

Scotland the Brave

While rail users in England have been hearing of exciting new developments in Scotland and Wales and wondering why England is being left out, a sceptical DAVID HANSEN believes the view from Glasgow is far from rosy. Here he explains why everything is not as simple as it seems.

After four years of doing little on the railways, the Scottish Executive burst into life a few months before the Scottish elections with announcements about a number of projects.

These announcements gave the impression that the projects are going ahead, but that is not certain. It appears that, having been criticised for its fully funded £1 billion trunk road building programme, it was time for the Executive to give some crumbs to rail projects. No doubt the timing is entirely coincidental and my cynicism misplaced!

Airport links

Preferred routes for airport links to Edinburgh and Glasgow were announced, together with a small amount of funding for even more studies. No funding to build the links has been announced, however.

Given the endless years of delays and reports on the Glasgow Airport link this announcement can only be given half a cheer, especially as the trains will run only to Glasgow Central rather than large parts of Scotland via the Crossrail project.

This project shows the folly of reducing to two tracks the quadruple line between Paisley Gilmour Street and Glasgow Central, then closing the Paisley Canal line and blocking it after Paisley Canal.

As well as the re-introduction of quadruple track it may eventually be necessary to knock down the buildings that currently block the Paisley Canal line.

The Edinburgh Airport route is the only sensible one, if the terminal is not to be moved. However, moving the terminal to a widened Fife line must be a far cheaper option than building a tunnel under the runway. There seems to be a lack of an integrated approach to transport here.

Borders Railway

The announcement that funding should be available, if a "sound business case" can be made, is welcome. However, new roads are not expected to have "sound business cases" so the playing field is not level. The current plans assume a single track with passing loops. This would be a false move. Because of the cost of expensive switches and bi-directional signalling, it's quite likely that there will be little life cycle cost saving by going for a single line. Several line singlings have demonstrated the point well, particularly Salisbury-Exeter.

Stirling-Kincardine

A Parliamentary Bill for this scheme has been progressed. In June, the Scottish Executive announced that it would provide

the lion's share of funding for the project – £37 million. That would provide 80% of the necessary investment. To cover the funding gap the Executive had earlier suggested that operators pay tolls to use the track. This ridiculous idea ignores the tolls operators already pay, called track access charges.

It's unlikely that any freight operator would want to use this line with these extra tolls, so freight trains will continue to take paths on the Edinburgh and Glasgow line.

Airdrie-Bathgate

As part of plans to build a motorway, the Executive talked this up in January, talking of a double-track electrified railway with trains through to Edinburgh. That would be excellent, but a few months later the Executive appeared to be trying to palm this project off on others, unlike the motorway.

Freight Facilities Grants

In contrast to the situation south of the Border these continue to be made. They are one of the positive things the Executive is quietly doing on the railways and deserve to be praised. Among recent awards is one for taking road salt to Grangemouth. The railways are actually involved in a number of ways in the road industry, from raw materials to finished vehicles. This is welcome.

Business as usual

Meanwhile the Executive shows more far enthusiasm for the largest urban motorway project in the UK, the £500 million M74 extension which will leap over Rutherglen station and Polmadie. This will do even more damage to the south side of Glasgow than the M8 did to the north side.

The cost of this devastation is about £62,000 per metre. It has not been evaluated against alternatives and even the Executive's own consultants say that it will increase road congestion.

Yet this shocking waste of money is pursued with religious zeal by the Executive, west coast councils and the media. The cost doubled just before Parliament adjourned, news which didn't even cause a murmur. Some mistake surely.

Aberdeen too

The main problem identified in Aberdeen is congestion caused by people travelling to the centre by car on radial roads. An excellent reason for improving local rail and bus services to the centre one might think.

Instead, in January the First Minister himself announced the building of a road that will do almost nothing to resolve the congestion problem, according to the Scottish Office's *Sustainable Transport Study for Aberdeen*, an excellent report which the Government has tried to suppress.

