

Scotland presses on bravely with rail projects

Scotland was pressing ahead towards a brighter rail future in early 2007 and Railfuture staged its reopenings conference in Glasgow in June to celebrate the country's rail development achievements.

But more than a month before the conference, the Scottish Parliament election brought to power the Scottish Nationalists who, in the election campaign, had threatened to ditch or re-appraise some of the "expensive" public transport schemes.

At the time of the conference it was not clear what the prospects were for rail.

Thanks to pressure from the Green party which had joined the SNP in a coalition, the threatened Edinburgh tram scheme was saved and is expected to go ahead.

But it looks as though the plan for a rail link to Edinburgh airport is to be dumped in favour of a tram extension.

At the Railfuture reopenings conference Strathclyde Passenger Transport chairman Alistair Watson said: "There's no doubt that fast, efficient rail links are vital if we are

to encourage more people to use public transport.

"There are strong economic and environmental reasons to promote rail travel instead of road travel.

"Strathclyde's railway patronage has reached an all-time high of over 50million passengers a year. We need to improve rail links to cope with this demand.

"We need to provide a railway network that serves the needs of modern society."

Mr Watson is responsible for public transport throughout Strathclyde.

But nationally, Transport Scotland, an agency of the Scottish Executive, is responsible for rail and trunk roads and plans £3billion of capital investment throughout the country by 2010.

Janet Edgell of Transform Scotland said: "We have had good growth of the rail network and we want to build on it."

There has been 23% passenger growth over two and a half years and freight is up 30% in one year.

"We need to make the environmental case for rail but we still have an



agenda for expansion. "It is much easier to do things on the railways in Scotland. We have one train operating franchise and one Network Rail area."

The SNP's Stewart Stevenson is now the Scottish Executive cabinet minister responsible for transport and climate change.

The party has plans to build more roads, including another bridge across the Forth.

The SNP wants to dual the road to Inverness partly, they say, on safety grounds.

But Paul Tetlaw of the Transform Scotland campaign group said: "If people are really worried about safety, they should upgrade the railway."

"They want to rob public transport for road building. Why does

the SNP want the auditor to look at public transport schemes but not at road schemes? When the 'experts' do look at road schemes the Government insists they look at the tax losses caused by reducing road traffic but they are not allowed to take into account the pollution and health costs of road traffic.

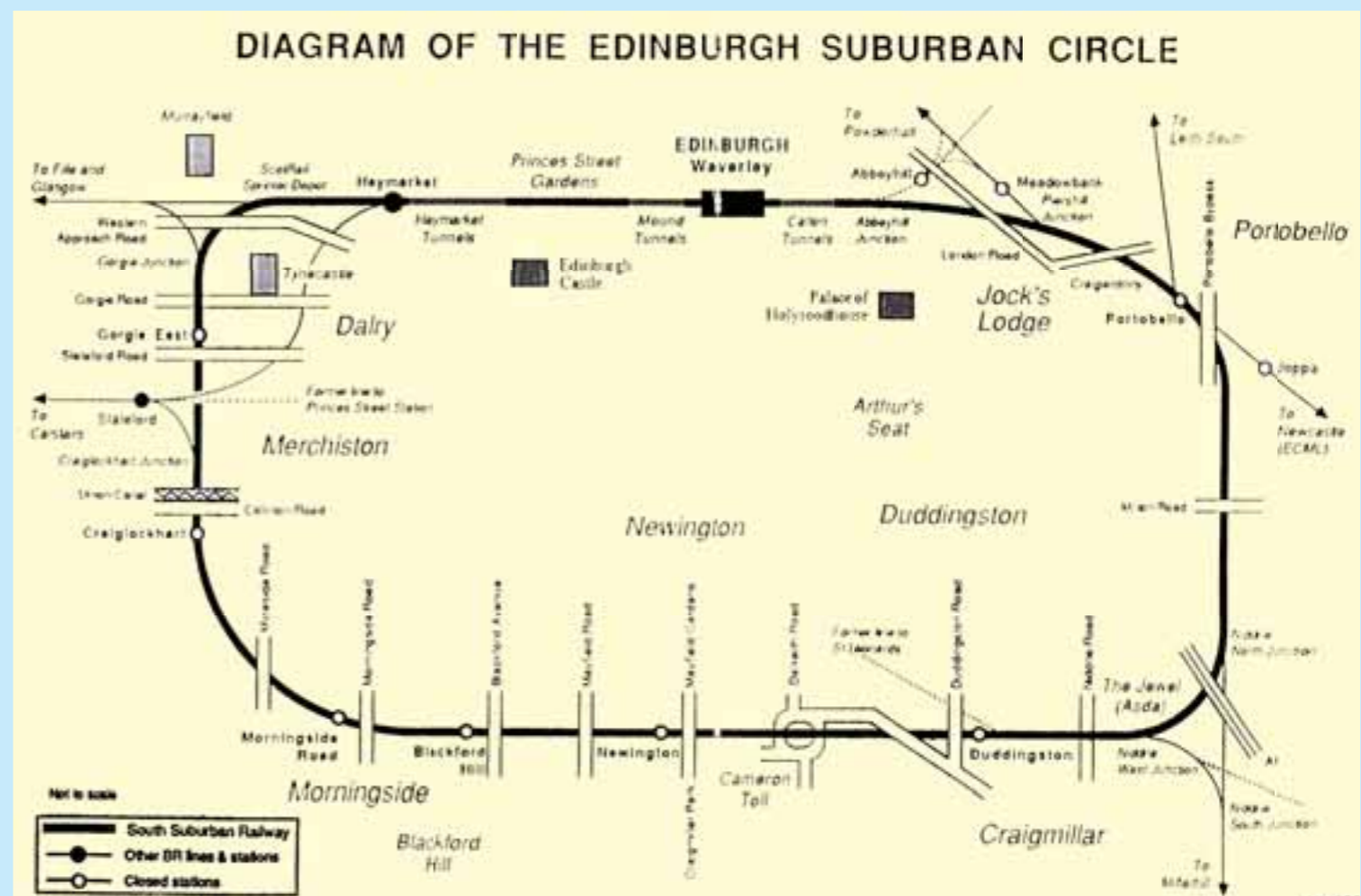
"Transform Scotland campaigns against road traffic and for better public transport. Transport is key to tackling climate change.

