

Meeting of the Cross Party Group on Rail in the Scottish Parliament **Minute of the meeting held on Tuesday, 3rd February 2015, 5.30pm**

Present:

John Mason MSP (SNP; Glasgow Shettleston), Neil Bibby MSP (Labour; West of Scotland), Patrick Harvie MSP (Green; Glasgow), John Finnie MSP (Independent; Highlands and Islands), Mary Fee MSP (Labour, West Scotland), Drew Smith MSP (Labour; Glasgow), Graeme Dey MSP (SNP; Angus South), Stewart Stevenson MSP (SNP; Banffshire & Buchan Coast), Margaret McDougall MSP (Labour; West Scotland), Allan McLean (Secretary), Mike Connelly & Mike Kean (Abellio), Lawrence Marshall (Capital Rail Action Group), Richard Ardern (Friends of the Far North Line), Iain MacDonald (Light Rail UK), Vic MacKinlay (Light Rail Transit Association), Roderick McDougall & Allison Cosgrove (RailFuture Scotland), Stewart Leighton & Ken Sutherland (RailQwest), Paul Tetlaw (Transform Scotland), Martin McKinlay (Transport Scotland), Frank Roach (HITRANS), Nigel Kirby (Siemens PLC), Steven Young (Steven Young & Associates), Gordon Martin, Michael Hogg, Jim Gray & Phil McGarry (RMT), Barrie Forest (RAGES), Iain Wilson (ScotRail), Robert Samson (Passenger Focus), John Kane, Ron McLean & Martin Brown (Beattock Station Action Group), Keith Geddes (Pagoda PR).

Apologies:

Eric Guthrie (TACTRAN), Norrie Innes (Action Barras Calton), Cameron Buchanan MSP, Damien Henderson (Virgin Trains), Jim Harkins (Light Rail UK), Callum Chomczuk (Pagoda PR), Ian Richard (RailQwest), Keith Robson (KR Consultancy).

Welcome from the Chair:

Neil Bibby MSP opened the meeting by affirming the group's condolences for the death of Geoffrey Evison, who had represented the Campaign for Borders Rail at every previous meeting of the group.

Apologies were read out and the minutes of the previous meeting were approved. Neil then introduced Abellio's Director of Rail Business Development, Mike Kean, who was to deliver a presentation on the new ScotRail franchise.

Presentation from Mike Kean of Abellio:

Mike Kean then spoke on the subject of the new ScotRail franchise that is due to be operated by Abellio from 1 April 2015. He outlined the successful bid that Abellio had made for the franchise and spoke of the reasoning behind it and the vision for the future of Scotland's railway. He highlighted the importance of integration with other modes of transport and customer benefits. He said that Abellio had started stakeholder engagement in October 2012 to prepare for the bid. New electric trains had been ordered and in addition a fully refurbished fleet of inter-city trains would be delivered.

There would be a “deep alliance” with Network Rail. The aim was to transform the network. The management approach would be “the Abellio way”. The refurbished fleet of high-speed inter-city trains would have power doors, improved comfort, compliance with regulations for passengers with reduced mobility and on-train catering. Capacity would be increased by 20 per cent and there would be an “uplift” of the 1st Class service.

Savings in journey-time would include 12 minutes from Inverness to Edinburgh and Glasgow. As part of the programme of transforming the quality of Scotland’s rail services, refurbished Class 158 trains, with interior layouts modelled on those currently on trains on the Far North Line, would serve tourist lines. There would be “refreshed” Class 156 trains for South West Scotland. There would be a series of apps to help passengers. Abellio would introduce their system of “bike-and-go” cycle hire. A Smart Card would be developed.

Questions for Mike Kean of Abellio:

(Answer summaries are within brackets)

- 1) Stephen Young asked about arrangements for engineering work to minimise inconvenience to passengers. Mr Young also asked about difficulties passengers had using through tickets at barriers when changing trains. **(A better way of working would be considered through the alliance with Network Rail. Smart ticketing would be better for a smooth journey.)**
- 2) John Finnie MSP asked about staff and job security. **(Staff would transfer from the existing franchise to the next under TUPE regulations. Incentives for staff would be introduced through consultation and negotiation with the unions. He was happy to negotiate. There would be training and development of staff.)**
- 3) Allison Cosgrove of Railfuture asked about access for people with disabilities. She also complained about problems on a recent journey to the Far North Line. **(On the latter, Mr Kean said Abellio were not running the franchise yet but would work to try and resolve problems. There was funding for station improvements including access.)**
- 4) Partrick Harvie MSP asked about a leaflet he had received from the RMT union before he travelled from Glasgow to Edinburgh about “dumping of sewage” from train toilets. **(Mr Kean said that the bid was compliant with requirements to end this practice but Abellio would work with Transport Scotland and Network Rail to come up with a solution. He recognised that the RMT wanted to achieve an end to the practice earlier than the target of December 2017. Mr Kean also reassured Mr Harvie separately over the provision of arrangements for cyclists.)**
- 5) Mike Hogg of the RMT asked about improving industrial relations. **(He was told that Abellio wanted to work with the unions on this.)**

