

PETITION PE 1115



COBRA'S RESPONSE TO :

1. The *Extended Tay Estuary Rail Study Appraisal Report* and associated documents prepared for TACTRAN by Steer Davies Gleave of March 2009
2. Letter from TACTRAN to Public Petitions Committee, "PETITION PE1115 : TAY ESTUARY RAIL STUDY UPDATE", Dated 5th August 2009

(Note, Number references relate to paragraphs in the above Appraisal report)

COBRA, the Campaign to Open Blackford Railway-station Again has been active since 2002 and enjoys widespread and strong support in the local community, from local businesses and from Councillors, MSPs, MPs and MEPs. COBRA welcomes the publication of the TACTRAN TERS Appraisal Report and the opportunity to comment on the key findings and recommendations made in this study.

Although time has been limited to digest the extensive report and the various associated documents, COBRA welcomes the proposal for a new hourly service being introduced on the Perth-Glasgow route by December 2010 as this will potentially increase the access opportunities for the many communities across Strathearn and Strathallan. However, COBRA remains fully convinced that a new station at Blackford will provide a more acceptable alternative for the future than the proposed "Enhanced Gleneagles" station.

Fundamentally, COBRA strongly disagrees with the key finding in relation to the reopening of Blackford station, namely "*following introduction of an hourly ScotRail service at Gleneagles in the short term, efforts to focus on realising the opportunities to improve access and facilities for an enhanced Gleneagles Station will be better served than on providing a new station at Blackford, having regard to the Ryder Cup at Gleneagles in 2014.*" COBRA does not support this conclusion on the following grounds :

- **Population Growth and Local Development Plans**

The report concludes that "proposed development areas are not expected to have a material influence on transport issues affecting the wider region" (2.12). Population projections should look forward, not back to the 2001 Census. In the "*Populations Projections Scotland*", published in January 2008 by the General Register Office, Scotland, the projected population increase in the Perth and Kinross Council area for the period 2006 - 2031 is a highly significant 22%. (2.8). Further, outline planning permission has already been given for 800 new houses in Auchterarder, a further 200 are pending permission and, 220 new homes have outline planning permission in Blackford itself. COBRA considers these developments as having a significant material influence on passenger demand for a station at Blackford, and potentially for developer contributions towards the station costs.

- **Station Catchment Analysis**

Given the above, catchment analysis based on existing Census data is a significant weakness in the demand forecasting methodology used by the consultants. COBRA would like to access and review the detailed assumptions and calculations relating to demand estimation for Blackford station. Although the catchments will overlap, the marginal difference in forecast patronage for Blackford and an enhanced Gleneagles is questionable. Nonetheless, we note with interest that the consultant's estimates show an additional 5,000 journeys per annum created by opening Blackford, 5,000 more than enhancement of Gleneagles.

Further, no serious reference can be seen to the extra inward traffic potential at Blackford for Highland Spring staff usage (315 personnel), the under construction G-West tourist complex (estimated to have 350 on-site staff and approximately 1,300 residents and guests), nor for tourist travel to Baxters and the rest of the Eaglesgate complex. The rail use surveys conducted as part of

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this study are not robust (8.29) and provide fairly meaningless results as they are based on a 4 hour period on a single day in March 2009.

- **Costs**

Recognising that capital funds from the Scottish Government will be restricted until 2016 COBRA asserts that reopening Blackford station presents real value for money and would be a comparatively inexpensive investment that will provide a quicker return on investment than an enhanced Gleneagles.

The report estimates that the cost of a reopened Blackford Station would be c.£4.5million compared to c.£3.75million to enhance Gleneagles. COBRA strongly contests this cost estimate, given the availability of existing infrastructure at Blackford and uncosted elements of the enhanced Gleneagles proposal (see below). Importantly, comparisons with the out-turn costs of recent new/reopened stations of a similar nature indicate that the real cost is more likely to be c.£1.5-2million and we question the high optimisation bias of 44% used. COBRA emphasises that the station design should not be overspecified, should be suited to meet business requirements and particular attention should be paid to the use of modular platform builds and reducing station platform length to the minimum necessary.

