



Scottish Association for Public Transport

SCOTTISH TRANSPORT MATTERS

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Robroyston station on the Glasgow-Cumbernauld line opened on December 15th 2019. The station has 385 parking spaces and is part of a local development plan involving 1600 new houses. It has a half-hourly service to Glasgow Queen Street and Edinburgh. *Photo: J.McCormick*

Best wishes for 2020 to all our readers

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The announcement by Transport Secretary Michael Matheson that the Abellio franchise will not be extended beyond March 2022 could interrupt further progress with developing ScotRail services.

There is no doubt that train services have become more unreliable over the last few years. More trains need more train crew, and crew shortages have been a frequent cause of train cancellations, particularly in the first few weeks of the new EGIP electric services. But many of the major interruptions to service have been caused by signal failures. **Network Rail (NR) was responsible for 58% of delay minutes in 2018. ScotRail train delay minutes due to NR increased by 18% from 2017 to 2018**, according to ORR statistics.

The Scottish Government has invested record amounts in electrification, station rebuilding at Haymarket and Queen Street, and track upgrades e.g. between Aberdeen and Inverurie. The full benefit of these in terms of increased patronage and revenue has not been achieved. Is this due partly to service unreliability?

The new station at Robroyston opened on December 15th is an example of problems caused by disruption. I travelled from Helensburgh to Robroyston on the morning of 20th December (see photo on front page). Unfortunately, after I arrived, a signalling problem at Polmont led to cancellation of trains for 90 minutes, leaving a number of intending passengers (including myself) stranded, a situation reported in the "Sunday National"! Later on the same day, I noted that another major signal failure at Pollokshields led to all trains to Cathcart, Neilston, Newton, East Kilbride, Barrhead and Kilmarnock being cancelled all evening, probably the busiest evening in the year for travel. The weather was dry and not cold, so what caused the fault?

Unreliability may have affected ScotRail passenger growth, which has stalled in the last year, with 97.3 million journeys in 2018, down from 98.4 million in 2017, after 15 years of growth. Abellio ScotRail lost £2m on a turnover of £760m in 2018 according to the International Rail Journal, and was seeking an increase in subsidy from Transport Scotland to continue the franchise beyond 2022.

But there is now progress with Abellio ScotRail's train reliability. ScotRail's flagship Hitachi Class 385 electric trains topped "Modern Railways" new train reliability table in the latest period of 2019, with 32,000 miles between technical incidents, almost double the reliability of the new Siemens Class 700 Thameslink trains.

Transport Scotland will have to look for a rail operator to run ScotRail from 2022. *Whether this is a private or public operator will not solve the reliability and financial problems. Three issues need to be investigated:*

1. **Network Rail**'s increasing contribution to **unreliability** should be **independently scrutinised**. Weather events are unavoidable. But is there an underlying problem with some signalling equipment?
2. There is a danger that a cut-price franchise bid from another operator will repeat the Abellio financial problem. If there is a budgetary problem in continuing to support and deliver the rail service, should Transport Scotland look at their **franchise specification** to see if any non-essential details can be relaxed. For instance, do the windows in station buildings need to be washed quite so often?
3. ScotRail services have increasingly been woven into an integrated network, delivering new travel opportunities. The above example of Robroyston trains being disrupted by a signal failure at Polmont arises because the new EGIP train services provide commuter links right across the entire central Scotland network. But ScotRail should be asked if more **contingency plans** could help isolate faults from spreading disruption also right across the entire network. With the Polmont fault above, would turning back trains at Cumbernauld have helped to maintain services between Glasgow and Cumbernauld?

One unfortunate feature of the franchising system is the discontinuity caused by changes in management. The Williams review is expected to recommend changes to the franchising system, or its abolition. There seems to be widespread agreement that management of train and track need to be integrated. This could focus more on investing to reduce the incidence of infrastructure faults that paralyse the railway.

