

Scottish Transport – News Notes Jan 13 to Mar 13

This review has been compiled by Tom Hart summarising the news items of greatest interest during the above period. No checks have been made on the accuracy of the statements made in the news. It is hoped that by recording some news items in this way the historical record will provide insight into the evolution of Scottish transport.

ENERGY, THE ECONOMY & TRANSPORT

Closure of the Cockenzie coal-fired power station has increased concerns about the security, stability and price of future electricity supplies for use in Scotland and a source of earnings from net exports. It is expected that the two existing nuclear power stations will continue into the next decade with renewable electrical output exceeding Scottish nuclear output in 2013 plus further contributions through linking renewables with grid strengthening, increased use of pumped storage and hydrogen storage to cope with peaks, extra conservation measures to dampen or shift demand, some expansion of electricity production from gas (with Cockenzie a possible site) and increasingly viable carbon capture and storage. Nevertheless, the media has queried whether enough is being done to ensure sufficient investment in conservation and in low carbon energy while avoiding a substantial rise in energy costs.

Labour Party has proposed an Infrastructure Commission to focus on a review of movement and modal share and establishing those larger investments which merit stable, longer-term programmes. In an open letter to the UK Transport Secretary of State, the Transport Planning Society, the Royal Town Planning Institute and 32 professors have warned that the benefits for employment and the economy of large transport investments may prove illusory. The letter warns that a large programme of inter-urban road-building could worsen congestion in towns and cities. It considers that present forecasts of road traffic growth are excessive and seeks more stress on travel behaviour and better links between transport and land-use planning. Professors in Scotland signing include Angela Hull of Heriot Watt, John Nelson of Aberdeen, Tom Rye of Open University, Iain Docherty of Glasgow, Wafaa Saleh and Stephen Stradling (both of Edinburgh Napier).

The UK Budget has removed the planned autumn rise in road fuel duty and has included a modest but fiscally neutral shift from capital to revenue spend in public funding while taking steps to encourage private investment. Economic growth projections to 2017/18 have been lowered.

AVIATION

DfT has again revised downwards estimates of future growth in air travel. Manchester Airport has acquired Stansted Airport for £1.5bn. The current UK Aviation Review should finish in 2014.

Edinburgh Airport has set-up a £15m fighting fund in a bid to win long-haul customers from Glasgow. After a three year break, direct Edinburgh-Oxford flights resumed in March, operated by Minoan Air. Glasgow Airport will complete a £10m revamp of the international arrivals hall before the Commonwealth Games. Technical problems with the new Boeing Dreamliner may delay its introduction on longer-haul routes, including Scottish routes.

Western Isles Council has withdrawn support for the Barra-Benbecula service and is seeking more support from NHS to keep present level of Benbecula-Stornoway flights. A study by HIE, HITRANS and Highland Council has urged formation of a Scottish Government Steering Group to consider reintroduction of a subsidised air service to Skye.

SHIPPING & FERRIES

Ministers have ruled out any early prospects for the return of a publicly-funded vehicle ferry between Gourock and Dunoon. However, an improved passenger ferry vessel is being considered for the coming winter to reduce major weather disruptions on the present passenger-only service.

Environment Secretary Richard Lochhead has increased the fund for emergency harbour repairs from £400,000 a year to £1m. Sandaig Ltd expect to lose the contract for the Knoydart ferry which it has operated for 40 years. The replacement ferry supported from a reduced Highland Council budget may only take 12 passengers compared to the 81 maximum for the present vessel.

RAIL

Richard Brown, commissioned to report to the UK government on rail passenger franchising, has recommended a more even spread of franchise renewals, greater commercial training for civil servants dealing with franchising and consideration of devolution of some local and regional franchises, especially in northern England. Management contracts or concessions are also suggested for city-region related services with relatively high levels of public funding but significant regional benefits. The Scottish Government prefers continuation of the present unified franchise for services in Scotland though with options for a community rail partnership approach being examined and perhaps including greater RTP or local authority involvement in and around cities as well as in rural areas. Meantime, the present First ScotRail franchise has been extended to March 2015.