"We will have to live in tents if we carry on wasting oil using cars, lorries and planes.

"I have told the politicians that if they want to tackle climate change, they must start talking sense on transport.

"A lot of well-paid people are routinely sitting doing nothing in cars when they could be working on the train.

"Road transport pays only a half to a third of its external costs. This was shown by a Leeds University report in 2003. Why don't politicians stand up and speak the truth about motorists being subsidised?"



QUICK WIN: The 'South Sub' offers a low-cost way to bring modern rail benefits to large numbers of Edinburgh residents

Larkhall-Milngavie

"A stunning success," said Alistair Watson, chairman of Strathclyde Partnership for Transport.

"Ministers cite it as the best example of a rail project north or south of the border".

Cost £33million, with Scottish Executive putting up £25million. Opened 2005. Has shifted car drivers off the motorway.

Only three miles of new track between Larkhall and Hamilton and under a mile between Maryhill and Anniesland was needed to unlock the potential. Four new stations were built at Larkhall, Merryton, Chatelherault and Kelvindale.

It effectively re-joined Lanarkshire with Strathclyde and provided 71 trains a day between Larkhall and Glasgow city centre. Figures show that there has been a 32% increase in the number of passengers on services between Larkhall, Glasgow, Dalmeir and Milngavie.

Edinburgh tram link

Preparatory work is under way after royal assent given in 2006 and should be running by 2011. The SNP was defeated in the Scottish Parliament over the tramway project and agreed to let it go ahead. Labour, Tories, Greens and Lib Dems supported the trams. SNP finance secretary John Swinney warned no extra money would be available. The aim is to integrate bus and tram and transfer 3million people from using cars.

Not private finance but a straight

Making progress

government grant. For every £1 invested, the community gets £1.60 back in benefits.

Phase 1a costs £500million, 1b £92million and phase 2 £592million.

One third of the tram project affects a conservation area, Susan Clark of Trams for Edinburgh told the Railfuture reopenings conference. Trams last ran in Edinburgh in 1956.

The electorate rejected congestion charging in Edinburgh but the money from it would have funded tramline phase 3.

Dublin tram has been a huge success with an improvement in air quality in the city. Edinburgh expects similar benefits.

World heritage cities with trams: Strasbourg, Lyon, Berne, Vienna, Graz, Prague, Riga, Rome and Oporto.

Airdrie-Bathgate

Preliminary work on this £300million project to reopen the Airdrie to Bathgate passenger rail link after 50 years of closure started in June although decisions on the main contracts were dependent on a budget meeting on 14 November. It involves upgrading the existing Bathgate to Edinburgh and Airdrie to Drumgelloch line. Once completed, the line will be double-

tracked and electrified throughout.

The first phase of the project is the upgrade of the Edinburgh-Bathgate line (double-tracking) which will see commuters in West Lothian benefiting from enhanced performance on this line as early as 2008. It is anticipated that services will be running the length of the new railway in December 2010.

