



Alison Wilson
Assistant Clerk
Public Petitions Committee
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

Bordeaux House
31 Kinnoull Street
Perth
PH1 5EN
Tel: 01738 475775
Fax: 01738 639705
e-mail: info@tactran.gov.uk

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Dear Ms Wilson,

CONSIDERATION OF PETITION PE1115

I write in connection with the Public Petition Committee's recent further consideration of Petition PE1115 on 26 October 2010. You have written to Perth & Kinross Council, Transport Scotland and Visit Scotland seeking response to points raised during the discussion of the petition and in particular to those raised by Dr Richard Simpson MSP. However, on the basis that a number of the issues/questions relate to our Tay Estuary Rail Study (TERS), I thought that it may be of assistance for me to provide some information and clarification to the issues and questions raised. In doing so it may be helpful to provide some update and background to the Regional Transport Strategy (RTS) and our ongoing work on TERS.

Petition PE1115 states that reopening Blackford "***is identified as a priority action in the latest Tayside and Central Regional Transport Strategy***". This is not actually the case. Tactran's RTS identifies the need to secure improvements to the rail network to enable increased provision and opportunities for the movement of passengers and freight by rail. It also states that such improvements are likely to include an additional hourly service between Arbroath, Dundee, Perth, Stirling and Glasgow. The RTS Delivery Plan sets out the intention to undertake a Tay Estuary Rail Study (TERS) involving Transport Scotland, First ScotRail and Network Rail, to provide a STAG appraisal and business case for a proposed rail service from Arbroath - Glasgow, including **consideration** of rail infrastructure, station enhancements and new stations at West Dundee, Bannockburn, Blackford and Greenloaning.

TERS was completed in June 2009 and identifies options for an hourly stopping service between Arbroath and Glasgow and proposes a phased introduction – start-up, short, medium and long term proposals – each providing a significantly positive Benefit to Cost Ratio (BCR). The service is designed to complement the existing fast Aberdeen to Glasgow service and would have an optimum stopping pattern of Carnoustie, Monifieth, Broughty Ferry, Dundee, Invergowrie (West Dundee), Perth, Gleneagles, Dunblane and Stirling.

In terms of station considerations the study recommends the relocation of Invergowrie Station approximately 800m eastwards towards Dundee and that there is no positive Business Case for reopening Greenloaning. The enhancement of Gleneagles Station is preferred over constructing a new station at Blackford. These conclusions were reached following a full Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance (STAG) assessment of the operational, economic, environmental, integration, safety, accessibility and social inclusion benefits and impacts of the service and associated infrastructure. The study was conducted in full consultation with Transport Scotland, Network Rail and First ScotRail, all of whom were represented on the Project Steering Group. The findings of the study were endorsed by the Tactran Partnership at its meeting on 23 June 2009 and submitted to Transport Scotland for consideration shortly afterwards. The outcomes of TERS were notified in my previous letter of 5 August 2009 to your colleague Mr Franck David.

The preferred option of enhancing Gleneagles Station over a new station at Blackford recognises that the main economic and passenger generation benefit lies in the provision of an hourly service, rather than the currently limited service at Gleneagles. Without the additional service

and associated passenger generation there is a much weaker business case for either an enhanced Gleneagles Station or Blackford Station. The study also identified that, whilst having both stations would not significantly increase the total number of passengers given their proximity and similar catchments, serving two stations so close together would incur additional operational costs and cause timetabling difficulties. In essence TERS concludes that the choice is either an enhanced Gleneagles Station or Blackford Station, but not both.

The TERS proposals for enhancing Gleneagles Station address a number of the issues identified by Dr Simpson at the Public Petitions Committee meeting on 26 October 2010. The road access is currently poor and the proposal is to provide a link road between the station and A823, providing local access from Auchterarder, Glendevon and Muthill as well as Gleneagles, without the need to enter the A9. Access via the A9 would be from the recently enhanced A9/A823 Loaninghead grade separated junction, thus permitting stopping up of the current station access onto and across the A9, thereby supporting the STPR project to improve A9 safety between Dunblane and Inverness. The proposed enhancements also include "Access for All" improvements, including platform ramps and lifts to the footbridge; increasing the station car park to 150 spaces; provision of CCTV and Customer Information Services (CIS) and heated waiting space. The total cost for station enhancement, including the new link road, is estimated at £3.78m (including 44% optimism bias).

The potential for introducing TERS remains under discussion with Transport Scotland, Network Rail and First ScotRail. Progressing consideration of the scope for introducing the start-up service has been delayed by the need to await completion of work on the Highland Main Line improvement timetable, which requires to be finalised before the TERS timetabling proposals can be updated. Pending completion of this work Transport Scotland has indicated that they are unable to provide any formal opinion on the TERS service and stations proposals.

