



**MINUTE OF COBRA ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
MONDAY 19th JANUARY 2009 HELD AT HIGHLAND SPRING**

PRESENT

COBRA Committee - Neil Gaunt (Chairman), Jennifer Gordon (Secretary), Ann Gaunt (Treasurer), Alan Moore (IT), Richard Beith, John Law, Joan Moore, Sarah Shankland

POLITICAL REPRESENTATION - Stewart Stevenson; MSP, Richard Simpson, MSP; Councillor Graham Houston, Stirling Council, Cllr Murray Lyle

TACTRAN

Eric Guthrie and Niall Gardiner,
Jim Valentine

PERTH & KINROSS COUNCIL

PRESS

Sandra Gray of The Courier
Caroline Boxer of the Strathearn Herald

MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

Margaret Beith	Andrew Brickell
Kay Cameron	Gordon Cameron
Ivan Collins	Julian Crawford
John Deuchar	Jean Gardiner
Colin Gordon	Pat Graham
Bryan Grieve	David Jamieson
Janet Law	Chris Livingstone
Ella McEwan	Chris McNally
James McNally	Master McNally
Master McNally	Sue Mellor

Ken Spittal
And three other members of the public

APOLOGIES

Patron

Desmond Carrington

Caroline Moore (COBRA Vice Chair)

Dave Aylott	Gordon Banks, MP
Jeannette Barr	David Brown, Stirling Council
Bruce Crawford, MSP	Emma Crawford
Roseanna Cunningham, MSP	Alex Deans, Perth & Kinross Council
Murdo Fraser, MSP	Adrian Griffiths, Baxters Food Group
Christopher Harvie, MSP	Jamie Hepburn, MSP



Ian Hislop
Anne McGuire, MP
Felicity Martin
Margaret Mitchell, MSP
John Park, MSP
Elizabeth Smith, MSP
Nicol Stephen, MSP
Catha and Neville Taylor
Chris Tiso
Howard and Kate Wilkins

John McCormick, SAPT
Irene McLaughlan
Serge Merone, P&K Council
Alex Neil, MSP
John Purvis, MEP
Kate Smithson, Stirling Council
Les Stewart, Perthshire Advertiser
Andrew Thompson
Andrew Warrington, P&K Council

1. **CHAIR'S WELCOME** - especially to all the politicians present. He also thanked Highland Spring/Chris Livingstone for the generous hospitality.

2. **INTRODUCTION**

The Chairman gave a presentation on the merits of a re-opened Blackford Station - this will be available on the website.

He then introduced the Scottish Minister for Transport.

3. **PRESENTATION BY STEWART STEVENSON, MSP, SCOTTISH MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT**

Mr Stevenson started his presentation by saying since taking over as Minister for Transport he has made 486 train journeys and is an avid train user. Trains were clearly a part of what his department is trying to do. Mr Stevenson went on to give an outline of decision making with regard to railway planning. This is done in five year cycles with that for 2009 to 2014 about to start. Blackford presently did not feature in this. The next cycle, 2015 to 2020, would be looked at soon. He referred to the Scotrail estimate for re-opening Blackford of £1.75m but thought £3m would be nearer the mark. He went on to say a grade separated junction costs around £10m to £15m. He perceived Blackford to be of local, not national, interest and said that Tactran was in the driving seat. An economic return must be shown and an opened Blackford must not have a negative affect on Gleneagles station. He gave anecdotal evidence of the Airdrie to Bathgate line.

Mr Stevenson noted there was a growing community in the area and that Highland Spring was expanding their business. They currently employed around 330 people and the majority of these could use rail to travel to/from work. He said Boyd Munro, currently in Australia, but who kept a 'plane at Strathallan had emailed him to get on with opening Blackford.

Costs and benefits of train versus car were evident - rail travel costs one quarter of a car journey to the environment. Currently in Scotland 20 stations were in the pipeline to be re-opened. He noted that disabled access at Blackford was good. He thought the signalling would need to be upgraded.

Mr Stevenson went on to discuss the new Forth Road crossing by saying this was essential as when the original bridge was designed/built lorries were not as large and as heavy as present



day transport. However, the cost for this should not affect any rail budget as the Rail Regulator was independent of both the Westminster and Scottish governments.

4. QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

Q The issue of disabled access at Gleneagles was raised.

A Mr Stevenson said that Westminster money - Access for All - was used for this and stations were being upgraded at the rate of about four each year, with about 100 needing to be upgraded. Gleneagles was not near the top of the list.

Q With regard to the Climate Challenge Bill, it would be inexpensive to re-open Blackford Station, compared with the Forth Bridge crossing. It would be better if political issues concentrated on opening more stations, rather than road expansion.

A No particular choice of road versus rail was made. The existing Ford Road Bridge could be repaired but this would entail it being shut completely for between four to seven years.

Q Why not nail political colours to rail rather than road?

A Currently Scotland's rails were being electrified at the rate of 1km per day. The new Westminster Transport Minister, Andrew Adonis, was rail orientated.

Q From a representative of the Dunblane Development Trust - The freight issue of parking in Dunblane was raised. The town had increased car parking capacity by 200 spaces recently but these were all filled on a daily basis. For example, at 0700 the Tesco car park was full but with only three customers in the store. Therefore, Dunblane had a vested interest in Blackford being re-opened. People travelled by car from Perth to use Dunblane for the free parking and the subsidised rail fares. The economic case for Blackford was obvious given the Ryder Cup at Gleneagles in 2014, the presence of Highland Spring and the planned increase in housing.

A The Tactran response to this was that the business case needs to be made. Stopping inter-city trains at Blackford would add to journey times but this would be acceptable for semi-fast trains. It was evident that there should be a rail, not a bus, solution. Tactran had no views on Blackford versus Gleneagles. The Tactran commissioned study should be finished by the end of March 2009. A cost versus benefit argument was needed. The current study represented level two of a five level system.

Q From the MSP present in the audience - The knock-on effect of a re-opened Blackford should be examined by Tactran - eg the effect on the rest of the locality as far as Perth and Dunblane. It was also important to accurately predict the potential passenger numbers. The under-estimate of the newly opened Alloa Station was cited - there was an eight to nine year delay in opening the Alloa line due to underestimating passenger numbers. Again the importance of the Ryder Cup was emphasised as tourism was increasingly impacting on the economy. The lack of disabled access at Gleneagles was highlighted - currently disabled people have to give 24 hours notice when wanting to use Gleneagles. Two rail personnel are taxied to Blackford to take the disabled person to Perth or Stirling to board the train. The previous practice of carrying the passenger



across the track has been stopped. Blackford has level access. It was further noted from a COBRA member that Mary Grant, Chief Executive of First Scotrail, had been very enthusiastic about a re-opened Blackford during a meeting in 2008 - this with reference to how improvements as Carnoustie due to the Open being held there have improved services.

A A corridor approach would be taken with the knock-on impact of the journey being examined. It had been estimated that taking one minute off a journey time created £60m, though this did not mean £60m for every subsequent minute. The whole timetable system needs to be looked at as parts date back for 40 years. There had been a number of studies on values of new housing regarding the economic advantage of good access/walking distance to a rail station. This begged the question of whether housing developers should pay towards the cost of a station. Mr Stevenson stated that he had been unaware of the Ryder Cup coming to Gleneagles until this point was made.

Q It was pointed out that Dunblane was currently a terminus for semi-fast trains and that Blackford could become the end of this loop. It was further pointed out that access to Gleneagles Station was across the busy A9 and that a re-opened Blackford would add to rail use as presently people do not use Gleneagles for many and already mentioned reasons. The geography should be looked at. There was a greater track distance between Blackford and Gleneagles than that between Dunblane and Bridge of Allan. It would be cheaper to re-open Blackford than upgrade the A9. During recent road works on that road, local traffic was diverted up to the Broxden roundabout - some 18 miles away. The police had stopped the local bus company from servicing Gleneagles Station as the buses had to cross two lanes of fast-moving traffic to turn right into the station and when exiting by turning left on the A9, they were at risk from traffic on the A9 not being aware of a slow-moving vehicle. This was because of a bend in the road in the approach to the station exit.

Q From the Leader of Stirling Council - How can COBRA accelerate the re-opening of Blackford in time for the Ryder Cup in 2014? Joined-up thinking and working was needed - even £3m was not a lot of money in the grand scheme of things.

