

# Blackford Railway Station

Business Case and Market Demand for Station Re-Opening  
Non-Technical Summary



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# **Blackford Railway Station - Business Case and Market Demand for Station Re-Opening**

## **Non-Technical Summary**

### **1 Introduction**

1.1 This study has been undertaken by AECOM on behalf of COBRA (Campaign for the Re-Opening of Blackford Rail Station Again), funded by a grant award from the Climate Change Fund. The study has reviewed existing information in relation to the case for the re-opening of Blackford Rail Station, alternative options for the enhancement of Gleneagles Station, as well as undertaken new research through a residents' survey, stakeholder consultation, and examination of rail based travel patterns within the study area. This non-technical summary provides an overview of the key outcomes of the work, with full details being available in the full report.

1.2 The outcome of the study concludes that across a majority of established appraisal criteria, the option to re-open Blackford Rail Station outperforms other alternative options. Furthermore, within the context of challenging future targets to cut greenhouse gas emissions from the transport sector, this option offers the best way of growing the rail market in the Strathearn and Strathallan catchment, and potentially limiting private car growth.

### **2 Commission**

2.1 COBRA have been campaigning for Blackford station to be reopened since 2002 and received a grant from the Climate Challenge Fund to investigate the potential impacts of re-opening the station. The objectives of this study have been as follows:

- a) To define the likely geographic catchment / key communities for potential users (commuting and non-commuting) of the reopened station;
- b) To review, collate and establish sound population projections and profiles for the likely catchment area – with particular emphasis on analysis of daytime/night-time populations;
- c) To determine the journey to work commuting patterns of users of Dunblane, Bridge of Allan and Gleneagles stations, the extent to which commuters from the likely catchment area use rail services and key issues/considerations in relation to reopening Blackford station;

- d) To undertake consultations with key businesses in the likely catchment area to determine support, likely use (eg staff travelling to work) and potential requirements/support for goods services;
- e) To undertake survey work/sampling in Blackford village and the key communities likely to be served by a re-opened station to gauge interest/likely use and key issues/considerations;
- f) To collate and review visitor/tourist figures to the area in consultation with VisitScotland/local tourist agencies, noting that The Ryder Cup will be held at Gleneagles in 2014;
- g) To produce a high level analysis of the potential social, environmental and economic impacts of a reopened station;
- h) To ensure that due consideration is given to the proximity of Gleneagles Railway Station, and the potential impact that re-opening Blackford Rail Station would have on it; and
- i) To consider the issue of low carbon access to Blackford Railway Station and the potential for developing an integrated transport hub.

### **3 Policy Review**

3.1 A review of policy was undertaken and concluded that the proposal to re-open Blackford Rail Station was entirely compatible with national and regional policy, as it would provide a high quality, safe and accessible means to access the rail network, with the hourly Glasgow – Perth service providing complementary services to express inter-regional services.

3.2 Furthermore, it is recognised that the provision of Blackford Station could provide an attractive means to encourage local rail use, as well as limiting private car use for longer regional trips.

### **4 Stakeholder Consultation**

4.1 Whilst national rail stakeholders were typically reluctant to engage with the study, the enthusiastic response from local businesses and transport operator demonstrated the interest that they have for the re-opening of Blackford Rail Station. The consultation response from local bus operator Docherty's Midland Coaches provided an assurance that a new Blackford Rail Station will be integrated with the local public transport network, linking directly to Auchterarder, something that will be very difficult to achieve with Gleneagles.

## **5 Residents' Survey**

5.1 The residents' survey revealed very strong local support for the re-opening of Blackford Rail Station. It was noted that 63% of current non-rail users (typically car users) would potentially be attracted to the rail network through a new Station at Blackford. However, it is also noted that marginally more existing rail users (who clearly already accept the shortcomings of existing arrangements) prefer the status-quo than the opportunity to improve rail access at Blackford.

## **6 Catchment Analysis**

6.1 Catchment analysis has been undertaken by way of assessing the detail of a variety of data sources, including the 2001 census, recent population projects for the area, planning data, national rail data, outcomes of recent rail station surveys, and also the outcomes of the residents' survey.

6.2 This has revealed that the pattern of rail use within the study area is greater, and more complex than that captured through TACTRAN's Tay Estuary Rail Service (TERS) report of 2009. It is anticipated that there are circa 100,000 rail journeys (inbound and outbound) made every year through the rail stations at Bridge of Allan, Dunblane, Gleneagles and Perth, which have origins or destinations in the wider Strathearn and Strathallan catchment area

6.3 Subsequent rail travel pattern analysis focussed on the settlements of Blackford, Auchterarder, Aberuthven and Dunning, corresponding with the coverage of the residents' survey, working with a future year of 2015.

