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Zoé Tough
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Public Petitions Committee
TG.01
The Scottish Parliament
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20th April 2008

Dear Zoé

Thank you very much for the opportunity to comment on the responses sent to the Petitions Committee.

Please find our comments attached.

We look forward to our Petition being discussed in more detail on 13th May, although recognise that this is still a provisional date and trust that you will confirm in due course.

I would appreciate if you would acknowledge receipt of this email. If you have any problems with the attachment or require any further information please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Yours sincerely

Caroline Moore
Vice Chair
COBRA



1.0 GENERAL COMMENT

1.1 COBRA members thank the Petitions Committee for examining our petition and for seeking views from a wider audience to inform discussions. We appreciate the opportunity to comment on these submissions. As stated in our petition we believe that current transport strategies are primarily focussed on the road infrastructure. Whilst improvement and investment here is necessary we believe that there are real medium and long term benefits to be gained from investing in the rail network to improve connectivity between rural and urban areas bringing environmental, social and economic benefits. These are set out in our petition and are included at Appendix 1 for ease of reference.

1.2 We are pleased that the Scottish Government, TACTRAN and Network Rail took the time to respond and our comments to each are set out below. We are disappointed that COSLA did not respond to your request for information/comment as this issue is pertinent to the significant number of Local Authorities and population in Scotland who are not located near the Central Belt or major conurbations. Perhaps it would be possible for the Petitions Committee to write to Local Authorities such as Perth & Kinross and Stirling directly.

2.0 NETWORK RAIL LETTER 17 MARCH 2008

2.1 We are pleased that Network rail is supportive of transport strategies that bring genuine benefits to the travelling public as we believe that the strategic re-opening of many rural stations will achieve this. Bridge of Allan station is an example of a station that was re-opened and has proved to be extremely successful.

2.2 In relation to the comments re Blackford Station we are aware that the current fast train service is not suitable for this type of local station. However, we would argue that other service options are available both in the immediate and medium to long term.

- Firstly a local service could be introduced very quickly by extending the local, Edinburgh and Glasgow service that currently terminates/starts in Dunblane. These trains could easily travel on to Blackford where they could terminate/start with minimal effect on the train timetable. Trains starting from Dunblane currently sit for up to half an hour between return journeys. We believe that the



station could easily be reopened at the cost of £1.9m (this is the figure quoted in the STAG1 study undertaken in 2004). Although platforms would need to be constructed at either side of the track the network of rails, points and sidings is still in place.

- Secondly, and more medium to long-term, is the proposal from TACTRAN for a potential semi-fast hourly service from Stirling to Arbroath through Perth and Dundee with the potential of this being extended to Glasgow. This would supplement the existing Glasgow/Aberdeen service providing a half-hourly east west service through the Tactran region. This service would be perfectly suitable for stopping at Blackford with minimal disruption to timetabling. As stated in TACTRAN's response, initial discussions so far have indicated that Transport Scotland, Network Rail and First Scotrail are all supportive of this proposal.

2.3 In response to the need for a full STAG appraisal we would refer the Committee to the TACTRAN response which outlines the current position more fully. In summary preparations for a full STAG appraisal of the TERS proposal are well progressed and it is our understanding that TACTRAN will soon be commissioning consultants to undertake this work which will be completed in the next six months. COBRA looks forward to participating fully in this process as a key stakeholder.

3.0 TACTRAN LETTER 5 MARCH 2008

3.1 We have no specific comment to make re the TACTRAN letter except to support the thrust of the content and look forward to participating in the forthcoming STAG process.

4.0 THE SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT (TRANSPORT DIRECTORATE) LETTER 5 MARCH 2008

4.1 We are grateful that the Transport Directorate of the Scottish Government for taking the time to respond. There are some statements within the letter which we feel require clarification or further comment. These are set out below.

- In the third paragraph, Mr Lyall makes the point that Regional Transport Strategies (RTSs) are high level documents and that it is for local authorities in partnership with Regional Transport Partnerships (RTPs) to establish priorities and funding. Whilst we appreciate that there has been a change in administration since RTPs were established we are not aware of the concordat with local



authorities covering issues such as funding for implementing RTSs. We would appreciate clarity on this issue and ask whether the funds for RTPs have now been given to local authorities to administer or if Mr Lyall means that this is the intention in future. If it is the latter then the Scottish Government Transport Directorate still has a major part to play as they remain responsible for the allocation of the overall funds.