A Blackford was not mentioned in the present planning tranche to 2014. However, there was a third tier of allocated money - referred to as the 'rat bag'. The Rail Regulator was not at the end of the current process - there could be a bit of 'wobble room' for the next four to five weeks. Mr Stevenson felt the best solution may be for COBRA/Blackford to source financial contributors - housing developers? To be selling houses near a rail station would give them a competitive advantage. If COBRA missed the Ryder Cup opportunity then it would be bad news. Mr Stevenson said that £3m was not the most challenging request being made to him.

Q From the Deputy Director of Environment at Perth & Kinross Council. Proposed changes to Loaninghead junction would severely affect access to Gleneagles Station and he felt this point was relevant. He further highlighted the problems at Gleneagles Station during the G8 Summit held at Gleneagles Hotel. There was an economic



argument to re-open Blackford Station. P&K C required housing developers to contribute towards new schools, with transport being next on that list.

Q Congratulations were expressed to COBRA by a member of the public for having the Transport Minister at this meeting. It was important that decision-makers had personal visits, rather than relying on maps. etc. The Minister was invited to go to Gleneagles Station in a wheel-chair or with a wheeled suitcase and the importance of listening to local people further emphasised.

A Was the answer to move Gleneagles Station to Blackford?

Q From a COBRA member - At no time had COBRA advocated the closing of Gleneagles Station. They had always stated that not every train had to stop at every station. The semi-fast commuter trains could use Blackford while Gleneagles, with its longer platform capacity, could be used for the Highland Chieftain. However, she went on to say that when travelling to Gleneagles on-train staff highlighted the difficulty of alighting there.

Q The issue of freight use at Blackford was raised.

A This was deemed to be independent of passenger use and subsidies were available to increase rail freight use. There was a good situation at Blackford for Highland Spring

Q From a member of Highland Spring staff - In all discussions, they were careful not to jeopardise passenger developments at Blackford.

Q The Dunblane Development Trust representative listed all the support and arguments - economic, environment and wide-spread support - for re-opening Blackford Station and asked how much more evidence was needed? He felt that bureaucracy was stopping this.

A Choices had to be made on a developed case.

Mr Stevenson said he had listened to the case for re-opening Blackford, especially with regard to the Ryder Cup and he would follow this up. He commended COBRA for their work and would watch developments with interest. The Chairman thanked him for attending the meeting and being willing to listen to a small community.

At this point Mr Stevenson left the meeting.

5. MINUTE OF AGM HELD ON 5TH DECEMBER 2007

This was adopted as a true record - proposed by Richard Beith and seconded by Neil Gaunt.

6. MATTERS ARISING

There were none.

7. APOLOGIES

Noted above. The Chairman read out the message of apology from COBRA's patron, Desmond Carrington.



8. CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

This has been an eventful year, prefaced by the acquisition of a Patron - Desmond Carrington. - a broadcaster who has a weekly programme on the BBC and has had for many years. Mr Carrington lives locally and, although he sends his apologies for tonight, is keen to be kept in touch with our activities as, naturally, he supports the opening of a railway station which would be of much convenience to him. The following message was received - *“Many thanks for your invitations (Desmond Carrington and Dave Aylott) Sadly we will not be able to attend, but I wish every success with the project. We will keep an eye on your progress with great interest. That is good news about the Minister of Transport. Please feel free to read out our message of support and good luck. We regularly use the line from Gleneagles, Desmond is 82 now and he is still working full-time, which means business trips to London for meetings with the BBC. He find the whole experience of driving down the motorways to Edinburgh or Glasgow and then flying to London is far too stressful and so he catches the train from Gleneagles to Kings Cross. I am certain that any opportunity to reduce traffic on our main roads must be seized with both hands and reopening Blackford Station would certainly contribute to this aim. With best wishes Dave Aylott”* Producer of The Music Goes Round.

At last year's meeting the intention to submit an E-Petition to the Scottish Parliament was mooted and this was duly done. It was considered by the Petitions Committee and has been held open pending further consultation with the various interested bodies. This considerably heightened the awareness of our local politicians, all of whom support our aim.