Government has published proposals for extending HS2 from the West Midlands to Wigan, Manchester and Leeds by 2033 with HS2 trains running through to stations beyond new route. This includes through trains from London to Scotland, splitting at Carstairs for Glasgow and Edinburgh. Despite a £33bn spend on HS2 by 2033, best times from London to Edinburgh and Glasgow would only fall from a projected 3 hours 50 minutes mainly on existing route to 3 hours 38 minutes compared to Manchester Airport coming within 58 minutes of London. There is a note that further discussions with the Scottish Government may allow greater and earlier improvements.

Virgin Group has expressed an interest in bidding for the East Coast franchise when it is taken out of public operation but others prefer this profitable franchise to stay in public hands. The Easter weekend saw substantial disruption of Anglo-Scottish services for engineering works despite previous NR promises. Passenger Focus has called for travellers at such times to be compensated and replacement bus services confined to small sections of route – not the entire distance from Preston to Glasgow.

UK reaction to HS2 has been muted given the long timescale of the project, the need to press ahead with other priorities in the coming decade and continued opposition in the Chilterns and Warwickshire. Political and business support from northern England and Scotland has been strong though with warnings from economists that HS2 alone would be unlikely to bring a shift in economic balance from London to the north (see comment from Transport Planning Society).

Glasgow City Council is seeking a commitment to continue new HS2 route on to central Scotland while Infrastructure Minister Nicola Sturgeon has stated that business plans for HSR between Glasgow and Edinburgh, together with links to Anglo-Scottish plans will be published in spring 2014. SAPT has taken the view that, by accelerating present plans for HS2 in conjunction with some new route on the approach to Glasgow and upgrades of the present corridor from Carstairs to Preston, 3 hour trip times from London to both Glasgow and Edinburgh should be the deliverable by 2030. This would also improve services from the Scottish Central Belt to Lancashire and the West Midlands.

Though the construction contract for Borders Rail has now been signed, this project continues to be criticised for a low benefit to cost ratio of only 50p per £1 spent. The Scottish Government says that this ignores wider benefits from the scheme and a longstanding commitment to provide it. NR is considering plans for lower-cost electrification which could see the Glasgow-East Kilbride and Whifflet lines electrified earlier in the present decade.

FTA is concerned that higher charges for rail freight could encourage undesirable shifts of coal traffic in Scotland and elsewhere in Britain from rail to road. ORR is proposing an extra charge on rail-hauled coal to power stations from 2016. Environmental regulations are forcing closure of Scottish opencast coal sites utilising rail with imported coal also expected to fall in the longer-term.

Rail passengers companies have promised to be more open in publicising information on the lowest fares between any two points. At present, separate fares for different parts of a trip can be significantly lower than a through fare. Since the new information will be web-based, this remains a source of public disquiet and has not stopped calls for a more radical restructure and simplification of fares. A £54,000 pay rise for Stephen Montgomery, ScotRail Manager, has also been attacked at a time when fares were rising but with little progress being made in reducing annual subsidies for ScotRail despite rising usage. Passengers thinking that ScotRail fares offer good value have fallen from 58% to 52%. From May, concession rail fares in Strathclyde for trips up to 10 miles will rise to 90p single and £1.30 return. A half-fare concession stays available for longer trips.

Deputy First Minister Nicola Sturgeon has announced that 20 stations in Strathclyde are to have a £2m revamp ahead of the Commonwealth Games. 53 years after closure, Conon Bridge station has reopened as a low-cost £600,000 project to provide both a continuing facility and an alternative travel mode during major repairs on the Kessock Bridge this summer.

On Saturdays this summer, all of the additional Glasgow-Irvine half-hourly services are to be extended to Ayr with all Monday-to Saturday trains extended through to Ayr by 2014 in addition to the present half-hourly express and hourly stopping service. Glasgow-Oban rail services are to expand from 3 to 6 per day from May 2014. This will meet rising tourist and local demand and will be funded from ScotRail's own resources in advance of decisions on franchise renewal in 2015. On other routes, there are complaints at failure to secure additional rolling stock to meet rising demand. This issue is being considered as a priority in the lead up to a new franchise.

In partnership with other bodies, ScotRail is planning further expansion of park and ride with some schemes completed before the present franchise expires in 2015.