Hopefully the above background is helpful. In terms of specific points raised by Dr Richard Simpson on 26 October 2010, I would offer the following comments.

Ryder Cup

Tactran agrees that road, bus, pedestrian and disabled access to the existing Gleneagles Station is poor and should be improved for the Ryder Cup. The TERS proposals for an enhanced Gleneagles Station, as described above, can address these problems and efforts should be made to ensure they are in place by 2014.

Tactran is not directly involved in the planning for the Ryder Cup but we understand that Gleneagles station is to be used for rail access and that a number of options for accessing the event from the station, including a footbridge over the A9 (temporary or permanent) or a link road to A823 similar to that proposed by TERS above, are being considered. Tactran would recommend that, in addition to any footbridge, the A823 link road and other TERS station enhancement proposals for Gleneagles should be implemented. This would provide rail visitors to the Ryder Cup with a much enhanced journey experience befitting of this world class event, whilst offering significant legacy benefits in the shape of a much enhanced station facility capable of serving visitors and local communities more accessibly and safely and, aligned with the TERS service enhancement proposals, more frequently.

It is estimated that the Ryder Cup will boost the economy by £100m and the expenditure of £3.78m for an enhanced Gleneagles should be considered in this context.

Costings for Blackford Station

Using consistent technical assessments and costings developed in line with STAG business case appraisal processes and in discussion with Transport Scotland, Network Rail and First ScotRail, TERS estimates a new station at Blackford to cost £4.4m (including 44% optimism bias). This has been questioned in comparison to Laurencekirk and Alloa. We understand that the total cost for Laurencekirk Station was approximately £4.5m when all partner contributions are included. The use of 44% optimism bias is the norm for appraisal of infrastructure projects at this stage of development.

This costing is for a basic 6 carriage platform which is the standard required for ScotRail services. However, one of the advantages of Gleneagles is that the platform can accommodate 9 carriages, which is potentially helpful for the Ryder Cup but particularly important for existing Inverness – London East Coast services, the maintenance of which Tactran believes to be essential for the local and regional economy. For these services to stop at any Blackford Station the platforms would need to be 70m longer than currently proposed, adding to the cost above.

It is known that projected passenger usage for Alloa and Laurencekirk were significantly underestimated. Whilst the TERS work has taken a deliberately conservative view of passenger generation, this still demonstrates a significantly positive BCR. In the event that passenger generation proves to be greater than predicted this would apply equally to an enhanced Gleneagles as it would to a new Blackford Station, adding to the success of the proposed TERS service.

Highland Spring

It is suggested that a new station at Blackford has the potential to serve the workforce at Highland Spring, if an incentive to use the train is provided. Whilst this is acknowledged, the actual usage by workers will clearly be dependent upon the convenience of rail for their home to work journey and also other factors, such as the availability of free workplace parking.

Tactran supports efforts to transfer freight from road to rail. Indeed we have worked with Highland Spring and contributed joint funding towards a feasibility study to investigate the potential for introducing a rail freight facility at Blackford.

Budget Constraints

Funding will be an issue for either an enhanced Gleneagles or reopened Blackford and financial constraints and Best Value, all the more pertinent in today's economic climate, have influenced the recommendations of TERS. There have been no detailed discussions on funding specific infrastructure elements of TERS at this stage, pending completion of discussions on the technical findings and recommendations of the study with Transport Scotland, Network Rail and First ScotRail. Tactran is represented on the Scottish Access for All Local Projects Group and we believe that finance remains undiminished from this fund until 2015. With the passenger generation potential indicated by TERS, coupled with the national and international benefits of the Ryder Cup, we believe that Gleneagles should be considered a national priority under Access for All. As set out above, the enhanced Gleneagles proposal is costed at £3.78m and there could be a number of potential means of financing this, including Access for All and alignment with STPR Project 16: A9 upgrade Dunblane to Inverness and/or STPR Project 23 : Improving Rail Access from Aberdeen to Central Belt.

In summary, the case for investing in either enhanced station facilities at Gleneagles or a reopened station at Blackford is underpinned by the TERS proposals for a regular hourly stopping service, which generates the additional passenger demand to justify infrastructure investment. For the reasons outlined above TERS recommends the option of an enhanced Gleneagles, which better serves the various local centres of population within the station catchment area, provides for the long term future of the London – Inverness East Coast service and, if implemented by 2014, will provide a suitable facility for the 8000 visitors per day expected to arrive by train to attend the Ryder Cup and for any future golf tournaments.

I trust that the above comments and clarification and update on our TERS work and proposals are of assistance. If you require any further information or clarification of any of the above information please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,



Eric Guthrie
Director