

Minutes of CPG on Rail in the Scottish Parliament

Meeting at Holyrood 19 January 2016

1. **John Mason MSP** (co-convener) in the Chair. He welcomed attendees.
2. **Sederunt:** John Mason MSP, Cameron Buchanan MSP, John Finnie MSP, Roderick McDougall (Railfuture Scotland), Ken Sutherland (Railfuture Scotland), Barrie Forrest (RAGES, Rail Action Group, East of Scotland), Don Barclay (LMRC, LevenMouth Rail Campaign), Stephen Young (Young Art Associates), Audrey Laidlaw (Network Rail), Paul Tetlaw (Capital Rail Action Group), Damien Henderson (Virgin Trains), Iain Wilson (ScotRail), Rosemary Blumfield (West Coast Rail 250), Iain MacDonald and Vic MacKinlay (Light Rail Transit Association), James Harkins (Light Rail UK), Richard Ardern (Friends of the Far North Line), Robert Sampson (Transport Focus), Robert Drysdale (Campaign for Borders Rail) and Allan McLean (CPG secretary).

Apologies for absence received from Neil Bibby MSP (co-convener), Allison Cosgrove (Railfuture Scotland), Trevor Roberts (West Coast Rail 250).

3. **Minutes** of previous meeting of 11 November 2015 including AGM approved subject to insertion of an omission by Allan McLean on the tribute paid to rail campaigner Ian Richard. Moved by Stephen Young, seconded by James Harkins.

Allan McLean explained that Allen Armstrong of the Levenmouth Rail Campaign was unable to address the CPG on this occasion but it was hoped he could do so at a future meeting when proposals for rail openings around Scotland could be reported to the CPG (see this evening's item 5).

4. Damien Henderson of Virgin Trains spoke on **the temporary closure of the West Coast Main Line** at Lamington in South Lanarkshire since 31 December 2015 because of weather damage to a viaduct. He said that there had been good co-operation between Virgin Trains and ScotRail to put alternative arrangements in place. Special trains were being run by Virgin Trains between Glasgow and Carlisle on an alternative line through Kilmarnock and Dumfries. These trains connected with others to and from the south at Carlisle. Edinburgh was served by special buses for both Virgin Trains and First TransPennine Express. Although 1 February had been quoted as a possible reopening date, it was expected that Lamington would not reopen before the end of February.

Mr Henderson answered questions from CPG members. Roderick McDougall of Railfuture said that electrification of the Glasgow/Carlisle route via Dumfries would make it better than the current arrangement, requiring diesel trains. Audrey Laidlaw of Network Rail said that more electrification was proposed for Scotland but the Dumfries line was not listed as a current priority. Robert Drysdale of the Campaign for Borders Rail pointed out that although Glasgow had an alternative rail route to Carlisle, Edinburgh did not. Mr Henderson confirmed that in this instance buses offered the best alternative route available. In response to Robert Samson of Transport Focus on ticketing arrangements, for example between Glasgow and Manchester, Mr Henderson said that temporary arrangements were in place during disruption and there was an element of flexibility in extraordinary times. Stephen Young, Paul Tetlaw and Rosemary Blumfield were among members of the CPG who raised points. Richard Ardern, Friends of the Far North Line, spoke in favour of diversionary routes being available. Jim Harkins asked if current disruption might strengthen the case for the Borders Railway to be extended to Carlisle. John Mason MSP said he intended to write to the Transport Minister Derek Mackay MSP on this and other matters.

- 5. Prospects for rail openings.** Ken Sutherland expressed concern that Transport Scotland had no agenda for reopening stations and lines. Planning guidelines for local authorities might make reopenings more difficult by preventing councils from safeguarding potential routes in the way that safeguards had allowed easier reopenings linking Edinburgh with Bathgate and then Airdrie. Mr Sutherland said that there was a risk of repeating the mistakes of the “Beeching era” when it had been assumed that closed lines would never re-open. Cameron Buchanan MSP said that in France, reopenings were easier because the national railway SNCF continued to own the land use by closed lines. Roderick McDougall said there were aspirations for 95 new stations to be provided in Scotland on existing routes and for at least 24 line openings. (See Levenmouth information above.) Barrie Forrest feared that costings for proposed stations at East Linton and Reston were “over the top”. Audrey Laidlaw defended Network Rail costings as “robust”. Robert Drysdale was concerned about planning rules. Richard Ardern also voiced concern about the disposal of railway land. Ken Sutherland said there was a risk of repeating the mistakes of the “Beeching era”. John Finnie MSP raised the question of future disruption resulting from climate change.
- 6. Arrangements for period from 24 March to 5 May election inclusive.** Allan McLean reported that in common with other CPGs, the current CPG on Rail would cease to exist after 23 March when the Scottish Parliament would rise in preparation for the May election. Whatever happened in future would be a matter for MSPs elected on 5 May. Meantime, all documentation including minutes for CPG on Rail, had to be filed with the parliamentary authorities by 23 March. John Mason MSP said there would be a legacy paper from the current CPG. He commented that Allan McLean had said he did not expect to be available to act as secretary of a new CPG on Rail, should one be formed. James Harkins said that based on Westminster experience, it should be possible to leave enough information to ensure the justification for a resumed CPG on Rail.
- 7. Potential item/s for later consideration by CPG.** Allan McLean reported that proposals for future investment by Network Rail in the existing network in Scotland were subject to public consultation until 10 March and this could be an appropriate subject for the CPG to consider before then. John Finnie MSP commented that there needed to be consideration of the long-term implications of climate change.
- 8. Date of next and final meeting** was confirmed as Tuesday 1 March.
- 9. AOCB.** Iain Wilson reported on the planned closure of the tunnel approaching the high-level platforms at Glasgow Queen Street station for essential work between 20 March and 7 August inclusive. Travel information was now available on the ScotRail website. He distributed leaflets to members of the CPG. John Mason MSP identified this as a subject for the 1 March meeting. Paul Tetlaw said that it was basically a story about improving the railway.

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