- We agree with the sentiments of the fourth paragraph and would request that in analysing these factors they are evaluated not only on economic grounds but also social and environmental impacts. There are significant issues relating to the A9 and initiatives which take traffic (commuter, visitor and business) off this already busy route will improve safety for road users as well as the environment by reducing carbon emissions.
- We are pleased that Transport Scotland is carrying out the Strategic Transport Projects review and look forward to seeing the outcome. We feel that this is a positive step and would urge TS to examine the potential for semi-fast and local services and not just concentrate on fast services.

5.0 GLENEAGLES STATION

5.1 A number of our members attended the Committee meeting on 29 January and noted that comment was made on Blackford's proximity to the existing Gleneagles Station. Gleneagles Station has major shortcomings in terms of access and safety which would be addressed by the reopening of a station at Blackford. We are not proposing that Blackford Station should replace Gleneagles Station but rather that both stations should compliment each other with Gleneagles continuing to provide a stop for the fast service trains and Blackford for the semi-fast and local service.

5.2 An evaluation of both stations in terms of access and safety has been undertaken and is provided at Appendix 2. In summary this shows that Gleneagles Station has significant limitations in terms of access by private transport. Its isolated position by the A9 makes it extremely unsafe if not near impossible to access the station any other way. There are no local bus services to/from the Station and the National Bus service makes pre-arranged stops on the main carriageway, not at the station itself.

The position of the entry/exit road to/from the A9 is hazardous due to the fast nature of the road and position of the entry/exit which is located at the end of a long curve on the southbound carriageway. In addition Gleneagles Station clearly fails to comply with the requirements of the DDA and has serious implications for personal safety due to its



isolated position. The station is not manned and there are no CCTV cameras, emergency phones or indeed lighting on the access road.

Blackford Station in contrast would provide safe access for passengers travelling by car, bike or on foot as well as satisfy DDA requirements as both sides of the track can be accessed by the level crossing.

5.3 There is much emphasis on integrated public transport solutions at both national and regional levels. The proximity of the Station site to the existing turning circle with bus stop in Blackford would make it easy to provide travellers with smooth intermodal connections. Local Bus companies have already expressed support and are willing to look at timetables if the station were to re-open.

5.4 Although Gleneagles and Blackford Stations would seem to be relatively close they are 3.8km apart (by rail track) which is more than the distance between Bridge of Allan and Dunblane stations. Dunblane is 16.17km from Blackford with Bridge-of-Allan 3.47kms from Dunblane. Stirling is 4.55kms from Bridge of Allan. As stated in 5.1 the purpose of the stations is different, the existence of one should not automatically preclude the other.

6.0 OTHER COMMENTS

6.1 TIMETABLING: Evaluation of the service currently available from Gleneagles identifies that there are no trains Northbound between 11am and 5pm Monday to Saturday or Southbound between 12noon and 5.30pm. The Sunday service has more trains during the day.

A local service to/from Blackford would provide residents from the surrounding area with access to trains throughout the day and also allow visitors and tourists access to local amenities such as the Eaglesgate retail village without the need of a car. A local service would mean that cyclists and walkers could access the south Perthshire countryside more easily without the need of a car. Gleneagles as it currently exists is not a safe station for walkers and cyclists.

6.2 FARES: There question of whether there would be sufficient demand to justify a local stop at Blackford has been mooted. It is important that when looking at this that current usage of Gleneagles does not over-influence the debate. At the moment the current fare structure does not encourage local travellers to use Gleneagles. A day return from Gleneagles to Edinburgh is over £3 dearer than Perth to Edinburgh on the



same train. Perversely it is cheaper for people to drive from Perth to Dunblane to pick up the most economical fares for Glasgow/Edinburgh than it is to board at Gleneagles. If the station were to open, a sensible fare structure that encouraged people to use the train would be imperative to change travelling habits.