

# REOPENING BLACKFORD RAILWAY STATION

## THE RYDER CUP - GLENEAGLES 2014



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### Context

The Ryder Cup is a prestigious international golf event, second only to the Olympics and World Cup. Hosting the event at Gleneagles in 2014 will bring the eyes of the world to the location and will be a major bonus to Scottish golf, golf tourism and, importantly, to Scottish tourism in general.

The Scottish Government recognises that a signature event like the 2014 Ryder Cup is a key part of its overall Economic Strategy and its International Framework. Events like this create an iconic opportunity to generate a lasting impact and long-term legacy. The impression created by event marketing and the real experiences gained by visitors have a direct influence on decisions to return, to refer to others, to future economic growth and ultimately to our overall global identity.

In order to maximise the opportunities, a wide range of challenging issues need to be addressed in event planning leading up to the event in 2014. One of the most critical issues to be addressed in the logistics for the event is that of transport planning – how best to efficiently and effectively provide transport solutions capable of meeting the anticipated influx of c.150,000-200,000 visitors, professionals, exhibitors and support staff. A failure to make adequate transport provision would lead to serious reputational damage and loss of credibility for Scottish tourism in general as well as to specific criticism on strategic business planning for the event itself.

In order to maximise the potential economic value of the event, transport planning needs to be undertaken as a core activity involving the key stakeholders – ensuring that marketing, promotion, logistics planning, accommodation, ticket distribution, tour operators, travel trade and the media work in concert with the key public agencies, golf and travel industry to co-ordinate strategic planning and operational management for the event.

**COBRA**, the Campaign to Open Blackford Railway Station Again, strongly asserts that a reopened railway station at Blackford should be considered as an urgent priority to help meet the transport demands of the 2014 event, as well as present a longlasting legacy for golf, tourism and a sustainable, environmentally friendly addition to the transport infrastructure of the region. COBRA has been active since 2002 and enjoys wide support in the local community, from local businesses and from Councillors, MSPs, MPs and MEPs.

### Economic Context

Scottish Government Statistics (August 2009) report that:

- Golf tourism is worth in the region of £300m to the Scottish economy. Spending by overseas visitors is estimated at £66m, with £46m of this by US visitors (2002 figures);
- 260,000 visitors play golf in Scotland each year. Scotland has more golf courses per head than anywhere else in the world;

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- On average, golfers spend twice that of other visitors to Scotland and for every £1 spent of a green fee, a further £5 is spent elsewhere in the Scottish economy.

The Ryder Cup event has a highly significant economic impact for the host nation :

- The 1997 Ryder Cup in Valderrama generated an estimated economic impact of c.£56million;
- The 1999 Boston match generated an estimated £103million;
- The 2002 event at The Belfry generated c.£62million;
- The 2005 Ryder Cup in Ireland generated an economic benefit of c.£113million;
- The 2005 Open Golf Championship at St Andrews was worth more than £72 million to Scotland;
- The 2010 Ryder Cup in Wales projects a potential economic benefit of up to £96million;
- Each event is televised to an audience of several hundred million across the world;
- Visitor numbers for each event total c.150,000-200,000.

In general, the actual economic benefit has considerably exceeded any pre-event forecasts. In planning for the 2010 Ryder Cup event in Monmouth, South Wales, a wide range of factors that could influence the economic impact of hosting the Ryder Cup were identified. On the issue of transport planning, a recent report states “It must be noted that some factors may have a negative influence if not addressed appropriately – for example – congestion and transport.”

### **Rail Transport Provision**

Amongst the key lessons learned from the 2006 Ryder Cup held in Ireland was the need to ensure effective road and transport arrangements were in place. Predicted visitor numbers for the 2010 event are c.45,000 to c.75,000 each day of the event – and this number can be reasonably predicted for the Gleneagles event.

Given the proximity of the rail infrastructure to the 2014 Gleneagles event, a key requirement will be to optimise the use of rail transport to cope with the large influx of visitors. The ease, convenience and connectivity of rail transport mean that this mode of travel will be a very attractive option for spectators.

However, the existing railway station at Gleneagles suffers from a number of significant disadvantages that mean it is highly unlikely this station alone could service the needs of the event. These drawbacks include :

- Very difficult and dangerous access for cars to and from the A9
- No access for buses or coaches as a result of the existing dangerous A9 junction for the station

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- Inaccessible to pedestrians from local communities
- The station is not DDA compliant and requires significant upgrading to provide disabled access;
- Limited car parking;
- Isolated, unstaffed, poorly lit station without any CCTV provision causing real personal safety concerns;

A recent report by TACTRAN, the regional transport partnership, has highlighted that upgrading the existing Gleneagles station to overcome these drawbacks would cost in the region of £3.75million. Critically though, the nature of the infrastructure improvements required mean that it is highly unlikely that these could be achieved within the timescales required for the 2014 event. Indeed, the report makes limited mention of the event at all.

### Why Blackford Railway Station?

It should be emphasised that COBRA are not campaigning for the closure of Gleneagles station. On the contrary, COBRA are campaigning to reopen Blackford station to provide a complementary station that will provide significant added value to existing, new and potential rail users in the future.

Although, the campaign is not fully predicated on the 2014 Ryder Cup event, COBRA strongly believes that reopening Blackford station will provide a ready-made opportunity to service the transport demands of the event and would easily be fully commissioned within the timescales required. Importantly, the new station would also leave a long lasting legacy from the event that would directly contribute to the social, environmental and economic well-being of the area for many future generations to come.

The advantages of a reopened Blackford station include :

- Platform and sidings infrastructure from the previous station still exist;
- Ample room for car parking;
- Station location within the village reducing risks of personal safety;
- Safe, well-lit, secure station location overlooked by manned signal box 24 hours a day;
- Commitment and support from bus operators to provide interconnecting services at existing bus terminus adjacent to station site;
- Easy and safe station access to and from the A9;
- Disabled access and DDA compliance easily achieved due to presence of adjacent level crossing;
- Relatively inexpensive investment costs involved.

The TACTRAN report mentioned above also determined that the cost of a reopened Blackford Station would be c.£4.5million. However, COBRA strongly contest this cost estimate, given the availability of existing infrastructure. Importantly, comparisons with the out-turn costs of recent new/reopened stations of a similar nature would indicate that the

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cost is more likely to be c.£1.5-2million. Crucially, the necessary redevelopment work to reopen the station could easily be achieved within the 2014 event timescales as there are no issues relating to land ownership or access.

Finally, the under construction GWest golf complex is a major new golf development immediately adjacent to Blackford and the existing station site. This new major addition to Scotland's golf tourism is expected to have some 350 on-site staff and some 1,300 residents and guests. Blackford station would be ideally suited to service this new golf complex.

### The Way Ahead

COBRA strongly encourages Transport Scotland, TACTRAN, the regional transport partnership and Perth & Kinross Council, to collaborate very closely with Event Scotland, Visit Scotland, and the key golf tourism representatives to ensure that a first class transport solution is in place for the world-class event that is the 2014 Ryder Cup.

COBRA firmly believes that reopening Blackford railway station is an integral, and easily achieved part of this solution that will also leave a long lasting, positive legacy to future golf tourism, tourism in general, the economic development of Perthshire and Scotland as well as promoting Scotland as a visitor destination.

More information about COBRA can be found at [www.cobra-blackford.org.uk](http://www.cobra-blackford.org.uk). To contact COBRA, please email [info@cobra-blackford.org.uk](mailto:info@cobra-blackford.org.uk).

**COBRA; August 2009**