One possible recommendation of the Williams review is to replace franchises with concessions. This would give operators a fixed payment or percentage of turnover for running the service, removing the need to predict revenue which can be affected by economic factors outwith the control of the rail industry.

The Scottish Government would be advised to await the recommendations of the Williams report, expected to be published early in the new year, rather than starting another potentially destabilising refranchising exercise. Meanwhile, reliability should hopefully continue to improve over the next two years.

In SAPT's response to the Scottish Government's second Strategic Transport Projects Review (STPR2) we emphasised the change in course that will be needed if the government's zero carbon targets are to be met. Four issues have increased in significance since the last STPR in 2008:

- **The Climate Emergency** declared by the First Minister in April 2019, the 2019/20 Programme for Government commitment to decarbonise Scotland's rail network by 2035, and the £500 Million investment in bus priority measures should determine the priority of schemes to be included in STPR2. Transport is now the largest source of emissions responsible for 26% of UK CO₂. This share will increase unless Transport Scotland prioritises STPR2 projects that cut emissions. Ongoing projects from STPR1 that could **increase emissions**, for instance dualling of the A9, should be re-appraised taking into account the probable climate change impact. *Significant investment in major road projects has been found to generate "induced demand", and this investment may simply create additional trips by car* (Scottish Parliament Information Service, <https://spice-spotlight.scot/2019/12/04/you-get-what-you-pay-for-20-years-of-devolved-transport-policy/>). SAPT recommends that priority should be given in STPR2 to public transport and active travel projects that will **cut emissions** and encourage modal shift away from cars.
- **Health problems** due to particulates and NO_x. These must be cut by reducing petrol and diesel traffic particularly in town and city centres. Building roads is not an answer. STPR2 should focus investment in urban electric trains, trams and low-emission bus priority lanes. Congestion charging is unpopular with motorists but politicians need to lead public opinion rather than follow it if pollution is to be tackled.
- **Electric cars** have potential to reduce CO₂ and NO_x but low emission vehicles made up only 2.2% of new vehicle registrations in 2018. The Scottish Government has committed to phase out petrol and diesel car sales by 2032. However as the average lifespan of a car is 13.9 years the impact on emissions will be slow to materialise. Fully switching to electric road vehicles would need a 30% increase in electric power generation and reinforcement of the distribution network (www.nationalgrid.com/group/case-studies/electric-dreams-future-evs). This potential crisis in power generation can be avoided by prioritising in STPR2 projects that encourage greater use of efficient electric public transport and less reliance on cars.
- **Mitigating the results of climate change** like rising sea level and flooding on infrastructure needs to be factored into the investment programme.

Changes in transport technology make long term predictions uncertain. Development of autonomous cars adds a further uncertainty in predicting travel behaviour: urban road congestion could worsen. There will be lower confidence in extrapolating historical trends of car traffic growth and road congestion as a means of justifying long term road transport projects. New roads quickly fill up with induced demand, increasing emissions and future electrical power needs.

The environmental benefits of investing in rail electrification are more predictable than for other transport modes. Rail electrification is a tried and tested technology which uses energy efficiently and reduces rail CO₂, NO_x and particulate emissions. However rail's greatest environmental benefit will come from attracting modal shift from other more polluting forms of transport: car, lorry and plane. STPR2 should prioritise rail schemes that will achieve this. Analysis of the sixteen rail projects proposed in the first 2008 STPR shows progress with major interventions, particularly the Edinburgh-Glasgow Improvement Programme (EGIP), but investment is now required to complete other significant schemes.

Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance (STAG) needs to be amended to reflect climate change and other environmental priorities when assessing transport projects, rather than focusing on car journey time reductions which generate more journeys.

Electrification of the complete ScotRail InterCity network will cost £1.7 Billion over 15 years at a target cost of £1.5M per single track km. This compares with £6 billion of spending on just two road projects (A9 and A96) which will generate additional car traffic and increase emissions and future power requirements.

