

Right on, Scotland!

Scottish Transport Minister Tavish Scott got his shoes dirty in October to inspect work to reopen the rail line between Stirling and Alloa.

After years of waiting, the scheme to rejoin Clackmannanshire to the National Rail network began.

Mr Scott, speaking on-site at Cambus, near Alloa, said: "The reopening of this line will bring real benefits to local communities through attracting business and increasing access to jobs, education and health services."

The Minister welcomed the transfer of rail powers to Scottish Ministers and the confirmation of funding from the Rail Regulator to allow the Scottish Executive to develop the rail network in Scotland.

A new station will be built at Alloa, giving the town passenger trains for the first time since 1968, and a key freight line to Longannet power station in Fife will reopen.

The work will continue for around 18 months and it is hoped rail services on the 13-mile line will begin in spring or summer 2007.

Richard Hudson, senior project manager, said: "It has been a lot of hard work to get to this stage."

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

The Stirling-Alloa-Kincardine Railway Act 2004 was the first private rail bill to be passed by the Scottish Parliament.

Further information on the construction work will be posted regularly on the Stirling-Alloa-Kincardine Railway website: www.sakrailway.co.uk.

On December 9, the First Minister of Scotland, Jack McConnell, will officially open three new railway stations on the Larkhall to Dalmeir line as part of a ceremony to mark the first reopening of a major branch line in Scotland for 25 years.

The £35million Northern Suburban Line project will see new stations at Larkhall, Merryton and Chatelherault and the line goes via Hamilton Central to Glasgow Central.

Railfuture draw

The following were prize winners in the Railfuture draw on 5 November. £500: J B Davies, Harpenden. £200: L M Griffiths, Market Harborough. £100: J Brock, Porth. £50: Mr and Mrs Ashfield, Sutton Coldfield. £10: E W Robinson, Malvern; W Marchant, Needham Market; M Acland-Hood, London SW8; F McDonald, Renfrew, Scotland; B Burfoot, Alton; A Keenean, Govan, Glasgow; A W Godfrey, Lowestoft; A Chapman, Northallerton.



ACTION MAN: Scottish Transport Minister Tavish Scott seeing a rail reopening project under way with construction manager Andy Nisbet near Alloa

Picture: Steve Lindridge, IDEAL IMAGES

Small minds at the top

MICHAEL'S MOAN

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We always seem to be the exception in Britain.

Take railway electrification. In most developed countries electrified railways are the norm.

Every month there is news of continuing electrification projects going ahead. But not in Britain. Oh no! Only here is electrification deemed too expensive. Only here are the advantages of electric traction not appreciated.

I've heard railway and political officials say that's because other countries electrified their systems before diesel trains improved so much that they were just as good as electrics, and that they are just filling in their "gaps" to get economies of scale.

What a load of rubbish. It begs the question of why we don't at least electrify our "gaps"?

No, we continue to run diesels, some awful ones at that, many hundreds of miles "under the wires".

"Diesels as good as electrics?" Breathe in the atmosphere at Paddington, and compare it with Waterloo. Stand at Crewe with a Voyager in the platform and try to listen to the announcements.

Compare travelling in a Wessex electric or an Electrostar with a Voyager or Turbostar. The Gov-

ernment, heaven help us, is taking the lead in designing the next express diesel to replace our Inter-City 125s, sometimes misleadingly known as high-speed trains.

They are not high speed by today's standards yet the new train is set to run for 30 years!

Is it seriously expected that diesel engines will still be used for transport in 2035-40 - depending as they do on an increasingly expensive and problematic supply of oil? We are already a net importer of oil.

Any government serious about climate change and oil supply would be electrifying railways as fast as possible, not arguing the toss over which diesel to put in the next generation of inter-city trains.

The problem is not that electrification is expensive; it's our crazy fiscal system.

Of every pound we spend on railways only 50p actually goes on infrastructure and trains. The rest goes on bureaucracy. The Government knows this but has done nothing about it. It is almost as if it needs the excuse to demonstrate how expensive railways are!

Then there is proper high-speed rail. Countries in Europe, Japan and south-east Asia, have realised the tremendous benefits these lines can bring, and are finding the money to build them. Elio

Catania, head of Italian State Railways, speaking at Eurailspeed, the fifth world congress on high speed rail, said:

"The various lines now being completed will change radically the structure of the Italian transport network, and will have a significant impact on people's way of life... the aim is clear: to provide an efficient, modern and well structured network able to meet the expectations of a great country.

Our rail network must be capable of offering the best possible services to our own customers, and will be a major contributor to mobility throughout the European Union."

Where is Britain in all this? Until very recently the opinion has been that we're too small to benefit from high speed rail, or too densely populated or too wedded to our cars. In other words we're different from everyone else. Anything but accept that, as usual, we've been left far behind.

The CTRL is being built more from embarrassment than anything else with passengers able to see at first hand the gulf between Britain and France in this respect.

Our "leaders" will spend years debating the relative merits of high speed rail versus Maglev. But they will be using the arguments about technology as an excuse to do nothing.