

Scottish Transport News Review – September to November 2013

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.

AVIATION

Edinburgh is aiming for direct seasonal flights to Las Vegas as well as three other destinations in USA - also all-year flights to the Middle East. Edinburgh-Chicago non-stop flights will start in May 2014 when US Airways will also introduce direct Philadelphia-Edinburgh summer flights. Oil business has encouraged direct flights from Aberdeen to Kristiansund and Oslo. Inverness is to have a £1.4m runway resurface.

Boosted by the oil and gas sector, HIAL saw a 9.7% rise in passenger numbers in September. The highest growth was at Sumburgh and Wick with Inverness having a lesser growth of 3.1%. Dundee, part of HIAL since 2007, fell 53.6%. Aberdeen had a 3.6% rise in October with Glasgow also 2.6% up. Edinburgh reported 8.7% growth to 917,437, a record for October. In a change from previous trends, Glasgow saw higher growth in domestic travel (3.2%) than in international (2.1%). At Edinburgh, the rise in international traffic continued to exceed a 5.6% rise in domestic growth, itself higher than in recent years.

Air France has withdrawn afternoon flights from London City to Dundee. Ryanair is presenting a 'softer' approach to passengers but is dropping flights from Prestwick to Paris Beauvais and winter flights to Faro. The Scottish Government is planning to buy loss-making Prestwick Airport. Reservations have been expressed about the ability to turn this airport round but the local MP sees hope if a direct service to Heathrow or nearby Northolt could be started. Crossrail links in Glasgow could also improve access to the existing airport station. Air Passenger Duty is claimed to have severe adverse impacts on Dundee airport and, more generally, at airports across Scotland.

BMI Regional has announced 500 job cuts across the UK. At present, there are 315 staff in Scotland but the Edinburgh base is to close, leaving Aberdeen as the only remaining base in Scotland. Services from Edinburgh to Copenhagen and Brussels will cease. Flybe is to shed 100 staff in Scotland. Bases at Inverness and Aberdeen will be closed, leaving only Glasgow and Edinburgh in Scotland.

SHIPPING & FERRIES

Scottish Government has agreed to a three-year pilot for direct services from Barra and South Uist to Mallaig but these will run in winter and on two days a week. Summer services would require provision of an additional ferry.

Loss of the Northlink ferry tender has brought a slide in revenue and in profits at David MacBrayne.

Waverley, the last salt water paddle steamer, has secured funding for the next three years from Argyll and Bute Council. There are revived calls for Glasgow to have a maritime heritage centre.

Russell Imrie of SEStran has called for more interest to be shown in improving ferries on the Forth and developing sea freight as an alternative to trunk HGV use. SEStran is to support a tourist-related passenger ferry from North Berwick via the Isle of May to Anstruther. Prof Alf Baird says more action is needed to move from monohull internal Scottish ferries to more efficient catamarans

RAIL

UK government claims that HS2 plans for High Speed Rail are on course for delivery with costs contained to just over £40bn at 2011 prices. Two new reports, on the strategic and economic case for HSR, have been published, including a conclusion that the wider economic benefits will be greater in the Midlands and north of England than in London. Network Rail has also published '*Better Connections*', looking at options for other inter-city and commuter service improvements made possible by the impact of HS2 in releasing paths for more services on existing route. This has only peripheral references to Scotland.

The Scottish Partnership Group on HSR is due to report by spring 2014 as part of the promised business case for Glasgow-Edinburgh HSR by 2024 and related benefits elsewhere on the Scottish and British rail networks. The Scottish Central Belt, and also Aberdeen, is seen as being disadvantaged by present HSR plans which increase the relative remoteness of Scotland with trip times to London no better than 3 hours 38 minutes by 2032. Herald feature on 3 October queries the worth to Scotland of spending £50bn on HSR route in England giving only marginal cuts in trip times to Scotland. SAPT has attacked present transport spending as contributing to an over-heated south-east and is seeking adjustments to give trip times no more than 3 hours by, or before, 2030 with Aberdeen and Inverness also gaining from reduced trip times.

Alex Sharkey, a senior Network Rail official in Scotland, says that rising demand is strengthening the case for more consideration of rail reopening in Scotland – including extending the Waverley route to Carlisle

Transform Scotland has called for a greater shift from trunk and urban road investment to rail spending in Scotland as a better means of moving to a sustainable Scottish economy backed by the evidence of a major change in consumer preferences from car to rail use.

Campaigns continue to keep the profitable East Coast Main Line franchise in state ownership but the UK government wants a return to a private operator by February 2015.