Being a pressure group makes COBRA ineligible for many grants and the Treasurer will explain where the funding which we do have comes from. However, it is our intention to apply to the Carbon Reduction Fund for a grant to cover market research into the number of people in the catchment area and their travel patterns.

We have tried to keep in touch through bodies such as Tactran whose meetings in Dundee I attended on 26th March and 16th October 2008. Caroline Moore, Jennifer Gordon and I attended a First Scotrail question and answer session in Stirling on 29th May last year. Joan Moore, Richard Beith and I attended the Scottish Association for Public Transport Meeting in Dundee on 26th April.

I will conclude by asking Eric Guthrie, guest speaker at our last public meeting, to give us an update on the activities of Tactran.

- Eric Guthrie reported that Steer Davies Gleave were appointed as consultants on 9th December 2009. The work they will carry out will be complex as they would need to understand timetabling with regard to extra stations. Niall Gardiner, also present at tonight's meeting, was in charge of the project steering group. The COBRA Chairman would be attending the stakeholders' meeting on Friday 23rd January - this was deliberately being held quite early in the process.



- It was requested of Tactran that projected forecasting would look at future use and not, as for the STAG 1 appraisal, dwell retrospectively on the 2001 census. This was agreed. It was felt the case was reasonably optimistic. The Dunblane car parking issue, for example, would be considered. With regard to the Ryder Cup, any opening of a station would need to look at use and economics for the future 60 years. Tactran had already apprised Transport Scotland of the Ryder Cup. One of the advantages of Tactran representatives attending COBRA meetings was noted in that they were now jointly, with Highland Spring, funding a study for freight facilities at Blackford. It was thought that bureaucracy was necessary.
- The Chairman had noticed more passengers travelling by rail when car fuel prices rise and asked if governments would make a concerted effort to get commuters to use rail. The Tactran response was that there was a finite pot of money and there was a reliance on the business case. Tactran would need to follow this process. They were currently consulting with Transport Scotland. An undertaking was given to look at robust forward planning, not, for example, the 2001 census. While this would be a desk-bound study, physical demands would be looked at by using raw data from recent times. Car parking data in Central Scotland was also being examined but it was uncertain as to whether conclusions from this would be in time to be included in the report by the end of March.
- Recent timetable changes were discussed - these had been received positively in the main. A detailed business case for Blackford would be needed. New stations would need to improve services. The study currently being undertaken was stage two of a five stage process.
- It was pointed out that COBRA members had day jobs and needed to know how and where to get help to further their cause. It was thought this may become clearer after Friday's stakeholders' meeting.

The Tactran representatives left the meeting at this point.

9. SECRETARY'S REPORT

Since the last AGM on 5th December 2007, COBRA has made great strides in gaining support and credibility throughout the political and business worlds as well as with individuals.

At a meeting organised by First Scotrail in May of last year, Mary Grant - their Chief Executive - was both aware and supportive of a re-opened Blackford Station. She made mention of the Ryder Cup being held at Gleneagles Hotel in 2014 and undertook to progress relevant meetings to examine the merits of Blackford Station.

The website, with its attendant email facility, has been a boon. Please complete your email details on the Sign-in sheets. Please also visit the web-site at www.cobra-blackford.org.uk.



As a result of the excellent programme by Ian Hislop in which he gave the narrative of the background to the Beeching cuts, I contacted him and he sent the following message. *28th October 2008 Dear Jennifer Here's a quote. "I'm delighted to offer my support to the Campaign to Open Blackford Railway Station Again. Good luck to Cobra!" Ian "off the rails" Hislop.*

He also responded to the invitation to attend this meeting. *9th January 2009 Sorry not to be there. Thank you very much for inviting me. Best wishes Ian Hislop.*

Working on the premise of nothing ventured, nothing gained, I also contacted the BBC Landward programme after mention has been made of them covering another railway station where there was a move for it to be re-opened. I got the following response from Simon Cousins, the producer of the programme. *21st October 2008*

Thank-you for contacting Landward. Unfortunately, all filming and editing is complete for this item and therefore I would be unable to include any reference to Blackford. However, I do think this is an interesting story given the Highland Spring angle. I would like to look into the story a little more with a view to possibly including the item in our spring series. Please feel free to send me any further information which you feel would be helpful. All the best Simon Cousins. I followed this up by sending information about COBRA and earlier this month I sent him copies of the recent press coverage we have had. This produced the following response. *6th January 2009 Happy New Year! I have not forgotten about Blackford Railway station. We are just starting to plan for the next series and we will be in touch in due course. Best wishes Simon. Watch this space!*

Finally I should like to thank Highland Spring in general and Chris Livingstone in particular for their enthusiastic hospitality in accommodating our Open and Annual General Meetings. To be here certainly gives a professional edge to our meetings.

