

Cross Party Group on Rail

8 May 2019, 1.00pm

Committee Room 1

MSPs attending: John Mason (convener), Jackie Baillie, John Finnie, Mark Ruskell, Maurice Corry, office of Alexander Stewart, Michael Matheson

Other attendees: Allan McLean; Frank Roach, HITRans; Allison Cosgrove, Railfuture Scotland; Vic Mackinlay, Light Rail Transit Association; Barrie Forrest, Rail Action Group East of Scotland; Ian Budd, Friends of the Far North Line; Chris Day, Transform Scotland; Niamh Hegarty, Network Rail, Heather Noller, Network Rail; Kevin Lindsay, ASLEF; James Dunshea, ORR; Kenny Walker, ORR; Lawrence Shackman, Transport Scotland; Keith Fiskin, SESTran; Trevor Roberts, WCR 250; Rosemary Blumfield, WCR 250; Karen Freel, Perspectiva Consultants; David Lister, ScotRail; Alex Hynes, ScotRail Alliance; Allan Watt, Abellio; Cameron Little, Alloa Community Council; Don Barclay, Levenmouth Rail Campaign; Eugene Clark, Levenmouth Rail Campaign; Robert Drysdale, Campaign for Borders Rail; Anisah Ijaz, Private Secretary to the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity

Apologies: Rachael Hamilton MSP, Oliver Mundell MSP, Stephen Young, David Prescott, Allan Rail; Iain McDonald, Light Rail UK; Richard Ardern, Friends of the Far North Line; Nigel Mullan, Newburgh Train Station Group; Jim Grieve, SESTrans; Stewart Nicol, Inverness Chamber of Commerce;

John Mason welcomed the group and noted the sad news that Roddy McDougall from RailFuture Scotland had died in April.

The minutes from the meeting of 2 April 2019 were approved by Allison Cosgrove and seconded by Don Barclay.

Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity

Michael Matheson MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity, outlined the level of investment in rail since 2007 and the considerable commitment of £4.8bn for Control Period 6, as well as the continuation of ongoing major projects like the Aberdeen-Inverness Improvement Project. He also mentioned the pipeline approach to rail enhancements in the new Control Period and spoke briefly about the Williams Review and the structural and process change that this would generate on a UK level.

John Mason asked if the Cabinet Secretary had any comment to make on the recent recommendation by the Glasgow Connectivity Commission that a metro or light rail system should be developed. The Cabinet Secretary noted that the proposed £10bn cost was substantial and said that all proposals from the Commission would need to be considered as part of the National Transport Strategy and the second Strategic Transport Projects Review.

Don Barclay asked about the pipeline approach and how the development of a Levenmouth rail link would be impacted by this. The Cabinet Secretary said that all projects must develop

a series of robust business cases before they could be progressed in more detail, and noted that funding for projects would depend on the availability of funding within the pipeline.

Mark Ruskell asked about the potential for partnership projects to progress quickly within the pipeline approach, highlighting the announcement from Talgo of its intention to construct a manufacturing facility in Fife. The Cabinet Secretary reiterated the need for a strong business case, but noted that the large scale and high level of investment in this specific project did have a positive impact. He further noted that the requirement for electrification of the railway in this area did affect the potential of future development of services between Alloa and Dunfermline/Fife, which would ultimately be dependent on demand and cost.

Jackie Baillie asked about Network Rail's CP5 underspend. The Cabinet Secretary outlined how the move towards a business case approach for major enhancements was based on the need for more stringent project management, noting that towards the end of CP5, projects that completed were more tightly managed and that the pipeline approach is more efficient as it allows the wider industry to plan its workforce and supply chain needs. Alex Hynes said that some of the underspend had gone towards the Glasgow Plan, improving asset reliability and PPM in the Glasgow area.

Allan McLean asked what the role of transport policy decisions were in reducing emissions. The Cabinet Secretary noted that transport is a factor in meeting Scotland's targets but highlighted the good progress made by the rail industry and particularly the increase in electrification of the network. CP6 will see further electrification and the development of new greener technology in rail and more energy-efficient rolling stock. John Mason asked if the development of battery or hydrogen-powered trains would benefit Scotland's rural routes where electrification was not a suitable option; the Cabinet Secretary said that the technology would need to be more reliable but it was an option for the future.

