

PARLIAMENTARY BRIEFING

Liz Smith MSP debate on motion S4M-07166: Direct Rail Link Between Perth and Edinburgh

Wednesday 9 October 2013, 17:00

1 Key points

- 1.1 Our belief is that in the 21st century, Scotland's cities should be connected by a modern and efficient rail network that is at the very least competitive with road transport.
- 1.2 While the Scottish Government has a number of initiatives designed to improve railways in the Central Belt, no similar ambition is being shown for routes to the north of Scotland. North of the Central Belt, rail journey times are generally uncompetitive with equivalent road journey times.
- 1.3 In particular, the rail route from Perth to Edinburgh is currently not fit for purpose as an inter-city route. As such, we welcome the efforts of Liz Smith MSP in making the case for reinstatement of the direct rail route from Perth to Edinburgh.

2 Rail journey times north of the Central Belt need to be made competitive with road alternatives

- 2.1 To transform Scotland's railways, journey times need to be competitive with parallel road routes. In this, we agree with the First Minister that:

"railways must at least compete with roads".¹

- 2.2 However, rail journey times from Perth to Edinburgh are already uncompetitive with road journey times. The average weekday rail journey time is 76 minutes, substantially longer than the equivalent road journey.² Shockingly, the current fastest journey time from Perth to Edinburgh (71 minutes) is slower than the equivalent journey time of 100 years ago (65 minutes in 1913).

- 2.3 The direct rail route from Edinburgh to Perth via Dunfermline, Kinross and Glenfarg was closed in 1970 to make way for the M90 motorway. It was one of key rail closures of the Beeching era. This short-sighted decision has ever since condemned inter-city rail travellers to journey times significantly longer than the road alternative. Edinburgh-Perth (and Inverness) trains were originally diverted via Stirling, but now most run via Ladybank — seriously uncompetitive with road, and leaving the rail journey from Edinburgh to Perth slower than it was 100 years ago.



3 Edinburgh-Perth *direct* in 45 minutes

- 3.1 Only the reinstatement of a direct link to Perth will truly open up routes to the north from Edinburgh. It would slash the journey time from Edinburgh to Perth (and Inverness) by up to 35 minutes; provide the opportunity to reduce journey times from Edinburgh to Dundee and Aberdeen using this new routeing; and allow the creation of new stations in key growth areas such as Kinross. The currently under-utilised Perth Station would be transformed into a new Inter-City hub — the catalyst for transport connectivity and urban regeneration.
- 3.2 Much of the proposed route alignment is still in existence. Some development has inevitably taken place at a number of locations, and a four-mile tunnelled section would be required to avoid the M90 and Glenfarg village. In the 2009 Strategic Transport Projects Review (STPR) the Scottish Government estimated a cost of between £500m and £1bn to build a new railway from Inverkeithing to Bridge of Earn (south of Perth), but concluded that the benefits would not exceed the costs. However STPR analysis did not:
- Analyse the benefits of an electrified railway (not least in terms of speed)
 - Assess the merits of a new railway from Halbeath to Bridge of Earn only — allowing Dunfermline to benefit from the project
 - Evaluate an intermediate park-and-ride station at Kinross, serving a wide catchment
 - Analyse the benefits of routeing Edinburgh-Aberdeen trains this way — together with track upgrades in Perth, allowing reduced journey times and better connectivity.
- 3.3 If we are to start planning now for the transformation of rail travel between Edinburgh and Perth, top priority must be given to protecting the Inverkeithing-Halbeath-Bridge of Earn rail alignment from further inappropriate development.

4 What we need to see happen next

- I. The Scottish Ministers to instruct the appropriate local authorities to safeguard the rail alignment between Inverkeithing-Halbeath-Bridge of Earn from further inappropriate development in order to allow the future re-opening of a direct rail link between Inverkeithing and Perth.³ Prior to reopening, sections of the protected trackbed could be used for walking and cycle routes.
- II. The Transport Minister to commission a new and comprehensive feasibility study of the benefits and costs associated with re-opening a direct Inverkeithing-Perth link. Our understanding, based upon detailed discussions with Transport Scotland civil servants, is that the 2008 appraisal carried out on behalf of Transport Scotland was limited in scope and ambition.

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¹ As quoted in The Herald on 5 August 2008.

² Compared to 59 minutes estimated for the road journey by <http://www.theaa.com/route-planner>. However, please note that AA's Route Planner assumes that road users obey speed limits, which government statistics show is often false (and especially for travel on trunk roads); hence, many road journeys on this route will be made in less than this time.

³ Such an approach would be consistent with Scottish Planning Policy, which states "Disused railway lines with a reasonable prospect of being reused as rail, tram or active travel routes should be safeguarded in development plans." It would also assist with delivery of the NPF3 proposed National Development 'National Cycling and Walking Network'.

Transform Scotland is the national sustainable transport alliance, campaigning for a more sustainable and socially-just transport system. Our membership includes bus, rail and shipping operators; local authorities; national environment and conservation groups; consultancies; and local transport campaigns. Transform Scotland Limited is a registered Scottish charity (SC041516).

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