<http://www.airdriebathgaterail.co.uk/>

Glasgow Airport

The £220million Glasgow airport rail link bill has been given royal assent. Of 130 MSPs, 129 voted for it. First contract out to tender. A new station will be built at the airport. From 2010, trains will run every 15 minutes and trains will also stop at Paisley Gilmour Street and the journey time will be 16 minutes.

Stirling-Alloa

Work started on the Stirling-Alloa-Kincardine rail project in 2005 which involves reinstating 13 miles of railway. Work is expected to be complete in March and the line will reopen in May.

Borders rail link

Also known as the Waverley scheme, preparatory work is under way. Promoters of the Bor-

ders railway reopening project awarded engineering consultancy Scott Wilson a contract worth up to £9m in October. Advance site works began in March and the line should reopen in 2011. But funding is uncertain. The Waverley scheme consists of a 47km rail link from the existing Edinburgh Crossrail scheme at Newcraighall to Tweedbank in the central Borders and includes seven new stations. The line would serve a combined population approaching 200,000 in the Scottish Borders and Midlothian, two of only three mainland areas in Scotland not currently served by a passenger railway.

The Waverley project is seen as the first phase in reinstating the Edinburgh to Carlisle line, closed in 1969.

<http://www.waverleyrailwayproject.co.uk/>

Track doubling

Reinstating double track on the eight miles between Gretna and Annan is proceeding apace as part of a £35million scheme.

Mossend-Elgin

Work began last year on enhancing the loading gauge on 270 miles of rail line between Mossend and Elgin as part of a £4million scheme.

Freight trains using larger containers will be able to use the line later this year following extensive track works to increase the clearances between trains, bridges and tunnels. Friends of the Far North

One project still waiting for the go-ahead is the Edinburgh South Suburban Railway which was closed to passengers in 1962.

Capital Rail Action Group campaigners are still on the case and sent a petition urging reopening to the Scottish Parliament which had a hearing on 6 November. A further hearing was scheduled for 16 December.

People in Gorgie, Craiglockhart, Morningside, Blackford Hill, Newington and Duddingston/Craigmillar now have to rely on buses while Portobello has had no rail access since

1964. The line itself remains open, providing a strategic bypass for freight trains that avoids Waverley and Haymarket.

Glasgow Crossrail

The heart bypass operation for central Scotland. "The most important Scottish rail project in 50 years." Have you signed up to support it on the SPT website?

The campaign, started in March 2007, wants to see a link between Central and Queen Street stations to allow through trains to join up isolated networks.

Two new stations would be built at Gorbals and West Street. A new viaduct would be needed. The

long trudge between Central and Queen Street would no longer be necessary for many journeys. SPT chairman Alistair Watson: "We need a bit more bravery and to listen to people inside the industry."

Waverley station Work on Edinburgh Waverley station is under way but other interchanges at Partick, Hamilton, Motherwell and Gourock are also in line for upgrades.

High-speed rail

Scotland was promised that Eurostars would be serving Scotland and providing links to mainland Europe by now. They are not. Greengauge 21 is proposing

that only Glasgow should be served by high-speed rail.

But both Glasgow and Edinburgh must have high-speed links, says SPT chairman Alistair Watson.

There will be too many trains on the West Coast main line by 2015, even after £8.5billion was spent on upgrading it.

So now Maglev is under consideration for a service between Glasgow and Edinburgh.

Edinburgh airport link

The Tories joined forces with the SNP to dump the £630million Edinburgh airport rail link. The benefit-to-cost ratio is estimated to be 2.16, meaning that for every £1 spent, transport benefits

far refused to support the project. This lack of enthusiasm is both disappointing and puzzling, given the modest capital cost involved and the significant benefits and value-for-money which the scheme would provide.

A reopened South Sub would transform cross-city links, create a fast alternative to the car for journeys to the city centre, and provide a feeder to Waverley Station and the planned new Haymarket train/tram/bus interchange. More info: <http://www.reopenouthsub.org.uk/> and <http://capitalrail.org.uk/>

of £2.16 would be realised. That is a remarkable return, far exceeding the benefits of any other rail project in Scotland.

The SNP instead wants a new station at Gogar on the Edinburgh-Fife line and a tram from there to the airport. A cheaper rail link could perhaps be provided via Turnhouse station.

Electrification

Electrification is under consideration again for the route from Glasgow Queen Street to Edinburgh.

There is speculation that this could be funded with money saved from the cancellation of the Edinburgh airport rail link.