

Meeting of the Cross Party Group on Rail in the Scottish Parliament **Minute of the meeting held on Tuesday, 4th March 2014, 5.30pm**

Present:

John Mason MSP (SNP; Glasgow Shettleston), Patrick Harvie MSP (Green; Glasgow), Hugh Henry MSP (Labour; Renfrewshire South), Neil Bibby MSP (Labour; West of Scotland), Jane Ann Liston (Starlink), Richard Carr (SAYLSA), Kirsten Sweeney (SPT), Ken Sutherland (RailQwest), Ian Richard (RailQwest), Roderick McDougall (Rail Future Scotland), Niamh Hegarty (Network Rail), Alex Sharkey (Network Rail), Dave Boyce (Network Rail), Paul Tetlaw (Transform Scotland), Lawrence Marshall (Transform Scotland), Michael Connelly (Abellio), Frank Roach (HITRANS), Alistair Watson (Glasgow City Council), Peter Gray (Beattock Station Action Group), Vic MacKinlay (Light Rail Transit Association), Phil McGarry (RMT Union), Jim Gray (RMT Union), Alistair Stewart (MHP Communications), Dace Jones (Arriva), Geoffrey Evison (Campaign for Borders Rail) and Alison Cosgrove (Rail Future Scotland).

Apologies:

John Finnie MSP (Independent; Highlands & Islands); Richard Simpson MSP (Labour; Mid Scotland & Fife), Kevin Lindsay (ASLEF Scotland), Eric Guthrie (TACTRAN) and Norrie Innes (Rock – DCM).

Welcome from the Chair

John Mason opened the meeting and handed over to Alex Sharkey, Area East Director for Scotland at Network Rail.

Phil McGarry of RMT commented that the previous meeting's minutes were very succinct and asked if future minutes could contain more detailed information.

Presentation from Alex Sharkey of Network Rail

Alex Sharkey provided a comprehensive overview of Network Rail's work in Scotland. A copy of his presentation is attached.

Questions for Network Rail

1. John Mason asked Network Rail what work they have undertaken to improve relationships with train operators. Alex Sharkey indicated that a change in attitude and approach has led to better working relationships.
2. Alison Cosgrove asked Network Rail about small stations with low platforms and what Network Rail could do to review the impact this has on elderly and disabled people. Alex Sharkey agreed that this was unacceptable and that Network Rail would look into this further.

3. Phil McGarry expressed concern about Network Rail's engagement with key stakeholders including trade unions with a specific emphasis on the lack of communication to staff about the development of Glasgow Queen Street Rail Station. Alex Sharkey indicated that he understood RMT's points and would seek to engage further with key stakeholders, including the RMT.

4. Alistair Watson asked Network Rail for its opinion about how the cross-party group should engage with the rest of Parliament on matters pertaining to connectivity and further investment in areas such as EGIP and GARL. Alex Sharkey indicated that he felt the opportunities afforded to the cross party group were boundless due to the impressive level of knowledge and passion for rail contained within the group.

5. Jane Ann Liston asked Network Rail for an update on the issue of semaphore signalling and asked a further question about the issue of two light trains operating at the same time on the Tay bridge. Alex Sharkey indicated that a structural assessment would have to be undertaken on the first point and that changes to signalling would open up further opportunities as regards to Ms Liston's second point.

6. Geoffrey Evison indicated his unhappiness at the decision to use class 158 units on the new Borders Rail line which he considered were somewhat out-dated. Alex Sharkey indicated that he understood Mr Evison's point about class 158 units and generally agreed with it.

7. Ken Sutherland informed Network Rail he feels the lack of progress on the issue of Cross Rail means Ayrshire and the West of Scotland are being left behind in terms of connectivity, with many people choosing to travel by road than rail. Ken Sutherland indicated that RailQwest would welcome any support possible for the backing of Cross Rail. Alex Sharkey responded by saying that he felt that the cross party group was the best possible vehicle through which to pursue issues such as GARL.

8. Paul Tetlaw welcomed the formation of the cross party group on rail but shared his belief that there is both too much of a central belt focus on rail and that, in particular, there was too much focus on road.

9. Lawrence Marshall asked about the concept of lighter tram trains being used for Airport Rail Links. Alex Sharkey indicated his belief that if work was being undertaken to lay a track, it would simply be better to lay a track for all forms of trains which could accommodate all trains.

10. Michael Connelly asked Network Rail if Glasgow Queen Street Station would remain under the operation of Scot Rail post-completion. Alex Sharkey indicated that this was not yet clear and he could not answer that question.

11. Roddy McDougall indicated his concern about the compatibility of diesel trains with such a congested rail network and how trains on the Borders rail line, relying on diesel, might have an impact on the service flow at Edinburgh Waverley.

12. Richard Carr informed Network Rail that he felt Stranraer was Scotland's forgotten rail line and that there was great potential for freight.

13. Frank Roach asked if Network Rail would take an interest at terminal development and, as a second point, asked about the issue of green zone working. Alex Sharkey responded to both points and indicated these were areas worth looking at.

14. Ian Richard informed Network Rail that he felt getting access to meet with organisations such as Network Rail, Transport Scotland and the Scottish Government was incredibly difficult. Dave Boyce responded to Ian Richard by indicating where Network Rail fit into the overall structure and reaffirmed that authorising Cross Rail was not within Network Rail's gift.

15. Neil Bibby asked about parking at rail stations and what more could be done to promote park-and-ride. Dave Boyce responded by indicating that no one sole organisation is responsible for station parking but this often requires a multi-agency approach from local authorities, transport partnerships, land owners and Network Rail.

The meeting closed at 19.17 with a vote of thanks to Network Rail for taking the time present to the meeting.

Date of next meeting to be confirmed in due course.