Abellio (the state-owned Dutch railway), Arriva, First Group, MTR (operator of Hong Kong metro) and National Express have passed the pre-qualification stage for bids for next ScotRail franchise. A draft invitation to tender was published on 19 November with bids submitted by spring 2014 and the winner announced autumn 2014 with the franchise starting on 1 April 2015.

The minimum requirements in the draft Invitation to Tender include improved quality, shorter trip times between Scottish cities, smart ticketing and peak fares pegged to RPI with off-peak -1% on RPI. Greater integration between rail, bus and ferry services is also sought and has been particularly welcomed by SAPT.

Within the EGIP programme, Winchburgh Tunnel closure will now be no more than 44 days but SPT is seeking more details on EGIP phasing and a minimising of service disruption. It has stressed the need to examine inclusion of electrification of the Maryhill line by 2019 and to consider whether, in the light of plans for Glasgow Central-Edinburgh HSR priorities, EGIP could be adjusted to give a less costly and quicker reconstruction of Queen St High Level for a maximum of 7, rather than 8, coach trains. SAPT has suggested that electric Maryhill trains from Queen St HL could continue from Anniesland as through trains to Whifflet improving frequency on the Argyle line without requiring more train sets.

The Campaign for Borders Rail is seeking changes in bridge design to facilitate double-tracking of a higher proportion of the Central Borders rail route. It has also suggested higher on-train space for cycles and a start to planning for an extension from Tweedbank to Hawick.

A further 160 spaces have been added to Bathgate station car park, bringing the total to 560 but Linlithgow continues to have an acute shortage of parking space.

Sunday trains from Edinburgh to Stirling and Perth will have increased frequency from December and, for the first time, Fife Circle will have Sunday services. There are prospects that some Ayr-Glasgow and Kilmarnock-Glasgow trains will be extended through to Edinburgh.

Though the alcohol ban on trains has helped, a crackdown by British Transport Police on misbehaviour in stations has led to a rise in recorded offences. Enable Scotland is seeking more help for disabled train travellers. A HUBS (Help us to be Spontaneous) campaign is seeking to make it easier for the disabled to use rail without giving advance notice.

Electrical faults have contributed to disruption at Waverley due to all power being switched off while the source of the problem was identified. Network Rail has been set tougher standards for improving punctuality. The ORR target is for 90% of trains to run on time though this is lowered to 88% due to capacity issues on the West Coast and East Coast approaches to London.

ScotRail passenger trips in the SPT area have continued to rise at a monthly average of 3% since April. Usage is 13% higher than in 2010/11. Usage has also risen elsewhere in Scotland. Shortage of rolling stock is now an acute problem, especially on services to Aberdeen and into Edinburgh from Fife & Falkirk.

BUS, TRAM & TAXI

The end of Edinburgh tram construction work has eased problems for bus operations in Edinburgh. Trial running of trams between the Airport and Edinburgh Park has started with these extended to the whole route in December. Lothian Buses has been shortlisted for seven national awards. Bus operators are concerned about the adverse impact on bus costs and revenue of an excessive growth in the number of streets with 20mph limits.

The Labour-led Aberdeen City administration is seeking a Scottish Government feasibility study of trams in as part of a strategic infrastructure plan. A suggested route runs from Dyce via the Airport and through the city centre to Torry and Cove. The previous city trams stopped running in 1958.

Glasgow Subway use has drifted down from 13m trips in 2010/11 to a probable 12.5m in 2013/14 but the new and more flexible ticketing systems now being installed, land use changes and the introduction of automated trains is estimated to increase trips by at least 25%.

Though UK-wide passenger numbers and revenue are up, First Group reports continuing problems in Glasgow and on routes into Edinburgh. Over the past 18 months, bus use in Glasgow was down 5%. Performance in Aberdeen remains strong.

First Bus is trialling fare cuts up to 55% on single fares for passengers who present a Job Centre Travel Discount Card. The offer runs to 19 January. Lothian Buses has launched a £7.50 Family Day Ticket including up to two adults and three children. This ticket has also been a commercial success, increasing total bus use - especially at off-peak times.

Age Concern fears that the loss of ring-fenced funding has slowed growth in community transport. It is proposing that all community transport should be included in present concession travel arrangements with 100% reimbursement. The existing arrangements were unfair to those who could not benefit from normal scheduled buses. But the Herald has again questioned the ability to maintain the present system of Scotland wide free bus travel for those over pension age and the disabled. SAPT has again called for a total review of the system with free local bus travel for concession holders extended to all local public transport but financed by an ending of free travel over longer distances and savings from a rise in the pension age.

