

CPG on Rail - minutes

25 September 2019, 1730

Committee Room

Attending: John Mason MSP, John Finnie MSP, Jenny Marra MSP, Aaron McHale, Alison Cosgrove, RailFuture Scotland; Andy Saunders, Network Rail; Ann MacKenzie, Network Rail; Cameron Little, Alloa Community Council; David Spaven, Rail Freight group; Don Barclay, Levenmouth Rail Campaign; Fiona Hesling, Transport Scotland; Jim Grieve, SESTran; Karen Freel, Perspectiva Consultants; Rose Tweedale, Transport Scotland; Simon Walton, Campaign for Borders Rail; Stewart Leighton, RailQWest; Vic McKinley, Light Rail Transit Association; Philip Henderson, Transport Focus; William Powell, Transport Focus; Ralph Barker, RailFuture Scotland; Barrie Forrest, RAGES; Allan McLean, Campaign for Borders Rail; Chris Day, Transform Scotland.

Apologies: Richard Ardern, Ian Budd, Trevor Roberts, Rosemary Blumfeld, Colin Howden, Dita Stanis-Traken.

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 8 May 2019 were proposed by Simon Walton and seconded by Allison Cosgrove.

Rail freight

The group heard from Andy Saunders, Freight Delivery Director at Network Rail, who provided an overview of the organisation's approach to freight and plans for Control Period 6. He highlighted the challenges to network capacity and how new rail technology developments impacted freight.

John Finnie asked about the limitations of the infrastructure. Andy noted that current constraints on the network meant that longer freight services were used to create incremental growth, but acknowledged that timetabling constraints were difficult to manage. Better use of existing infrastructure and examination of route capability will be required in the future to ensure adequate growth.

David Spaven noted that modal shift from road to rail is not happening quickly enough and that the increased carbon emissions from road freight, as well as the wear and tear on the road network, was not enough of a motivation, with further promotion from industry required. Stewart Leighton also noted that the A9 dualling would make road a more attractive option than the equivalent rail journey due to the Highland Main Line constraints. Andy said that there had been discussions about timber movement this year in order to increase uptake, and that route availability needed to be looked at in greater detail to match where the investment was.

Karen Freel asked about freight connections at Montrose. Anne MacKenzie said that a business case would be needed to develop use of the adjacent freight yard.

Chris Day asked where the demand for freight was coming from. Andy noted that a key aspect of freight growth was about looking at where movements were taking place and where the gaps were, working to develop where input was needed. The freight growth plan is innovative and includes initiatives such as roadshows to attract new business and make the benefits of rail freight clear.

Philip Mendelson noted that announcements such as the Levenmouth Rail Link were very passenger focused and freight opportunities within projects like this also needed to be recognised. Anne Mackenzie confirmed that a freight proposal for the Levenmouth project was in development.

Ralph Barker asked if the constraints of the infrastructure prevented improved freight uptake, or if operational costs were too high. Andy said that some aspects of containerised freight were limited by the UK rail network but this was not a major problem. He further noted that the freight growth plan mentions gauge clearance issues and the requirement to be more innovative.

Allan McLean asked about freight potential of the Borders Railway. David Spaven said that an extension of the route to Carlisle could be a driver for this.

Barrie Forrest asked about the potential to run more freight trains at night. Andy said that the requirement to maintain the network overnight needed to be balanced with the available freight paths overnight.

Other business

Don Barclay asked if the £75m announced for the Levenmouth Rail Link was enough to cover the development. John Mason said that the group could write to the Cabinet Secretary and ask this question directly.

Next meeting

The next meeting of the CPG will take place on 13 November at 1300 in Committee Room 1.