- **Appraisal Against Planning Objectives**

The statement that “there is little difference between the performance of Gleneagles and Blackford options against planning objects and the STAG criteria”, suggests that these objects and options need revising to something more practical. (13.122). Nonetheless, the two key differentiators in favour of Gleneagles are EC2 - Improve efficiency, reliability and integration and ACC1 - Increase Accessibility (table 9.2). In fact, Blackford and enhanced Gleneagles score equally on EC2 so we assume this is an error and COBRA contests that Blackford should score equally if not higher than Gleneagles on increased accessibility given the existing bus services adjacent to the station site and commitments already made by the bus operators to integrate with new rail services. Also, COBRA considers that the Local Economic Impact of Blackford station (EAL1) is far greater than Gleneagles given the proximity to Highland Spring, Eaglesgate and the under construction golf complex at GWest.

- **Development Timescales**

Contrary to the statement relating to an enhanced Gleneagles Station: that “construction work will not be as significant (as other options) as the existing structure is only being enhanced”, work at Gleneagles would include compulsory purchase of land, moving a telecommunications mast (uncosted), improving the camber of track (uncosted), landscaping (uncosted) gaining listed building consent, installing disabled access as well as CCTV etc. Further, the report places a dependency on developing the new access to Gleneagles on trying to link the Gleneagles improvement works to other committed schemes such as “Access for All” and grade separation of junctions along the A9. Failure to achieve the new access road from the A823 means that (a) car entry to Gleneagles from Auchterarder would still be via the dangerous limited access gap on the A9 and (b) there would be no integrated bus service as local bus companies have desisted from operating services to the station on the advice of Police due to the poor sightlines onto the A9. These interdependencies and complex planning processes will inevitably lead to significantly extended timescales and call into serious doubt whether an enhanced Gleneagles could be provided in time for the Ryder Cup in 2014.

On the contrary, the necessary redevelopment work to reopen Blackford station could easily be achieved within the Ryder Cup 2014 event timescales as much of the necessary infrastructure already exists and there are no issues relating to land acquisition or dependencies on other road-related infrastructure work. COBRA would also like to point out that the existing station site is not owned by Highland Spring (8.5), but is believed to remain in railway ownership.

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- **Accessibility**

Contrary to the report, Gleneagles would not provide improved travel opportunities for people with limited or no access to the private car (6.8, 9.22, 10.61, 13.79). The Gleneagles station site is at an isolated location and notably, the perceived risk to personal safety and vandalism (9.29) would remain. However, Blackford station would provide direct walk access and intermodal bus access for the large and growing village catchments at both Blackford and Auchterarder. The local bus operators are ready and willing to co-ordinate bus and train times. Encouraging this use of public transport at Blackford will present new opportunities to the young, old and non-car owners and promote greater long term social inclusion in the community. Further, on the grounds of “Comparative accessibility”, Blackford scores highly over Gleneagles. (13.78, 14.12) Also, Blackford Station would not be isolated from its catchment area - residential and commercial. (7.8, 7.16, 9.33, 11.25, 13.75, 13.77, 13.110, 13.116, 13.117).

- **2014 Ryder Cup**

International events such as the Ryder Cup bring the eyes of the world to Scotland and create an iconic opportunity to generate a lasting impact and a long-term legacy. There will be an anticipated influx of c 150,000 to 200,000 visitors, professionals, support staff and exhibitors. 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.

It will be essential to optimise the use of local rail transport to cope with the large influx of visitors. COBRA strongly encourages Transport Scotland, TACTRAN and Perth and Kinross Council to collaborate closely with Event Scotland, Visit Scotland and golf tourism representatives to ensure that a first class transport solution is in place and that a reopened Blackford railway station is part of that solution.

Next Steps

COBRA reiterates that a reopened Blackford Station would commend itself to the public; located on a level, easy-accessible, well-lit, safe, DDA compliant site with ample parking space and overlooked by the manned signal box. Much of the railway infrastructure remains from the old station site with the benefit of a low investment cost and relatively short timescales to commission and build.

COBRA strongly recommends that a detailed appraisal on the reopening of Blackford station is also progressed to the next stage along with robust scrutiny of any option for an enhanced Gleneagles station. COBRA is currently in the process of securing direct funding to undertake a detailed independent appraisal of the business case to reopen the station and believes that many of the shortcomings in the TERS report will be addressed in favour of station reopening.

COBRA requests that the e-Petition (PE1115) remains open for an extended period for further consideration of (a) the continued inclusion of Blackford for more detailed appraisal along with an enhanced Gleneagles to fully determine the differentiation in these options (b) the independent consultants report on the business case for Blackford station and (c) a more detailed review by COBRA of supporting information used in compilation of the TERS report.

More information about COBRA can be found at www.cobra-blackford.org.uk. To contact COBRA, please email info@cobra-blackford.org.uk. **COBRA August 2009**