

Station campaigners face long wait for funding



Blackford railway station yesterday.

CAMPAIGNERS HOPING to see the reopening of Blackford railway station could face a long wait to receive funding from the Scottish Government.

At the COBRA (Campaign to Open Blackford Railway station Again) annual meeting on Monday, Transport Minister Stewart Stevenson informed the committee that plans for railways were already in place for the next five years, and Blackford is not among them.

The next potential opening for the organisation to get their ideas heard will be during the 2015-2020 period, although this will be dependent on the results of research by TACTRAN.

Mr Stevenson told COBRA that the government will look at several different aspects before considering the plans for Blackford.

He said, "This is a project which I think is predominantly of local interest rather than national interest.

"What needs to be looked at is how many passengers are going to use this station, and how many will stop using Gleneagles as a result.

"This could have a negative impact and needs to be considered, as Gleneagles could end up closing.

"The STAG (Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance) process can also find out if you have a transport problem, what this is, and what the best solution is."

He commended them for the work they were doing and assured the committee he would watch the project with interest.

The COBRA campaign aims to forge better links for Blackford and Auchterarder between many towns on the main line.

They have also suggested reopening the station could ease car parking congestion in Dunblane, where many commuters from south Perthshire get the train to Glasgow and Edinburgh.

Although Scotrail provided an estimated cost of £1.75 million to get Blackford station working again, Mr Stevenson said this figure would now be closer to £3 million.

He suggested the best way to get the project moving quicker would be to follow the example of several other stations in Scotland, and ask developers building houses in the area to help with funding.

He said, "The economic benefit to house builders who have their houses near a railway station is quite good, as it can increase the value of a property by up to a third.

"Many developers don't have a problem helping to pay for a railway station as they can get 100% of their investment back."

However, this does not seem to be an option that is available to Blackford, as Perth and Kinross Council have already been down that route.

Jim Valentine, depute director for the environment service, said, "Developer contributions is something we have been working on.

"There isn't a lot of developers coming forward to bring contributions in, and I can't see that happening in the foreseeable future."

Despite difficulties in securing funding, the COBRA campaign has had no problems with finding support.

TV's Ian Hislop, of Have I Got News For You, has added his backing to the station and they have a patron in actor and broadcaster Desmond Carrington.

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