

PE1115/Y



David Stewart, MSP
Convenor of the Public Petitions Committee
Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

4th October 2011

Dear Mr Stewart,

PETITION PE115 - REQUEST TO REFER PETITION TO THE INFRASTRUCTURE AND CAPITAL INVESTMENT COMMITTEE

Prior to the recent parliamentary recess our petition (PE1115), which campaigns for the reopening of Blackford Railway Station, was classified as a “legacy” petition to be reconsidered by the new Public Petitions Committee (PPC). We have recently been advised that the PPC is scheduled to consider our petition again at its meeting on 1st November 2011.

We have also received a recent response from Transport Scotland dated 29th August 2011 in relation to a final decision on whether to re-open Blackford Station in preference to upgrading Gleneagles Station. Disappointingly, this response still reiterates a policy position which favours investing in existing stations in preference to investing in new or former stations.

We strongly attest that in the current economic climate, the investment decision should be based on the optimal business case, taking into account the economic, social and environmental impacts on a case by case basis. We disagree that the current hierarchy for investment should be targeted on current stations and services in precedence to new or re-opened stations. Most of the existing rail stations and infrastructure date back to the late 19th and early 20th century - since then, population growth, wider transport infrastructure developments, changing social and environmental demands mean that investing in the past may no longer be relevant, or financially prudent, to meet current and future rail demands.

We have consistently demonstrated that re-opening Blackford Station provides the strongest business case and this position was reflected in the independent assessment undertaken by AECOM transport consultants. We would strongly urge that the current policy position is re-considered and that the focus should be on the comparative business cases associated with the potential options to improve rail services in this rural area.

Consequently, my purpose in writing is to formally request that our petition be referred to the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee (ICIC), a move that I understand is accommodated within the standing orders of the PPC.

The PPC has considered our petition on a number of occasions since early 2008 when it was first submitted. Over the last three years, we have submitted numerous reports, written responses and related submissions while the PPC has consulted various stakeholders on our behalf to request additional information or clarifications.

During this time we have continued to build on strong, cross-party political support for our campaign with numerous site visits, AGM attendance and written support by many MSPs and MPs. We also had a constructive meeting with the Transport Minister and a Transport Scotland official prior to the recent recess where we presented our summary business case that was followed up by a very constructive site visit from the Transport Minister.

Our campaign has gained significant benefits while under PPC consideration, heightening awareness amongst all key stakeholders, strengthening our widespread community support and keeping the campaign in the media's eye.

However, we strongly believe that referring our petition to the ICIC will have mutual benefits. With the new Rail Utilisation Strategy, the next round of the ScotRail franchise, and the impending High Level Output Specification for 2014-2019, it would be a very prescient time to refer the campaign for consideration by the subject committee directly responsible for rail investment. For the PPC, this will free up valuable committee time for consideration of other petitions.

We would be very happy to meet with you to discuss our proposal and to discuss any other action that the PPC considers appropriate in actively progressing our petition to the next stage.

Meanwhile on behalf of COBRA, the campaign group responsible, I would like to thank the PPC for the time and consideration that has so far been given to our petition. If you require any further information at this stage please do not hesitate to contact me.

I look forward to your early reply.

Yours sincerely

Neil Gaunt

Chair, COBRA

cc Chris Hynd, Committee Assistant, Public Petitions Committee