The Climate Emergency also has implications for other policy areas: **Planning and Land Use Regulations** should be updated to make it easier for planning authorities to reject developments that increase the need for unsustainable travel. **Land should be safeguard for STPR2 projects once agreed.**

The projects that SAPT recommend for STPR2 will be described in the next "Scottish Transport Matters"

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2020 Transport Prospects

The Scottish Government's finalised **STPR2** (see Section 2) is due for publication by the autumn of 2020, shaping the future of transport investment for the next 20 years and hopefully heeding SAPT advice.

ScotRail services should continue to improve as the full InterCity HST fleet is finally commissioned. The termination of the Abellio contract in 2022 (Section 1) and publication of the Williams review of rail franchising are likely to herald changes which SAPT will aim to influence.

With bus usage continuing to fall, SAPT will be pushing for a **Scottish Bus Strategy** based on greater public transport co-ordination, more bus lanes, and focusing of bus funding to protect strategic transport links.

Urban transport electrification to reduce CO₂ and pollution will need investment in infrastructure and vehicles. **Edinburgh** is well placed with the **tram extension** to Newhaven now underway and potentially leading to further expansion of the network. The **Glasgow Connectivity Commission** has shown the way ahead for Glasgow and SAPT looks forward to contributing to further discussions with Glasgow City Council, SPT and other organisations towards making progress with this.

The **CalMac ferry** network is facing major problems, with escalating subsidies, ageing vessels leading to more breakdowns, and the crisis in new ferry procurement following the collapse of Fergusons shipyard. SAPT will be discussing a radically new approach to ferry provision and operation and the RET system.

The future of HS2 should be announced in the New Year following publication of the Oakervee report. Having already spent £7 billion on the project, a government volte face would be an extraordinary failure.

Looks like 2020 will be another busy year!

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Avanti on the West Coast Route

Avanti, a partnership between First Group and Trenitalia, took over the West Coast franchise on December 7th 2019. All the Virgin Trains staff, including the management team, transferred to the new organisation, reflecting the view that Virgin West Coast had been one of the best run franchises. The franchise will extend to March 2031 covering the introduction of HS2 (if this goes ahead) which will sensibly be integrated with West Coast services.

Avanti will introduce 10 new seven-car Hitachi electric trains and 13 five-car bi-modes costing £350 million to replace 20 diesel Voyagers, which use diesel fuel under the wires. The seven-car trains which have 26 metre coaches will seat 453 passengers, similar to the number of seats available on a nine-car Pendolino which has 23 metre coaches. The bi-modes will be used on London-North Wales services.

Pendolinos will be refurbished, with a new premium economy class being introduced. This is likely to give access to 2+1 seating, but without the full food and drinks service offered in 1st Class. First class capacity will be correspondingly reduced.

The main change affecting Scottish services is that Motherwell will be developed as an interchange, with 50% of Glasgow Avanti trains calling there. At Glasgow Central, the booking office and first class lounge will be refurbished.

One development that SAPT will be suggesting to Avanti management is direct trains from Glasgow to Bristol via Birmingham New Street. Bristol is a busy destination from Glasgow Airport but travel by rail involves changing at Birmingham, or travelling via York



The initial "Avanti" Pendolino after arrival in Glasgow Central on 9/12/19, with Steve Montgomery (left), FirstRail Managing Director and former First ScotRail MD, and Bill Reeve (3rd from left), Transport Scotland Rail Director.

Photo: J.McCormick

by Tom Hart with contributions from John Yellowlees and John Wilson

AVIATION

Loganair has introduced flights from Stobart-owned Carlisle Airport to Dublin and Belfast as well as London (Southend). These are first passenger flights from Carlisle in 26 years. In December Wizz Air is introducing new flights from Edinburgh to Warsaw, Gdansk, Budapest and Bucharest. In 2020 Loganair is also offering a daily Glasgow-Cardiff service and flights from Aberdeen to Haugesund, East Midlands and Brussels. A new Easyjet route will be opened from Glasgow to Birmingham.

