



Tayside and Central Scotland
Transport Partnership

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Dear Mr David,

CONSIDERATION OF PETITION PE1115

I refer to your letter dated 30 January 2008, seeking the views of the Tayside and Central Scotland Transport Partnership (TACTRAN) on the above Petition, submitted on behalf of the Campaign to Open Blackford Railway-station Again (COBRA). TACTRAN's position on the matters raised in the Petition is set out below.

The TACTRAN Regional Transport Strategy (RTS), which was submitted to Ministers on 30 March 2007, is entirely supportive of the need to encourage and promote public transport options and solutions, in support of the wider economic, social and environmental objectives of our own RTS, the National Transport Strategy, and other Government strategies. The submitted RTS identifies a wide range of proposals we would wish to see progressed for enhancing the quality and availability of national and regional public transport links and services. Detailed development of these will be taken forward through our RTS Delivery Plan. Our aspirations include various improvements to the frequency and availability of rail services operating through and within the TACTRAN region.

Specifically, in relation to Petition PE1115, the RTS includes a proposal for:-

“Additional hourly rail service between Arbroath and Perth as recommended by the Tay Estuary Rail Study (TERS) and possible extensions of this service to Stirling or Glasgow”.

The RTS also indicates that TACTRAN will:-

“Work with Transport Scotland, First ScotRail and Network Rail to update the Business Case for the proposed TERS Rail Service, and possible extensions, and ensure that these services are fully assessed as part of the Strategic Transport Projects Review”

“Support and promote rail infrastructure enhancements proposed under TERS, including a new Dundee West Station, station enhancements at Montrose, Arbroath, Carnoustie, Broughty Ferry, Dundee and Perth, and possible new stations at locations such as Blackford and Greenloaning”

The current TERS proposal builds on earlier work which was undertaken by Angus, Dundee City, Perth & Kinross and Fife Councils, which assessed the justification for introducing additional local rail services between Arbroath – Dundee – Perth and into Fife. Arising from consultation on the development of the TACTRAN RTS, the previous TERS proposal has been developed further, and now takes the form of a proposed additional hourly “semi-fast” service between Arbroath – Dundee – Perth – Stirling, hopefully also extending to/from Glasgow. This would supplement the existing hourly Glasgow – Aberdeen service, to give a broadly half-hourly east-west service within and through the TACTRAN region.

This latest TERS proposal recognises the need to ensure that rail enhancements must strike a balance between offering new opportunities to travel by rail, whilst ensuring that the competitive advantage rail can offer for longer distance travel is not eroded by increasing journey times, which is in line with Government and rail industry aspirations to ensure that rail offers an increasingly attractive and competitive alternative to travel by car, for both commuter and longer distance travel demands.

Consequently the RTS envisages that the potential for new or re-opened rail halts, such as at Blackford, would be best promoted as part of the TERS proposal, rather than including these as additional halts on the core “InterCity” network. In effect the TERS proposal offers a “win/win” opportunity, by enabling the introduction of much needed additional capacity on congested sections of the existing rail network, particularly between Dunblane/Stirling and Glasgow, whilst at the same time offering the opportunity to develop new rail markets at existing or new/re-opened stations and communities along the route.

The above approach has been the subject of direct discussion between TACTRAN and COBRA, who are fully aware of TACTRAN’s proposed process for evaluating the viability of re-opening Blackford station, as part of the wider detailed appraisal of the TERS proposal, as outlined below.

Preliminary discussions have indicated that First ScotRail, Network Rail and Transport Scotland are supportive of the principle of introducing the TERS “semi-fast” service, including the potential for additional halts being accommodated on this service, rather than on the core Aberdeen – Glasgow route.

As the Committee will be aware, any significant transport scheme or proposal of this nature requires to be fully appraised in accordance with the Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance (STAG) process. The above bodies have indicated a willingness to assist TACTRAN in taking the current TERS proposal forward through these necessary appraisal procedures.

Work is currently underway on the development of a Study Brief for a full STAG appraisal of the TERS proposal, as outlined above, with a view to inviting consultants to tender for undertaking this work during the current year. This Brief will be developed in full consultation with First ScotRail, Network Rail and Transport Scotland.

It is envisaged that part of the work will involve a review of the earlier TERS study and other relevant proposals and appraisals, including an earlier assessment of the Business Case for re-opening stations at Blackford and Greenloaning. The agreement of both COBRA and Perth & Kinross Council, who sponsored the earlier study at Blackford and Greenloaning, will also be sought on this.


In terms of the Committee's initial discussion of Petition PE1115 on 29 January, I would confirm that the work we are taking forward will have full regard to the existence of Gleneagles Station and the relative merits and business case for including additional halts in light of existing station availability and current and projected demand along the route of the TERS proposal.

Until the above appraisal work has been completed TACTRAN is unable to take a formal position on the re-opening of Blackford, or indeed any other potential new or additional halts associated with the TERS proposal. We currently anticipate that the work referred to above is likely to take around 4 – 6 months to complete from contract award. During the development of this work we will continue to liaise and consult closely with the rail industry, Transport Scotland and with other key stakeholders, including groups such as COBRA.

It is anticipated that the outputs from this work will be reported to the TACTRAN Partnership Board for consideration towards the end of 2008, at which time the Partnership will be able to take an informed view on the TERS proposal, including prioritisation of the various rail service and infrastructure enhancement elements of this.

I hope that the above comments clarify TACTRAN's position and proposals for addressing the issues raised by Petition PE1115, but should you require any further information or clarification, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,



Eric Guthrie
Director
TACTRAN

CC Councillor Fraser Macpherson, Chair of TACTRAN
Councillor Alan Jack, Deputy Chair of TACTRAN
Councillor John Kellas, Perth & Kinross Member of TACTRAN
Councillor Ann Gaunt, Perth & Kinross Member of TACTRAN
Jim Valentine, Depute Director of Environment, Perth & Kinross Council
Neil Gaunt, Chair of COBRA
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