- 6) Richard Ardern of the Friends of the Far North Line thanked Mr Kean for reassurances about tackling problems. **(Mr Kean promised an open approach from Abellio.)**
- 7) Mary Fee MSP asked about long-term reinvestment into the franchise. **(Mr Kean said that Abellio had a good record of investing and quoted the Greater Anglia franchise as an example.)**
- 8) Margaret McDougall MSP asked about winter weather disruption and car-park charging. Mr Kean said there would be “winterisation” work through the alliance. **(Mr Kean stressed that the policy is not to charge for passengers to park at stations where the car park is the responsibility of ScotRail. However, other organisations were responsible for some car parks. There was also an issue in some locations of people who were not travelling by train but who parked for free at stations instead of parking elsewhere.)**
- 9) Robert Samson of Passenger Focus also asked about car-parking at stations and was told that it was Abellio’s long-term aspiration to bring in a common set of rules. **(Unfortunately outwith Abellio’s remit.)**
- 10) Ken Sutherland & Stewart Leighton from Railqwest asked about new opportunities including Glasgow Crossrail and capacity on the Highland Line. **(Mr Kean said that any developments clearly had to meet wider Scottish Government objectives and a business case. Abellio would do what they were specified to do.)**
- 11) Martin Brown from Beattock Station Action Group said the absence of a station serving the Beattock/Moffat area left a big gap in the network. **(Mr Kean said Abellio would stop at stations where there was a case to do so.)**
- 12) Phil McGarry of the RMT asked about the application of TUPE, the practice of dumping effluent on tracks and mentioned concern about a pay anniversary date coinciding with the start of the franchise. **(Mr Kean said Abellio would comply with TUPE. There was a process to be diligently worked through and there would be road shows to inform staff throughout Scotland about the new franchise. In response to Mr McGarry’s concern about those staff who were due to transfer from the current ScotRail franchise to the new, separate Caledonian Sleeper franchise, Mr Kean said he was not able to speak about the Sleeper franchise. He reassured Mr McGarry that ScotRail would have no compulsory redundancies.)**

- 13) Graeme Dey MSP asked about trains stopping more often at particular stations. **(He was told that the first priority was to ensure that the specification is met. However, over time, opportunities could arise.)**

- 14) Roderick McDougall of Railfuture asked about travel prices for Smart Card users, adding that he hoped that there would not be extra charges for passengers not using such cards. **(Mr Kean said that the franchise operator was not responsible for pricing policy.)** Mr McDougall also asked if there would be an opportunity for the public to see mock-ups of proposed interiors before new and refurbished rolling stock was introduced. **(Mr Kean said that Transport Scotland had indicated what was required.)**

- 15) Ken Sutherland of RailQwest accused Transport Scotland of “perversely” opposing schemes. **(Reassured that Abellio will have a positive attitude to schemes. It is in their interest to.)**

- 16) Barrie Forrest of RAGES, Rail Action Group, East of Scotland, asked about new stations at East Linton and Reston and a new service linking Edinburgh with Dunbar and Berwick. **(Mr Kean said he would meet the RAGES committee soon.)**

- 17) Stephen Young stated that innovative train planning can help with improvement schemes. Someone added a question about potentially faster Edinburghj/Ayr journey times over the current timings via Carstairs. **(Mr Kean said that better journey times in general were among franchise criteria.)**

- 18) Robert Samson of Passenger Focus asked about possible timetable changes on the Borders Railway when charter trains would operate. **(Mr Kean said that the Borders line would be unique in the way it would combine commuter and tourist needs. A balance would be needed but a commuter peak train would not be dropped. Abellio was talking with Transport Scotland.)**

- 19) It was asked if electrification gave an opportunity for more trains to run. **(Mr Kean said that the Edinburgh-Glasgow Improvement Project EGIP involved dramatic improvement and acceleration.)**

- 20) Mike Hogg of the RMT wanted to know which managers the union would be dealing with after the franchise started. **(Mr Kean said that could not be confirmed yet, other than to say that he would be part of the Abellio senior management team. He added that the current management team had done a good job.)**

21) John Mason MSP asked for more information about the relationship between ScotRail and Network Rail in the deep alliance. (Mr Kean said it would be a continuation of the good work done by First Group, moving to the next level. ScotRail and Network Rail would be aligned under a vision which put the customer at the centre. The relationship would help with the management of maintenance arrangements.)

At the end of the Q&A Mr Kean was thanked by the Chair and attendees for his time, presentation and answers.

Date of Next Meeting & AOCB:

The date of the next meeting was set at March 10th 2015 at 17:30 in Committee Room 6.

As there was no further business to attend to, the meeting was called to an end.