EasyJet is adding 50 jobs at Glasgow partly replacing jobs lost when Ryanair closed its Glasgow depot. After 5 years of no service to London City, Loganair seems likely to restart Dundee-London City direct flights. After refusal of Government aid, long-established travel firm Thomas Cook has collapsed with CAA arranging to bring home 150,000 abandoned tourists (H24Sept)

BA pilot strikes in September have disrupted flights. Ryanair is having to cut flights this winter due to delays in Boeing 737 Max deliveries due to two serious crashes by these new planes. Passenger growth rate for summer 2020 has been cut from 7% to 3%

Catriona Stewart speculates on problems of halting the desire to fly as part of plans for large carbon cuts (H10Sept). Orkney has been chosen for a trial of zero emission HyFlyer 6 seater flights using hydrogen fuel cells. These are likely to have a maximum flight length of 300 miles (H19Sept)

FERRIES and PORTS

CalMac and the Scottish Government continue to share heavy criticism from Brian Wilson, former MP, of the planning and management of ferry routes, vessels and terminals (S13 Jul)

After prolonged delays and design changes on two new vessels for the Arran and Uig routes, Ferguson Marine in Port Glasgow has been nationalised by the Scottish Government. Liquidators report that the value of the two unfinished ships is well below sums already paid by the Scottish Government to Ferguson Marine. Jim McColl, former owner of Fergusons, has suggested scrapping the two unfinished ferries and starting again with a simpler design. Western Isles Council is also seeking urgent action to replace ageing ferries. Pinstripe is highly critical of Scottish Government inaction in controlling costs at Prestwick Airport and in ferry design and construction (H20 & 22 July). CalMac has set up a 'maritime AA' to tackle ferry breakdowns (H3Jul) (H9Aug)

RMT has called for nationalisation of services from mainland Scotland to the northern isles (H23July).

After complaints, Argyll & Bute Council has dropped plans for a £9 a day parking charge at Fionnport, the Mull terminal for the ferry to Iona (H5Sept)

Alistair Ross has stepped down as Chairman (since 2002) of Western Ferries and has called for government action to split ferries into sensible groups competing for contracts. This could lead to lower costs but better and more frequent services with smaller vessels and local crews. (H6Jul&19Aug). A former ferrymaster has criticised very poor management by CMAL (Caledonian Maritime Assets) of vessel and pier design (H9Jul).

CalMac is to review ferry booking systems to make it easier to identify capacity crunch points (H18Set)

A report to HIE, Argyll & Bute Council and Scotch Whisky Assoc. has recommended additional freight-only services to Islay as quickly as possible (H17Sept)

A new ferry service from Rosyth to the Netherlands (Eemshaven near Rotterdam) may be started but there are doubts about viability. The service may depend on level of Scottish Government support and assessed economic benefits (EN23Aug; H24Aug)

City Deal is contributing £9.7m to a new cruise berthing and visitor facility at Greenock Ocean Terminal. The total costs are likely to be £19.2m (H2Jul)

Funding has been raised for the £2.3m repairs needed on paddle steamer Waverley, including £1m from the Scottish Government. Two new steam boilers are required for the steamer, launched in 1946, to be returned to regular summer service (H21Sept)

The second phase of 'critical' repairs to the Caledonian Canal has started with completion in spring 2020 and funding from Scottish Government (H24Sept)

RAIL

East Coast operator LNER has extended new Azuma trains to run through from London to Edinburgh via East Coast route. Bimode Azumas now run on diesel power north from Edinburgh to Aberdeen.

Grand Union Trains have applied to ORR for a Stirling-London service by West Coast Main Line – 3 or 4 trains per day are proposed from 2021 using ex LNER trains (LTT781 13 Sept p23)

Article and photos highly commend the redesign of Queen St station due to be completed in 2020 (H1Aug).