In a £40m contract, NR has appointed Carillion to electrify the Springburn-Cumbernauld line in advance of the Commonwealth Games. There are rising hopes that electrification of the main Glasgow-Falkirk-Edinburgh line will be integrated with a reinstatement of plans to electrify to Stirling, Dunblane and Alloa before 2019. This will also deal with rolling stock provision.

Higher charges for disruption caused by operators of charters excursions could threaten the operation and expansion of the present seam-hauled Jacobite services between Fort William and Mallaig. HIE is seeking a new operator for the Cairngorm Funicular Railway but will retain ownership of the land and infrastructure.

There have been no passenger deaths on Britain's railways since the Cumbria accident in early 2007.

27 March marked 50 years since publication of the Beeching Report on the *Reshaping of British Rail*. News feature on 4 March contrasts this with the much more favourable attitude to rail travel now prevailing *'The question we should be asking is not how routes (like Borders Rail) can be made more economically attractive but can we really afford not to invest in railways* (Herald 4 March)

BUS, TRAM & TAXI

The level and nature of bus funding from public sources remains in the news. The Welsh Government is introducing a new system of bus support on 1 April designed to improve the fit with regional priorities within Wales. In England, BSOG is set to be replaced by Better Bus Areas funding aiming at better results from reduced funding. In Scotland, bus operator compensation for free bus travel for concession holders is being cut from 67% of normal single fares to 58.1% by 2014/15 with total spend also capped at £192m.

Age Scotland has called for an extension of concession travel to all demand responsive transport but Scottish Government funding for such extensions (also including local rail and ferry travel) is unlikely unless linked with a limitation of free travel to local trips for those over state pension age. There is a

desire to see a greater proportion of bus support shifted to network improvements and fare structure reforms rather than compensation for free bus travel throughout Scotland. However, the Scottish Government says there will be no changes before 2015. Ralph Roberts, MD of McGills argues that more urgent steps are needed to correct a shortfall in public funding (Herald 4 Feb)

Scottish Labour is promoting a Bill which could include 'franchising' of local bus networks in a similar fashion to trains. Franchising powers would rest with local councils or groups of councils. They could also include local rail franchising powers as being considered in England.

The tram route from Gogar to Edinburgh Airport has been handed over to the City Council with trams running daily as part of staff training. Some work remains to be done within Edinburgh but there are prospects that trams may be in public service before summer 2014. Edinburgh City Council is to finance free tram travel for concession holders as part of consistent plans for city travel.

The Manchester Metro now extends to 43 route miles and should reach 59 miles by 2016, including a new route into Manchester Airport additional to the longer-distance rail links already provided. Completion of the Glasgow Airport surface access plan has been delayed until December to allow 15 short-listed schemes to be evaluated.

Aberdeenshire has called for a feasibility of rail or tramtrain links from Aberdeen via Dyce to Ellon and possibly onwards to Peterhead and Fraserburgh. Deeside may also offer an option. In a separate proposal, consultants seeking to revive Union St in Aberdeen city centre are considering a tram service linking this street with other areas.

First Glasgow has consulted on sweeping changes in Glasgow area bus routes. Under a SimpliCITY logo, key inner corridors will have improved frequency, reversing the change from 10 to 12 minute frequencies on many routes last year but also involving removal of some services and reduced frequencies further out from the city. SPT has objected to the very short 2 weeks allowed for consultation and is seeking meaningful changes with major alterations taking place over the period to November rather than all in May. The First Glasgow strategy is to reverse an accelerating loss of patronage in 2012 and will include larger numbers of new buses and the fitting of wi-fi.

Stagecoach has ordered double-deck sleeper coaches to allow expansion on Anglo-Scottish overnight routes. Coaches can also convert for day operation. These coaches will be made in Belgium but the vast majority of Stagecoach's total order for 432 new buses in 2013 will be made by Falkirk-based Alexander Dennis.

First Glasgow is to provide real-time passenger information at 9,000 bus stops in Glasgow

Scottish Government has provided £2m of funding towards a further 25 eco-friendly buses giving up to 60% fuel savings compared to conventional buses. Lothian Buses and Stagecoach are the main beneficiaries.