Edward Hodgson, MD of Stagecoach Scotland West has attacked proposals to force bus companies to run socially needed but unprofitable routes as 'immoral' and a breach of human rights. Labour MSP Iain Gray's proposals for more regulation would leave passengers with higher fares or lower service levels. Iain's response was that it makes economic and social sense to invite operators to bid for packages of routes. He agreed that there was a need to shift the balance of funding for public transport operations from rail to packaged bus support. Both Stagecoach and George Mair of CPT Scotland consider the present Gray proposals unworkable though there was scope for improved results from present public funding. Stagecoach has called for improved bus infrastructure, smart ticketing and other partnership measures to entice people out of cars.

Borders-based Perryman's Buses has secured £1.7m from the Bank of Scotland to upgrade buses and start new routes. Scottish Government has announced a £1m lump sum to help community bus operators to expand services and replace older models.

Pending an appeal, Glasgow-based City Sprinter has been given an 11th hour reprieve by the Traffic Commissioner from a threatened loss of licence. Repairs and service performance is alleged to have been unacceptable

Edinburgh taxi firms have hit out at council plans for a £50 admin fee for every cab fitted with wi-fi.

ROADS & PARKING

Reform Scotland has called for a pay-as-you-drive system of road pricing based on :-

- abolition of present fuel and vehicle excise duties
- direct variable pricing of all roads in Scotland rising upwards from zero charges

George Osborne plans to continue the freeze on road fuel duty into 2015 but tolls may be introduced on some new roads in England. Ten areas in Scotland are included in a planned submission to the EU seeking extension of the present 5p a litre fuel duty rebate on islands. There is pressure to extend these areas to include Durness, Lochinver and parts of rural southern Scotland. Recent falls in wholesale oil prices have contributed, along with some cuts in air fares, to reduced inflation.

The Law Commissions have recommended procedures to allow faster removal of level crossings where this yields admin savings, fewer accidents and cuts in road delays through alternative provision. Revised DfT estimates put the total annual costs of road accidents at £34bn. UK government is considering rise in the minimum age for a full driving licence from 17 to 19. Strathclyde is the worst area in the UK for drink-driving offences by those over 50.

Road casualties in Scotland in 2012 are now at their lowest since present records began in 1947. 174 people were killed, 43% down over past decade. But pedestrian and cycling deaths have risen. Police Scotland is giving road safety a higher priority.

Scottish Government says that costs of new Forth Road Crossing are expected to fall from £1.65m to £1.45bn. Work has started on detailed studies on how best to improve the notorious Berriedale Braess on the A9 north of Helmsdale. Business is seeking accelerated work on full dualling of the A9 between Perth and Inverness as well as action to complete the £34m Inverness West Link Road but others are seeking a multi-modal plan for the Perth-Inverness corridor with increased rail investment.

The A83 has experienced its seventh recent landside at Rest and be Thankful but this time north-west of the section on which work had been done to create a temporary alternative route.

New data from the Office for National Statistics has shown a total rise of only 2.5% in road vehicle miles in Britain the past decade. Scottish growth is higher at 5.8% but, in both cases, growth rates are far below road traffic growth up to the mid 1990s and contrast with record levels of rail passenger growth

Plans for central Edinburgh have been revised to make George St one-way for motorists from west to east along with a two-way cycle route and widened pavements. For a pilot year, Princes St will remain a two-way system but restricted to trams, buses and taxis rather than the previous plan for one-way bus operation east to west. Lothian buses was a strong opponent of this plan. The longer-term City Council aim, supporting the economic and environmental strategy for the city centre, is to reduce the number of buses crossing the city centre.

Controversy continues over fines for the misuse of bus lanes in Aberdeen, Glasgow and Edinburgh. Glasgow has received £4.3m from bus lane fines, including £1.2m from one camera location. Some appeals have been successful with the AA expressing concerns that the system involves unfair taxation. Local authorities have replied that all net income goes towards transport related projects. Liverpool has introduced a temporary suspension of all bus lanes in order to allow results to be observed. Bus operators see bus lanes as very important for efficient and reliable operation, especially on some key corridors.

Police Scotland is to withdraw police-funded traffic wardens, leading to fears that local authorities will not have the funds to maintain wardens at present levels. Motorists in Glasgow have paid £8.7m of on-street parking charges in the past year. Higher charges have since been introduced as many charges have been unchanged since 2005. Edinburgh is also planning to increase parking charges.

City Parking, owned by Glasgow City Council, has reported losses of £22m. Car park assets are now worth less than half the loans taken out against them. Councillors have called for a full investigation. Edinburgh City Council is examining a scheme to make savings while also providing a more convenient service to users by changing parking meters to mobile phone debits.