This is the so-called Aberdeen western peripheral route, perhaps the second most damaging road scheme after the M74 extension. In marked contrast to rail schemes only two months after being announced the

Scottish Executive were able to produce a spend profile for this scheme. There has been no action on a Crossrail service for Aberdeen, not even as a fig leaf for the road.

Stranraer abandonment

The last ferries are to abandon Stranraer for Cairnryan. The Executive has stumped up money for road building to assist with this move, but appears not to have even considered rebuilding the railway to cater for those without cars.

Instead they are to be offered a "bus link" and we all know what that means. No doubt this will drive all those who can to using cars. Another triumph for integrated transport, I don't think.

The harbour is to be turned into a marina and the plan does give the railways the option of serving the town better. This could have been a win for everyone, but lack of integrated thinking in the Executive has meant that only some will win. The only bright spot is that EWS is intending to re-introduce rail freight services to Stranraer.

No progress on Larkhall

The Parliamentary powers for this scheme expire in March 2004. If the authorities intend to do it, then it is time for Scottish Passenger Transport and the Executive to pull their fingers out. This scheme is the key to sorting out several problems on the north side system, as well as providing a useful service to Larkhall.

It would be a disaster if the powers expired. A Larkhall scheme has been under discussion for much of the time since the line closed in 1965. Perhaps the money is needed for the M74 extension after that doubled in cost.

Now for the good news

Work started at Edinburgh Park station on 7 April. The station is 10 years too late and car-based travel patterns have been long established there. It will be interesting to see how well the station does. The trains may well be packed.

Completion of this station in the autumn will mark the completion of the Edinburgh Crossrail scheme, first suggested by Railfuture members, the Capital Rail Action Group. It is right to remember those who came up with the idea as well as those, particularly in the City of Edinburgh Council, who worked hard to make it a reality.

More good news

Edinburgh has also had the good news of £375 million awarded by the Executive to build the first two tram lines in the city. This money appears to be firmly committed, though quite what form it will take is not clear.

Pressure still needs to be maintained though, in order to keep the politicians to their promise. They could easily slacken if people think the tramway is now more or less built.



CONFIDENT: Tara Whitworth, principal engineer at Babtie Group with Clackmannanshire Council Leader Keith Brown on the track and above a map showing the line which runs alongside the River Forth from Stirling to Alloa and Longannet.

The Alloa reopening will revitalise 13 miles of disused and abandoned track.

Track will be upgraded and re-laid along the entire length of the route. The programme will also involve significant improvements to bridges and level crossings, sensitive landscaping and extensive safety works. The proposed route will follow the existing railway line from Stirling station through Alloa, Clackmannan and Kincardine.

The Stirling-Alloa-Kincardine route reopening scheme is being promoted by Clackmannanshire Council which is a member of a steering group which also comprises the Scottish Executive, Scottish Enterprise, the Strategic Rail Authority, Fife Council and Stirling Council. As part

of the project, there are plans to construct a new station in Alloa town centre and operate hourly passenger services between Alloa, Stirling and Glasgow Queen Street.

Freight services will primarily deliver coal by rail to Longannet Power Station, removing freight from the Forth Rail Bridge and improving the operation of the main Edinburgh-Glasgow line.

The reopened route is set to deliver a range of economic, social and environmental benefits to the area.

While coal to Longannet Power Station is currently delivered by road and rail, once the rail link is re-established, up to 80% of coal – around 16,800 tonnes per day – may be transferred to rail. This will effectively

remove hundreds of lorries from Scotland's roadways every day.

When the private bill was introduced to the Scottish Parliament, project manager Tara Whitworth said: "This is a tremendously important stage in the project's development, and illustrates that we are well and truly on track."

"This is a groundbreaking project and we are confident the Scottish Parliament will recognise the huge benefits it will bring, not only to the local communities served by the route, but also to the Scottish economy as a whole."

A website devoted to the project – www.sakrailway.co.uk – offers news and information.