Kevin Lindsay said that the Cabinet Secretary's view on the need to change rail franchising was welcomed, but criticised the Scottish Government's aspirations for further devolution of Network Rail, noting that the ScotRail Alliance was intended as a way to more closely align infrastructure and train operator. The Cabinet Secretary said that Network Rail needed to be more accountable to the Scottish Parliament and Scottish Government.

Chris Day noted that the recent announcement of no reduction in air departure tax had been influenced by policy decisions in other portfolios, and further asked what the money would now be spent on. The Cabinet Secretary explained that tax revenues were not allocated to discrete spending pots and noted that the climate recommendations were being analysed across all portfolios, reiterating that all modes of transport contribute to carbon emissions and that the transport portfolio would examine a range of potential reduction measures across all modes of transport.

John Finnie noted the Scottish Government's commitment to growing rail freight and stated that rail freight needs to be at the forefront of joined-up policy making. The Cabinet Secretary said that utilising rail freight opportunities remained a commercial decision for companies, but support was available and there needed to be continued engagement with industry in order to promote the benefits and opportunities of rail freight.

Barrie Forrest asked for an update on the planned new stations at Reston and East Linton. The Cabinet Secretary stated that further information on progress was forthcoming from Network Rail.

Ian Dunn asked whether dualling the Highland Main Line was a possibility. The Cabinet Secretary noted that long term infrastructure development would be examined by the Infrastructure Commission.

Allison Cosgrove asked whether the Williams Review would have strong outcomes. The Cabinet Secretary noted that the review was a long-term exercise to look at the systemic problems in the UK rail system and that the UK Government would need to take action based on the evidence received as part of the review.

The Cabinet Secretary left the meeting at 1.50pm. The convener asked for further questions which would be put to the Cabinet Secretary in writing (see Appendix 1 for details).

John Mason thanked attendees for their participation. There was no other business.

Date of next meeting

The next meeting of the CPG will take place on **Wednesday 25 September at 5:30pm**. Topics for discussion will be finalised nearer the time.

Appendix 1

Letter to Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity on behalf of the Cross Party Group on Rail

Michael Matheson MSP

Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity

The Scottish Government
St. Andrew's House
Regent Road
Edinburgh
EH1 3DG

Dear Michael,

On behalf of the Cross Party Group on Rail, I would like to thank you for taking the time to speak to the group at the meeting on 8 May 2019. It was very interesting to hear about the Scottish Government's continued investment in Scotland's Railway, and further explanation of how the rail enhancements pipeline will better support current and future demand, aligning resources and funding more efficiently.

Group members who were unable to ask questions due to time constraints in the meeting have submitted their questions to the CPG secretariat. I would be grateful if you could respond to these questions before the Cross Party Group's next meeting on 25 September 2019.

1. Frank Roach, Partnership Manager, HITRANS: If there is further devolution of Network Rail in Scotland, how would this affect the role of the ORR as economic regulator?
2. Robert Drysdale, Campaign for Borders Rail: Where in the pipeline is the Portobello junction remodelling project?
3. Karen Freel, Perspectiva Consultants (on behalf of the Montrose Port Authority): Are there any plans to meet with harbour representatives to facilitate greater modal shift for freight?
4. Lawrence Marshall, Capital Rail Action Group:
 - a. Following previous announcements of commitment to a rolling programme of electrification, what are the Scottish Government's plans to efficiently deliver future electrification schemes going forward?
 - b. What is the scope for re-doubling the Calton North tunnel, as the two single tracks tunnels are a great restraint on capacity approaching Waverley from the east?

5. Vic Mackinley, Light Rail Transit Association:

- a. In the 1980's and 1990's, when whole UK taxpayers' funding was used to build the Channel Tunnel, the Westminster parliament promised that the Channel Tunnel rail link would support connections to the North of England and Scotland. With plans to embark on major reconstruction of Waverley Station, and bringing the need to persuade air travellers to change their mode of travel into that equation, would the Cabinet Secretary consider pushing for a Channel Tunnel terminus in this reconstruction work?
- b. The Light Rail Transit Association welcome the focus on light rail solutions in the Glasgow Connectivity Commission's recent report, but note that there was little mention of the environmental benefit of light rail/trams. Would giving greater priority to trams than buses in local transport be of general benefit to society and the environment?

Once again, thank you for your attendance at the CPG meeting and for taking the time to answer group members' questions in detail. I look forward to welcoming you to the CPG on Rail again in the near future.

Kind regards

John Mason MSP

On behalf of the Cross Party Group on Rail

May 2019