager, reports that it is still difficult to recruit drivers. Too many people were not 'work ready'. Environment campaigners are calling for zero tolerance of buses idling at the kerbside, especially in low air quality parts of Glasgow city centre.

SESTRAN Chair Russell Imrie sees smart ticketing and good publicity as vital for sustainable transport where people can hop off buses, trams and trains as they please – and linked with encouragement for walking, cycling and more use of electric vehicles

Rather than a Stagecoach contract, Dundee City Council is to fund the Friendly Bus scheme through a Public Social Partnership from July

Rail

Following the Stagecoach/Virgin acquisition of the East Coast rail franchise from temporary public sector operation, First Group has made an open access bid to run lower fare London-Edinburgh trains in four hours with stops at Stevenage, Newcastle and Morpeth. GNER, part of the DB-owned Alliance group, is proposing a rival bid with hourly Pendolinos cutting the Edinburgh-London journey to just 3 hours 43 minutes. The aim is to encourage transfers from air to rail and encourage competition. Track capacity and abstraction from the East Coast franchise will influence an ORR decision on these applications.

Virgin Trains East Coast have promised an extra Stirling-London service later in 2015 with extra Edinburgh-London services from May 2016. New Super Express trains will enter service from 2018.

First Group has gained a 1 year extension to 1 April 2016 of its Trans-Pennine franchise which includes Edinburgh/Glasgow-Manchester services. There is also pressure for direct services to Liverpool.

Though the new Caledonian Sleeper franchise is aiming at higher quality and a better range of facilities, new data shows that Anglo-Scottish sleeper usage fell 25% from 274,000 to 210,000 over the past 3 years due to competition from air and daytime rail services.

Further proposals are under consideration to increase the volume of Anglo-Scottish rail freight together with improvements within Scotland. Hitrans is studying the scope for re-introducing timber by rail north of Inverness as forests in this are mature. British studies of the possible impact of a 50% rise in rail freight tonne kilometres suggest that, concentrated on routes over 200km, this could cut road freight tonne kilometres 12% with larger falls on corridors with high volumes of HGVs

The latest report on HS2 phasing will not be published until after the election. Labour is cooler than the Conservatives on HS2 extension north of the West Midlands, preferring a priority package for the rail network in the north. SNP wants priorities to include sections of new line in Scotland as well as in the south. One option is accelerated construction as far north as Crewe by 2027 rather than 2033 with this also including other work in Scotland and across northern England and south from Leeds.

ORR has published the annual report on rail finances to 31 March 2014. State support for the rail network in Britain has fallen to 28.5% of total passenger income. Total rail support in 2013/14 was £3.8bn.

The largest franchise payment, at £506m, was to ScotRail followed by £346m to the Northern franchise in England and £152m to Arriva Wales. As a percentage of total income, Northern had the largest support at 66.4% followed by Arriva Wales at 62.8%. ScotRail came in at 57.7%.

Transport Scotland, linked with the Abellio ScotRail franchise, has signed a deal for 70 new Hitachi emus for guaranteed use in Scotland for at least 25 years and an option to purchase after that period for £1. Delivery will start from summer 2017 with completion in 2018. Glasgow-Falkirk-Edinburgh electrification will be completed before the arrival of most new trains, so an interim electric/diesel mix will operate.

Electrification clearance work will involve closure of Winchburgh tunnel from 13th June until 26th July 2015, seriously disrupting services across central Scotland. Edinburgh-Glasgow passengers will have to use slower trains via Bathgate, Shotts or Carstairs. Agreement between Transport Scotland, Network Rail and Abellio will allow new housing at Winchburgh to be served by a new station by December 2018.

Glasgow Queen Street High Level station will be closed for up to four months in 2016 to allow the concrete slab track, which has deteriorated, to be replaced. A major programme of diversions will be necessary for trains from Edinburgh, Aberdeen, Inverness, Alloa, Dunblane, Stirling, Maryhill and the West Highland Line which currently operate to and from Queen Street High Level.

Modifications at Portobello and on the eastern approach to Waverley may be needed to ensure that average trip times on the reopened Edinburgh-Tweedbank railway can be cut to meet the original promise of 55 minute trip times. There are also capacity problems west from Waverley but these will be eased by the £18m resignalling work in progress between Haymarket and the Forth Rail Bridge.

There are similar capacity and 'network gap' problems in Glasgow. These get limited attention in the City Deal plans which say little on rail apart from mention of a tramtrain style Glasgow Airport link. Labour leader Jim Murphy has supported plans for Glasgow Crossrail development.

Abellio is offering smarter public transport ticketing across Scotland as well as a new Club50 Deal (replacing Club 55) offering cheaper fares for those over 50 travelling at times when spare seats are available. Others have criticised this new scheme as over-complex and offering less value than Club55. Midlothian and Scottish Borders residents have been told that present rail discounts for the elderly and disabled will not be available on the new Borders rail route. The Scottish Accessible Transport Alliance (SATA) has called for concessionary travel by rail to be extended, not curtailed – especially as trains are often far more accessible.

Local pressures for rail extensions are rising with interest shown in Thornton-Levenmouth, Leuchars-St Andrews and Tweedbank-Hawick. But there is also pressure to give priority to improving the ScotRail InterCity rail infrastructure.

A budding graphic designer, Angus Doyle, has produced an attractive London-style diagrammatic design for a future Greater Glasgow Rail Network (Herald 6 April). Some routes have been seen as over-ambitious but Transport Scotland has agreed that there is potential for improved presentation of a network which has seen improving frequencies and higher usage.

The Forth Rail Bridge has celebrated 125 years in operation and a new visitor attraction, the Forth Bridge Experience, will be in place by 2017.

The steam train ban imposed on operator West Coast Rail due to serious safety issues on the Great Western Main Line was lifted just in time for the start of the popular steam-hauled Jacobite summer trains between Fort William and Mallaig.

ScotRail passenger trips in the SPT area have risen from 51.8m in 2011-12 and 57.6m in 2013-14 to 62.6m in 2014-15. The latter figure was affected by a 2.1m 'wash-up' Zonocard adjustment made prior to the start of the Abellio ScotRail franchise. British data shows that, in the past two years, intra-regional trips have been rising faster than longer-distance travel