10. TREASURER'S REPORT

The balance in the current account after cheques cashed is £393.76. £150.00 of this is earmarked for the planning fee for our proposed notice board advertising our campaign and it is hoped to agree the positioning for this soon. This will leave an amount of £243.76 in the balance for use.

The funds have come from the following sources:-

- We received a donation of £150.00 from Blackford Community Council to pay the planning fee for the notice board.
- Last year's quiz, organised by Jennifer Gordon, raised just over £100.00
- A donation of tickets for the Comedy Club, donated by Bruce Fummey, raised £82.00. This paid for the car stickers which we purchased.
- We also received a donation of £250 from the new owners of the Eaglesgate Development which paid for our new banners - these are on display this evening.
- In addition, we are greatly indebted to the generosity of Freda Robertson of the Roll On In and her customers for her donation of £105.75 which has paid for two years hosting of our website.



Since the first financial year was an incomplete one, I shall be preparing a full financial statement at the end of March and Marjorie Sloan has kindly agreed to audit the books.

11. IT REPORT

The website continues to attract a lot of interest from various stakeholders, particularly the press/media over the last few months. New content has been continuously updated to reflect the appointment of our Patron, Desmond Carrington, the interest from Ian Hislop following his 'Off The Rails' documentary and updates on progress with the E-Petition.

News articles from The Herald, Perthshire Advertiser, Strathearn Herald and The Courier have also been added and you can download these from the Support pages of the website - <http://www.cobra-blackford.org.uk/4.html>. You can also download campaign leaflets, a brief summary of the campaign, Minutes of the various COBRA meetings and the presentation given by Tactran at the last public meeting in September 2008.

COBRA would like to thank Roll On In for their generous donation which has been used to renew the website hosting subscription for a further two years.

As always, we welcome your thoughts and ideas on how to improve the website.

12. ELECTION OF COBRA OFFICE BEARERS- see attached table.

13. OPEN DISCUSSION

- It was suggested that Niall Gardiner of Tactran be asked to attend a COBRA committee meeting. This was discussed.
- It was suggested that a member of the Dunblane Forum join the COBRA committee - this to be pursued.
- There were other successful campaigns for re-opening stations in the UK - these to be looked at with a view to learning from their experience. Alan Moore was already doing this. He would be working on website linkage.
- A professionally run survey to emphasise the business case would be pursued. However, funding for this would be needed - perhaps from the Climate Challenge fund. Caroline Moore was already exploring possibilities.
- Ryder Cup - it would be advisable to have Visit Scotland on board as it was felt that P&KC perhaps did not realise the enormity of the event. Contacts to be sought.

There being no other business, the Chairman closed the meeting by thanking all for attending and especially Highland spring for their continued offer of hospitality which gave such COBRA meetings professional credibility.



COBRA 2009 AGM COMMITTEE MEMBERS

COBRA Constitution states there should be between seven and 12 Committee members.

	POSITION	NAME	PROPOSED	SECONDED
1	CHAIR	Neil Gaunt	Joan Moore	Richard Beith
2	VICE CHAIR	Joan Moore	Jennifer Gordon	Ann Gaunt
3	SECRETARY	Jennifer Gordon	Ella McEwan	Colin Gordon
4	TREASURER	Ann Gaunt	Jennifer Gordon	Joan Moore
5	COMMITTEE MEMBER	Alan Moore	Neil Gaunt	Sarah Shankland
6	COMMITTEE MEMBER	John Law	Ella McEwan	Joan Moore
7	COMMITTEE MEMBER	Richard Beith	Ann Gaunt	Alan Moore