- a) The analysis suggests that with a do-minimum scenario (service improvements, but no station improvements) total rail journeys in the study area would be 61,007 journeys per year, with the number of journeys at Gleneagles rail stations limited to 30,000 due to existing road access constraints.
- b) With an enhanced Gleneagles (service improvements and station access improvements), some new trips are generated, with an estimated 76,607 journeys per annum in the study area, and 45,540 journeys at Gleneagles rail station.
- c) With a Blackford Station only option (service improvements and re-opened station), a maximum of 88,432 rail journeys per annum would be generated in

the study area, with between 65,008 and 68,008 journeys at Blackford, dependent on the treatment of the daily inter-city service.

- d) With both Blackford Station, and Gleneagles Station, 88,432 journeys per annum are generated in the study area, with demand of 32,250 at both Blackford and Gleneagles.

## **7 Low Carbon Access**

7.1 A detailed assessment of the opportunities to provide low carbon access to either Gleneagles or Blackford has concluded that there is significant opportunity for a catchment of 5,000 to gain access to Blackford by the most sustainable travel modes (walk, cycle, public transport). In contrast, it is considered that the low carbon access catchment of Gleneagles is practically zero.

7.2 With the development of GWest, a £500m new golf tourism development, adjacent to Blackford, there is also wider potential for Blackford railway station to act as a sustainable means to access this development.

## **8 Option Appraisal**

8.1 A high level option appraisal has been undertaken to systematically capture the strengths and weaknesses of the options considered within the study.

- a) Performance Against Planning Objectives – Using the Planning Objectives established within the TERS report, it is considered that the Blackford Station re-opening consistently out-performs the Gleneagles options, particularly in terms of connection to business and employment locations, improved accessibility, improved levels of safety and security, and integration with the wider public transport network. In addition, with higher patronages attracted to Blackford, there is greater potential to limit greenhouse gas emissions from cars undertaking inter-regional trips.
- b) Technical Feasibility– Blackford Station is considered to have a more straightforward implementation path than Gleneagles, which relies on land negotiations, potential compulsory purchase, and inter-action with the trunk road authority. By contrast, Blackford is all on existing rail industry land. Given the necessary approvals, there is no significant reason why Blackford could not be designed and constructed in the short-term, whilst an implementation path for enhanced Gleneagles reliant upon “Access for All”

funding, developer contributions and trunk road upgrades would only be fully completed in the medium to long term.

- c) Operationally, if Blackford is to be re-opened, it will be necessary to confirm sustainable arrangements for inter-city services, which could include the continued use of Gleneagles, or encouraging interchange at either Stirling or Perth.
- d) Public Support - Whilst there was strong support for the Blackford re-opening from local residents, those living closer to Gleneagles expressed a preference to continue to use this station.
- e) Environment – Whilst local rail access impacts on greenhouse gases were marginal, with higher patronage at Blackford compared to Gleneagles, there would be greater opportunity to reduce growth in car based emissions on inter-regional journeys such as Edinburgh and Glasgow
- f) Safety – For rail passengers, Blackford provides a more secure and safe environment, as it is adjacent to the village, it is well lit and is also overlooked by a manned signal box.
- g) Economy - Assuming the patronage levels detailed in this study, the economic benefits of Blackford compared to Gleneagles would be greater.
- h) Accessibility – Blackford provides a more accessible location to access the rail network for residents of Strathallan and Strathearn. It is also more socially inclusive, as it provides an immediate means to provide step-free access to both platforms.
- i) Integration – It is considered that the proposals for Blackford will integrate successfully with the local public transport services, as well as local walking and cycling routes.

## **9 Summary**

9.1 The analysis presented above demonstrates that Blackford is a superior option across the majority of appraisal criteria that have been identified. It is therefore surprising that further consideration of the potential for Blackford Rail Station has been dismissed by the TERS report, based on the perceived difficulty of changing the status quo, despite the advantages that this will provide.

9.2 In order to meet the challenges of the future, particularly in respect of providing a locally accessible and attractive sustainable transport network, it is necessary to realise the opportunities that can be achieved by a re-opened Blackford Rail Station. Accordingly, we would recommend the following:

- a) The outcomes of this report are fully considered by Transport Scotland in the context of their continued consideration of the TERS report;
- b) A re-opened Blackford Rail Station is recognised by TACTRAN, Transport Scotland and other rail stakeholders as the most appropriate rail access point for the communities of Strathearn and Strathallan; and
- c) Funding and regulatory support is sought from Transport Scotland and the wider rail industry for the re-opening of Blackford Rail Station.