Edinburgh Airport has awarded a £30m 5 year contract to an Edinburgh Private Hire/City Cab partnership to manage the airport taxi rank. Vehicles will have to be no older than 5 years and will have standard colours and driver uniforms. Central Cabs, the largest city cab operator, whose bid for the contract failed, is concerned that standards will be eroded by the private hire element in the new partnership.

Taxi provision within Waverley station will be reduced later this year from 27 to 12 but the City Council is working on plans for taxi stacking and road/pavement improvements to be in place before restrictions inside Waverley start.

Police in Edinburgh are cracking down on car drivers parking at bus stops.

ROADS & PARKING

Potholes, road maintenance and excessive delays from roadworks continue to hit the headlines. Extra works required to partly overcome maintenance backlogs worsened by heavy rainfall have increased motorway and trunk road maintenance costs above original estimates.

AA survey shows 40% of Scottish motorists have had their vehicles damaged by potholes over the past two years. Edinburgh City Council has announced a doubling of road and pavement maintenance spending. Britannia Rescue has found that UK motorists are clocking up almost 240 extra miles per year in efforts to bypass roadworks. Many repairs, including those by public utilities, were found to be poorly executed yet taking too long to complete.

In efforts to cut landslide delays at Rest and be Thankful on the A83, the older route has now been upgraded for emergency use. Four months of major upgrading on the A9 Kessock Bridge started in February, leading to unavoidable delays though with motorists urged to use public transport or car share. Similar 3 month delays are expected from October while the Pulpit Rock section of the A82 on Loch Lomondside is upgraded at a cost just over £9m. Rail service improvements to Crianlarich and advertised alternative routes will go some way to ease problems arising. A fatal lorry crash at Fairlie on the A78, which partly demolished a house and killed 1 occupant, has led to renewed calls for a bypass. Neither funding nor a suitable route is available for this with consideration being given to other ways of lowering lorry flows and speeds through Fairlie.

Surveys have confirmed that there is no serious risk of cable corrosion leading to HGV closure or full closure of the Forth Road Bridge. Fife Council now suggests that the present bridge should remain open for general traffic after the new bridge opens in 2016 but Edinburgh Council fears that this could increase road traffic in west Edinburgh.

Bidders for the £415m M8/M73/M74 contract in the Baillieston area are now down to two, Connect Roads and the Scottish Roads Partnership. It is hoped that work will be complete by 2017 providing a long-awaited through M8 all the way from Glasgow to Edinburgh. Time savings of 18 minutes are expected. Preliminary design work has started on dualling the 5.6 mile section of the A9 between Luncarty and Pass of Birnam but CBI is pressing for completion of A9 dualling through to Inverness before 2025. Rail freight supporters have drawn attention to the option of a higher priority for upgrading the Perth-Inverness rail line for freight and improved passenger services.

The £26m upgraded M9 1a junction has opened two months early. It eases trips into north-west Edinburgh and west from the south end of the Forth Road Bridge. 60 companies attended a meeting to consider funding and contract opportunities for the Aberdeen Western Peripheral Road. The main part of this route will be a 30 year PPP but the Scottish Government will provide direct funding for the Stonehaven Fastlink to the south and for the A90 Balmedie-Tipperty dualling to the north.

Road users are concerned that new level crossing barriers to be installed at Kirknewton in West Lothian plus an increasing number of trains per hour will lead to lengthier periods when the road will be closed. There continues to be local opposition to a bridge or underpass solution.

Experts are puzzled by a one third rise in Lothian road deaths since April 2012. Pedestrian and cycle deaths are up with this being a UK trend. A Comres survey has shown 62% approve immediate action to restrict city centre speeds to 20mph. A rise in maximum motorway speeds in England to 80mph is now unlikely but CILT has called for the HGV limit on non dual carriageways to be raised from 40 to 50mph.

Strong feelings for and against have been raised by revival of plans for a large underground car park close to George St in Edinburgh. Parking charges in the centre of Edinburgh are to rise up to £3 an hour on 1 April with estimated extra City Council income of £340,000. In Glasgow city centre meter parking charges are to rise 25%. The new rate of 60p for 12 minutes replaces 60p for 15 minutes.

Electric car drivers still face wide swathes of no-go areas in Scotland despite moves to install a national network of charging points. Danny Alexander, Chief Secretary to the Treasury, still hopes that petrol/derv fuel discounts will be extended to remoter mainland parts of the UK but EU approval was far from certain.

