

PARLIAMENTARY BRIEFING

Scottish Government debate: Transforming Scotland's Railways

Thursday 30 May 2013

1 Progress on Scotland's railways

- 1.1 The Transport Minister can take credit for delivering progress on, amongst other things: installing Wi-Fi on more trains; resolving split ticketing anomalies; and his initiative to introduce Community Rail Partnerships.
- 1.2 More generally, recent years have seen the reopening of the Airdrie-Bathgate line. We also welcome the start of construction of the Borders Railway, and are confident that patronage figures will outperform those in the business case (as has been the case with other recent reopening projects).
- 1.3 Patronage growth both on railways within Scotland and on Anglo-Scottish routes demonstrates that there is strong demand for expansion of the railways.

2 However, railways north of the Central Belt remain uncompetitive with the roads — and are due to worsen

2.1 To transform Scotland's railways, journey times need to be competitive with parallel road routes.

2.2 In this, we agree with the First Minister that "railways must at least compete with roads".¹

2.3 While there are a number of initiatives to improve railways in the Central Belt, no similar ambition is being shown for routes to the north of Scotland.

2.4 As shown in this map, the journey time from Edinburgh to Aberdeen is almost an hour longer than the equivalent distance from Edinburgh to Newcastle.



2.5 Rail journey times from Edinburgh to Inverness via the Highland Main Line are already uncompetitive:²

Rail: 3 hours 35 minutes

Road: 3 hours 28 minutes

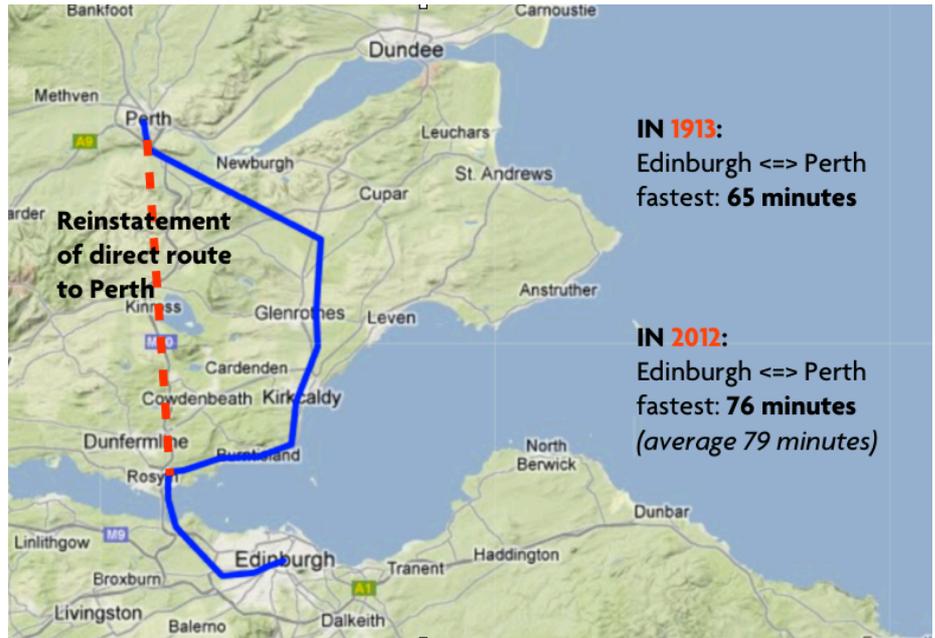
2.6 The Scottish Government has committed to a £3 billion dualling of the A9. This will substantially reduce journey times by road & weaken the competitive position of the railway for both passengers and freight.

2.7 Therefore, we have serious concerns about the ability of rail to compete on this corridor unless current plans for the Highland Main Line are significantly improved.

3 Transform Scotland's *Inter-City Express* proposal

3.1 Our belief is that in the 21st century, Scotland's cities should be connected by a modern and efficient rail network that is at the very least competitive with road transport.

3.2 Given the Government's ambition to dual the A9 road then for rail to compete on this corridor, in particular on the Inverness to Edinburgh route, a 'game changer' is required. Whilst we fully support proposals to improve the existing single track railway, these will never create a level playing field between road and rail unless



the line from Perth to Inverness is fully doubled and electrified. Even given this, the journey between Edinburgh and Perth will remain slow and tortuous without a significant intervention. Transform Scotland believes that the 'Inter-City Express' proposal that we have submitted as a Candidate National Development for NPF3 is the 'game changer' which will truly open up routes to the north from Edinburgh.³ Among the benefits are:

- A reduction in the journey time from Edinburgh to Perth and Inverness of 35 minutes.
- The opportunity to reduce journey times to Aberdeen by routing some Edinburgh trains via this new direct line and then onwards via Dundee.
- The opportunity to create new stations along the route at key growth areas such as Kinross and Bridge of Earn.
- The creation of a key hub on the inter-city network at Perth and the opportunity to make proper use of this iconic station, including integration with bus services.
- The opportunity to use the freed capacity in Fife for more local services, re-opened stations and routes such as those to St Andrews and Leven.
- A reversal of a key Beeching era closure: the fast rail line north from Edinburgh.

3.3 Whilst we appreciate that there has been some development along the route, we understand that it currently remains largely intact and that replacement of the original route should be no more complex than that of the Borders Railway; furthermore, the route mileage is significantly shorter (22 as opposed to 31 for the Borders Railway). Some sections of new alignment may be necessary but these would be modest in comparison to the new route being proposed between Edinburgh and Glasgow. An approach that might be considered would be to first re-open the closed section via Glenfarg followed in a later phase by a direct line from Inverkeithing which would avoid the Dunfermline loop.

4 Conclusion

4.1 While there has been some progress in improving Scotland's railways, to truly transform Scotland's railways will require the Scottish Government to review its current plans for upgrades to rail routes north of the Central Belt in order that railways between Scotland's cities can at least compete with the roads.

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¹ As quoted in The Herald on 5 August 2008

² Rail figure is for average weekday Edinburgh-Inverness journeys (ScotRail & East Coast), Road figure from AA Route Planner. This assumes that road users are obeying the speed limit, which Transport Scotland's own figures have suggested is not the case.

³ See <<http://www.transformscotland.org.uk/GetFile.aspx?Itemid=640>>.