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To:
Subject: RE: Cuts to cycle spaces on trains

Dear

I attach extracts from the discussion which happened at the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee on the 09 March 2016. If you have any comments on the answers which were given when this was put to the Chief Executive of Scotrail, please let me have them.

Alex Johnstone.

Adam Ingram: I have a question about cycle-carrying capacity, which will no doubt be returned to by others. Has anything been done on the Borders railway to expand cycle-carrying capacity?

Phil Verster: I would like to set the context for the discussion around cycling. When I talk to customers, they always express different needs. The majority of our customers are keen for seats on trains. We have a trade-off decision to make between what space we allow for seating and what space we allow for cycling.

On the refurbished class 158 product, we have two designated cycle spaces but we have also agreed with the Department for Transport accessibility committee, which is the holder of the keys on all things accessibility related, that we can take the second wheelchair space on the class 158s and demarcate that area for the use of cycle spaces as well. That is on a single two-car train.

There have been a lot of letters, correspondence and questions in Parliament about what cycle spaces will be available. Sometimes the detail is where the answer lies. Having the two additional spaces in the wheelchair area as well as the two designated spaces can only work as long as ScotRail ensures that if there is a wheelchair user, they get priority to use the wheelchair space. In those circumstances, to be honest, our staff will find a way to move any bicycle that is in the wheelchair space and put it somewhere else on the train.

We will continue to provide the facility to move bicycles on all our fleets. To give you a sense of what will happen on our class 385 fleet, which is the new fleet that is coming in, we have two designated cycle spaces; we have a further two designated cycle spaces in the universal access toilet area, where there are flip-up seats; and then we have two more spaces in the luggage area for folding bicycles.

Our commitment to supporting cyclists is definitely there. However, I want to make a big point about cycling. We are much more interested in developing cycling facilities at stations and in developing cycling as a way to get to our stations. In the end, our trains are not really aimed at moving bicycles. We are putting 3,500 cycle spaces into our stations in the next three and a half years. That covers a multitude of stations. It also includes putting in very big cycle points in Glasgow, Edinburgh and Stirling to allow a cycling services provider to maintain and resell second-hand bicycles and the like.

We are much keener on supporting cycling as an active mode of travel that people use to come to our stations than we are to have bicycles on our trains. Some cyclists, when they talk to me, say, “Yes, but I cycle to the station, I get on a train and then I cycle at the other end as well—do you want me to buy two bicycles?” I say, “Well, it would be nice if you could.” We have this difficult balance—I can guarantee you that if I ask a broad spectrum of my customers, “What should we do? Should we have two more seats or two more cycle spaces?” the vote would probably go to seats.

David Stewart: Good morning. I want to ask you about the new Hitachi electric trains. I am very excited—as I am sure many members of the committee are—by the prospect of those trains coming on line. Given the interaction of transport with climate change, it is vital that we look at higher targets for electric trains. I have a couple of points on capacity issues, although Mr Ingram has—not for the first time—stolen my thunder. There are some issues around the ability of those trains to carry bikes, although I take on board the earlier points that you made in that respect. Perhaps you can touch on that issue first, after which I will ask some follow-up questions on the Hitachi AT200s.

Phil Verster: Would you like me to pick up the point about cycling?

David Stewart: Sure.

Phil Verster: “AT200” was the original Hitachi codification—the trains will be class 385s, going forward. When I talk about class 385s, you can put those in the same bracket as the AT200s; they are the same thing.

On the class 385s, we will have two clearly designated cycling spaces. In the area of the universal access toilet, we will have another two cycling spaces. Those will not be in the same place as they are on the 158s—they will be in an area where there are flip-up seats, as I have explained—so they will not be subject to the priority of another user. In addition, the luggage space area will be able to accommodate a further two folding bicycles. That is the capacity per unit; it feels like pretty reasonable coverage for cycling.

David Stewart: So you are saying that, in comparison with your more traditional rolling stock, there is an enhanced ability to carry bikes on trains.

Phil Verster: Yes: there is more capacity. Let us look at the class 380, for example, which is the Siemens Desiro product that operates widely—as you know—in the Strathclyde area and through to Edinburgh. It has two designated spaces, and there are another two spaces that can be used in an area that is similar to the wheelchair area. However, there is a restriction there, as we do not have a derogation like we have for the 158s. When the law changes and insists that wheelchair spaces are used for wheelchairs only, we will not be able to put bicycles in that area, even if we could. It is only on the 385s that we will be able to take two more folding bicycles.