Flooding of the Edinburgh-Glasgow main line at Winchburgh and track washouts elsewhere, particularly on the West Highland line, have disrupted services. Train and staff shortages also led to severe overcrowding on late night trains during the Edinburgh Festival, with conditions worsened by a major match at Murrayfield. Services between Glasgow Central and Hampden were also disrupted for four and a half hours when a passenger pulled an emergency alarm. ScotRail and event organisers are urged to pay more attention to better anticipation, and planning, for such events (EN 13Aug; H27,28&31Aug,S30Aug)

Complaints have been made about line closures for repairs of major stations and track at week-end holiday peaks despite leisure and week-end rail use rising more rapidly than weekday use. Passenger Focus has called for more attention to this issue – including greater planned use of diversionary routes (S22Aug)

The Scottish Government has awarded £870,000 of grants towards eight potential local rail schemes, including an additional West Highland line halt to serve the naval base at Faslane (LTT780 30Ag p11)

The Scottish Government and Transport Scotland has been accused of a lack of inspiration and poor management in planning Scotland's railways over the coming 20 years. Paul Hirst of Addleshaw Goddard sees a ScotRail/Transport Scotland alliance as in a prime position to lead a continuing rail electrification programme, other rail decarbonisation and shifts away from car use (H27Aug). Battery powered trains and hydrogen trains are expected to remove remaining rail diesel power by 2040 (H 12Sept)

Boris Johnson's plan (H8Aug) for a costly road bridge from Scotland to Northern Ireland has been attacked as making neither environmental nor economic sense.

After Network Rail abolished toilet charges at Glasgow Central and Edinburgh Waverley, Age Scotland has attacked ScotRail decision not to proceed with abolishing charges at Aberdeen, Elgin, Stonehaven, Inverness and some other locations but instead raise charges from 30p to 50p (S8Aug)

BUS and TRAM

UK bus profit margins are too low to maintain extensive commercial networks. Scottish bus companies need a margin of at least 7.9% (higher in cities) to maintain commercial services. First Glasgow did have a higher margin of 16.8% but losses were experienced at First Aberdeen (-2.9%) & Highland Country Buses (-4.6%). Bus passengers in Scotland fell 3.5%, 3.3% in Wales, just over 2% in English PTEs & counties but only 0.6% in London (LTT779 16Aug p17 Bus Industry Performance 2019)

Lothian bus trips fell from 121.1m in 2017 to 119.2m in 2018, hit by longer trip times in city travel and changing travel patterns. Revenue is up 5.1% but operating profit is down to 0.6% (due to depreciation period being reduced from 15 to 12 years). Edinburgh tram use is up from 5.2m in 2015 to 7.3m in 2018, aided by shorter trip times and improved frequency. West Lothian Council is seeking a £500,000 saving on subsidised bus services

Stagecoach West Scotland is consulting on proposed bus service changes from December. These include a return to a half-hourly daytime express bus frequency between Beith and Glasgow (but with no buses now diverting to Braehead) and changes in the present 44 route from Irvine to Glasgow to higher quality express buses operating via Kilmarnock and M77. Stagecoach has also gained a £2m grant to introduce zero emission single-deck buses between Kilmarnock and Darvel.

First has announced further cuts and lower frequencies on several Glasgow bus services despite First claiming that First Glasgow contributed 55% of First UK bus operating profits. A. Jarvis of First Bus (Scotland) has highlighted the value of better loadings on ultra-low emission buses and has plans to convert the M3 route in Glasgow to all-electric operation. First Aberdeen is about to have its first hydrogen-powered double-deckers (15) following 10 hydrogen single-decker buses already operating.

Glasgow has introduced two new bus gates in Oswald St and Union St giving buses exclusive entry between 7am and 7pm. Some local businesses express fears that these will make the city centre a 'ghost town'. The reply is that more people access city centres by bus than any other mode. Car contributed 60% of road greenhouse as compared to 5% for bus and coach (H23Aug).