WALKING & CYCLING

Media comment on cycling issues has stayed at a high level despite levels of walking being higher than cycling. However, it is recognised that schemes to reduce or lower the speed of motorised traffic can aid both walking and cycling safety, especially in and around city centres and in other busy areas such as Byres Road in the west end of Glasgow and Leith Walk in Edinburgh.

Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen and Dundee Councils are all now considering ways of providing a more attractive walking, cycling and leisure environment in their city centres. Pedestrian groups are seeking a longer 'green man' phasing at street crossings.

The proposed reduction in rail level crossings, including pedestrian crossings, has been criticised for ignoring the fact that alternative pedestrian routes can be much longer. On low-speed lines with good sightlines, there have been pleas to retain (or relocate) pedestrian crossings. On other railways, funding should allow provision of more bridges or underpasses for walkers.

Over emphasis on the dangers of cycling has been seen as a deterrent to growth in cycling. For short urban trips, cycling has a good safety record plus boosting health and well-being. On busier A roads, there is a safety issue which, in addition to more use of high visibility clothing and stricter measures against car and lorry drivers, justifies faster introduction of segregated corridors for cycling in larger towns and cities.

A Cycling Scotland report has praised ten councils in Scotland for action to encourage cycling. The highest praise goes to Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeenshire, Clackmannanshire, Fife and North Ayrshire with the poorest performers being Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Inverclyde and Renfrewshire. Despite data problems, there is agreement that cycling has been rising more rapidly than walking.

Scottish Government has invited Councils to bid for a share of a £20m fund for cycling improvements. One adverse outcome of the rise in cycling has been a rise in bikes reported as stolen in Glasgow. 350 bikes were stolen in the Partick/Hillhead/Anderston area of Glasgow in just one year. Police action against bike crime is being intensified.

PLANNING & PROPERTY

Commercial development is showing distinct signs of revival, with schemes now proceeding in Edinburgh and Glasgow as well as in Aberdeen. Schemes show a leaning toward city centres apart from growth pressures around Aberdeen Airport and the Edinburgh Business Development zone close to the airport (Large-scale development is also proposed in a zone close to Manchester Airport)

City centre retailers in Glasgow are expanding later opening as a means of responding to out-of-town and internet shopping. Further extensions of the fringe-of-town shopping centres at Glasgow Silverburn and Glasgow Fort are in progress but, in Edinburgh, there have been efforts to block further developments at Fort Kinnaird in order to help both city centre shopping and the Ocean Terminal shopping complex in Leith now being hit by competition and reduced growth in new housing on the Leith waterfront.

Aberdeen City Council has proposed a new £200m Aberdeen Exhibition and Conference Centre close to the airport with potential rail or tram links and providing better facilities than the present centre at Bridge of Don. In the city centre, work has started on a £100m Marischal Square development to replace the eyesore St Nicholas House. In Glasgow, the Hydro concert and entertainment centre has been completed as an SECC extension. It is located close to the SECC rail station which has seen a rapid growth in usage as SECC expanded but with a reduced emphasis on parking.

SESPan proposals to accommodate jobs and population growth around Edinburgh have revived Green Belt controversy. Options range from further brownfield development within the city plus more housing on the immediate edge of the city to a wider distribution of growth within 15 miles of the city but also extending further though in both cases related to suitable corridors and improved public transport.

Murray Estates is urging inclusion of the Garden District development to the immediate west of Edinburgh as a replacement for the 9,000 home Leith Dock housing development no longer favoured by the Port Authority. Under Scottish Government targets, 108,000 new homes are required across SE Scotland by 2024. Some incursion on the Green Belt is highly probable with present indications being that the bulk of new housing by 2024 will be within the city boundary but utilising open land to the west and south-east plus some expansion into Midlothian and Fife. The Cockburn Association has questioned the robustness of high targets for new housing and is supportive of keeping Edinburgh as a compact city with some housing perhaps moved further afield. Residents in the Corstorphine/Cramond zone argue that, if more housing is to be provided in west Edinburgh, it should be in the area close to Edinburgh Park station.

Planning officials are recommending refusal of an application for 2500 house on southern edge of Ayr due to infrastructure concerns. West Lothian Council has approved plans for a further 400 homes at Southdale, close to the reopened Armadale station.

RESEARCH & STATISTICS

The HS2 Economic Case has been criticised for excessive and unsupported wider economic benefits and a superficial appraisal of the relative importance of HS2 in a northwards rebalancing of the British economy. HS2 Ltd and Network rail are to lead a new project to look at options into Scotland including 'new route, upgrades to existing infrastructure, or a combination of the two, looking at both the East and West Coast corridors'. DfT, Scottish Office and Transport Scotland are also involved with Councils along the route consulted on a confidential basis. A draft report will be submitted in summer 2014 (*LTT 15 November*).