TACTRAN working with JMP is considering a Freight Consolidation Centre on the A9 near Perth to enable a cut in HGVs making deliveries or uplifts from Perth city centre.

WALKING & CYCLING

NESTRANS is considering the cultural and funding changes required to meet the Scottish Government's target of 10% of trips by cycle by 2020

Newsnight Scotland has been accused of a bias against cyclists by having motoring journalist Alan Douglas as the main contributor. However, cyclists - especially younger ones - are facing criticism for being inconsiderate of pedestrians.

Planning is in progress for alternative cycleways to those displaced by the Borders Rail scheme. The well-used North Meadow walk and cycleway in Edinburgh is to be upgraded in a £360,000 scheme including new lighting and resurfacing.

The National Cycle Tourism Forum and the Scottish Tourism Alliance has launched a campaign to boost cycle tourism including on-road cycling as well as mountain bikes.

SPOKES has called for 20mph limits to be extended to selected sections of main road. It has also called for a restriction of Princes St to trams, cyclists and pedestrians. Others are concerned that this could worsen conditions on George St. Decisions are expected soon on plans for changes in Princes St as from the start of tram operation. There has been press support for widened pedestrian priorities in and around George Square in Glasgow and in place before the Commonwealth Games.

Friends of the Earth Scotland have criticised slow progress in meeting EU standards for street air quality. Nitrogen dioxide and diesel particulates continue at excessive levels. The most polluted streets included not only Glasgow and Edinburgh but also Aberdeen, Dundee, Perth and the area around Raith Interchange in Lanarkshire. FoES says *'Fumes from cars, lorries and buses kill at least 10 times the number who die in road crashes every year'*

Renfrewshire Council has approved plans for cars and taxis to enter pedestrianised areas in Paisley between 4pm and 10.30am in a bid to inject new life into the local economy. Paisley town centre pedestrian streets date back to 1997 but the area has suffered from out-of-town shopping.

PLANNING & PROPERTY

Edinburgh City Council is consulting on a new Local Transport Strategy. Suggestions include a lowering of 40 and 30 mph speed limits, tougher action on air quality, Sunday parking charges and bus subsidies to improve frequency and reliability.

Intu, owner of Braehead Shopping Centre is seeking a £200m expansion with a possible start date in 2015 but Glasgow City Council is seeking to block city centre shopping status for Braehead. Selfridges has dropped plans for a high-end Glasgow city centre store. Office rentals in Edinburgh city centre are beginning to rise with Glasgow expected to follow.

Dundee is experiencing a mini-boom with three new hotels proposed for the waterfront close to the rail station and the V&A museum due to open in 2015. The Abstract Group is planning major office, leisure and retail development on a 40 acre site next to the Aberdeen Airport.

The Buchanan Gardens shopping and flat development adjacent to Buchanan Galleries has opened while Buchanan Galleries is proposing a £380m extension to the east and south linked with TIF financing agreed between the Scottish Government and Glasgow City Council. If full planning permission is gained this year, the scheme could open in 2017. SPT has objected to the present proposals on the basis that entry and exit flows from the enlarged car park could disrupt bus services and increase congestion in the city centre, contrary to the aim of reduced road traffic levels and an improving pedestrian environment in the city centre.

RESEARCH & STATISTICS

In a report confined to England and Wales, the Office of National Statistics has reported the following changes in commuting

	2001	2011
By car or van	61.5%	59.2%
Working at home	9.2%	10.7%
Train/light rail	7.1%	8.7%
Bus	7.4%	7.2%

Other modes, including walking and cycling, account for the remainder of commuter trips.

Though these changes are influenced by an absolute fall in road traffic in London, extra cycling and a record level of rail trips, Scottish data also shows an improving rail performance relative to bus travel but with the highest growth in rail usage outwith traditional peaks and including off-peak usage for leisure and other purposes. Total road traffic in Central London was down 20% over the decade compared to a rise in the GB index of road traffic from 100 to 104.9

ScotRail data supplied to SPT shows that 2012/13 rail trips in the SPT area are up from 51.8m in 11/12 to 55.4m in 12/13, partly attributable to improved ticket controls. In Northern Ireland, track improvements and new rolling stock have contributed to a 74% rise in rail passenger trips (greater than in Scotland but from a lower base) from 5.8m in 2000/01 to 10m in 2010/11. The annual rail operating subsidy in N Ireland (calculated on a different basis from ScotRail) is now £24m.

ATOC data shows that Edinburgh was the Scottish city with the largest rise in leisure rail travellers, up 26% over the past five years. Over the same period business travel was up 12%. Total rail passenger travel has been up almost every year since the 1990s and is now higher than rail travel in the 1920s.

Writing in LTT614, Will Judge of Mastercard expects contactless bankcards to be the way ahead in ticketing – allowing information to be stored 'back office', not on complex and slow cards

Helped by new routes to Barcelona and Poland, Ryanair winter passengers at Prestwick are up 29% after a steep drop in previous years. HIAL passengers were up 9.1% in January despite the loss of routes from Dundee to Belfast City and Birmingham. Sumburgh and Wick are gaining from increased oilfield activity but the largest HIAL airport, Inverness, was down 3.2%. Snow disruption also contributed to a 1.2% dip in January passenger numbers at Glasgow and a 5.7% dip at Edinburgh (5.9% for domestic and 5.4% for international fliers)

easyJet is introducing direct flights from Edinburgh to London Southend in May.

Clydeport report that cruise traffic is holding up well despite recession. Cruise passengers at Greenock topped 50,000 for the first time in 2011 and are expected to reach 80,000 in 2013

Scotland's hotels outstripped the rest of the UK in 2012 in both occupancy and revenue but this outcome was heavily influenced by buoyancy in the Aberdeen area.

A report from the Intercontinental Hotels Group has examined likely travel trends over the next 10 years. It predicts that more travellers will combine holidays with work and new coffee-style hotel lounges eroding traditional business hotels. Asian residents are expected to be one-third of travel by 2020 plus rises in extended family group holidays and more holidays by affluent 'mid-lifers'

Academics from Spain and Australia have found that text messaging while at the wheel is as dangerous as being twice over the drink-drive limit. Using hands-free mobile phones was also found to distract drivers.

An Autotrader survey reports that 53% of those aged 17 to 24 expect fewer young people to learn to drive and own cars in the coming decade. Insurance and petrol prices are too high relative to constrained incomes. It is also easier to use mobile phones on public transport.

A TRL report concludes that cutting speed limits in towns and cities may increase emissions but can contribute to fewer and less severe accidents and make streets more attractive for walkers and cyclists. This surprising conclusion is based on an increase in stop/start driving and a fall in smooth driving around 40mph

Research by Minerva/MVA for the Scottish Government has concluded that the free bus travel concession in Scotland has fuelled a rise in the base adult fares on which operator compensation is calculated. It recommends the use of 'operator-specific' reimbursement factors rather than a single national rate (LTT616 22Feb).

BUSINESS & PERSONNEL

Ryanair has revealed unexpected bumper profits due to air travellers being more willing than expected to pay higher fares. Demand in northern Europe had been strong with forecast profits upped to £442m for the year to March.

Stagecoach profits have been hit by poor weather and coach competition in USA but bus and rail growth in the UK has compensated. Revenue growth in UK bus operations had slowed from 8.3% to 3.8% but the rail sector had maintained growth at 6.6%. However, revenue growth in the joint Stagecoach/Virgin West Coast franchise had slowed to 3.3%

First Group has seen share prices improve as it restructures bus operations after ill-timed fare rises hit demand in the north of England and Scotland. Bus revenue had improved to 2.1% growth though this was below the 8.1% revenue growth in First Group rail operations

Barrhead Travel, founded in 1975, continues to see growth opportunities as the tourist market expands and Thomas Cook and other operators contract. Cruise market activity had expanded and new openings were being considered in Canada and Australia. The business travel and luxury travel sectors were also growing. Pre-tax profits are expected to be over £2m, some £300,000 to £400,000 ahead of the previous year.

Damien Henderson has moved from the Herald, where he was Transport Correspondent, to be Public Affairs Manager for Virgin Rail in Scotland and North of England. He replaces Allan McLean who has retired.