A study by KPMG shows that the energy, tourism and food and drink sectors will have the strongest positive impact on the Scottish economy in the next 10 years – a conclusion conflicting with the KPMG British study concluding that, in the period to the 2030s, HS2 will have a major influence on economic growth and its distribution within Britain, especially in relation to a relative shift of economic activity from London and the south-east to the English Midlands and the Manchester-Leeds zone.

Transport Scotland, West Lothian and Edinburgh Councils are collaborating on a £100,000 West Edinburgh Bus Study which could see busways extended to a bus park and ride site west of Newbridge at the A89/A899 junction. At present, buses face major peak delays at the Newbridge junction

Sustrans reports that results from automatic counters have shown a tripling of Lothian bike trips on National Cycle Routes in recent years. At Seton Sands in East Lothian, use rose from 32th in 2008 to 132th in 2012. At Bathgate in West Lothian, numbers rose from 49th in 2004 to 163th in 2012. Sustrans has also found that pupils cycling to school every day have risen from 3.1% in 2011 to 5.2%

Scottish population may soar to 5.8m by 2037 (+9%). Detailed area estimates are not due until 2014 but growth in the Lothians is expected to be above average.

Scotland has been named as one of the top-three countries for travel in 2014. Hotel bookings and tourists visits in 2013 are already above 2012. Between January and June 2013, total tourist visits to Scotland from the rest of Britain and other countries rose 1.6%. Foreign tourists had a slight fall but spending rose 8.6%.

Sales of new cars in Scotland in September, at 41,368, were up 14% on 2012 and the highest since 2008. Growth over the UK as a whole was 12%. Scottish new registrations in October were up 10% compared to 4% across the UK. For the year from January, Scottish sales are up 13% compared to 10% for the UK.

Caroline Jones Carrick of the TEV project based at Prestwick sees great opportunities for Scotland to take a research lead in a new generation of electric vehicles able to operate as automated pods on new roads with continuous charging. Large markets were seen in countries such as India where a 30,000 a year electric car assembly plant has just been completed.

Rural Affairs Secretary Richard Lochhead is concerned that poor broadband is forcing people to leave rural parts of Scotland. The target of extending standard broadband coverage to 90% of Scottish homes is two years behind schedule. An extra £126m of public investment and £19m from BT has been announced to speed up the roll-out of superfast broadband in Scotland. This should raise the 21% of premises presently having such access in the Highlands and Islands to 84%.

BUSINESS & PERSONNEL

Barrhead Travel reports a 20% rise in turnover and profits in 2012 with best results coming from growth in business and long-haul travel.

Loganair reports record profits and turnover. Turnover is up 20% and profits up 24% to £4.4m. Passenger numbers rose from 528th to 592th. Luton-based short-haul carrier EasyJet reports a 51% rise in profits, helped by cost control and a return to allocated seats for passengers Revenue per seat is up 7% and passenger numbers up 4%.

Aided by the acquisition of Arriva services in Scotland, McGill's Buses turnover rose from £15m to £27.7m in 2012. After a £553th loss in 2011, 2012 saw profits of £659th

Stagecoach reports solid growth in its rail and bus business. UK bus revenue outside London was up 5% and had been accelerating since the summer. Rail revenue for the same period was up 3% with Stagecoach also interested in bidding for the East Coast, Thameslink and London Docklands franchises.

First Group reports the first rise in bus travel volumes in five years and a 1.6% rise in revenue in the six months to end September. However, conditions in Glasgow remained difficult. Bus division profits started to rise but the rail sector was performing better with operating profits up 38% and revenue up 5.7%

Scottish Citylink Coaches saw turnover up from £37.3m to £40.8m in 2012 but pre-tax profits fell from £7.5m to £5.7m

Transport for Edinburgh is seeking three non-executive members to steer the city to a fully integrated transport future.

Mark Carne from Shell is the new Network Rail Chair, replacing Sir David Higgins who is moving to chair the HS2 Company,

Fiona Kerr, First Group's Scottish finance director has been appointed Managing Director of First Glasgow.

NEW PUBLICATIONS

Reported Road Casualties : Scotland 2012, A National Statistics Publication for Scotland

Edinburgh Waverley Dr Ann Glen This colourful 144p A4 size book covers the history of Waverley Station from its origins until the recent modernisation. Available from W H Smith or Lily publications