

MEMORANDUM

Response to: Scottish Parliament Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee

From: The Scottish Council for Development and Industry

INQUIRY INTO THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF HIGH-SPEED RAIL SERVICES

Introduction

1. The Scottish Council for Development and Industry (SCDI) is an independent economic development organisation that strengthens Scotland's economy through the formulation and promotion of innovative public policies to encourage sustainable economic prosperity. Its members are drawn from businesses, local authorities, trades unions, educational institutions and the voluntary sector. SCDI welcomes the Committee's Inquiry into high-speed rail services and the opportunity to present some views.
2. Good quality rail links for passengers and freight as part of an efficient transport network are essential for the development of the Scottish economy, especially because of our peripheral location in relation to major UK and European business and population centres. Apart from the obvious benefits that improved communications bring, it is very important for the tourist industry in Scotland that we are easily, comfortably and cost effectively accessible from within and outwith the UK.
3. Capacity issues on the existing East and West Coast Main Lines (ECML and WCML) are a significant concern. With further strong growth in demand for rail services anticipated, investment in the rail network will be required to ensure both the existing Main Lines are fit for purpose and that steps are taken now to ensure connectivity to and from Scotland is enhanced in the future to meet the requirements of the Scottish economy and its population by increasing capacity. A UK high-speed rail link would help meet these requirements.
4. SCDI welcomes the heightened interest in developing high-speed rail lines within the UK as part of that enhanced connectivity and is encouraged by the current inquiries into the feasibility of high-speed rail links by several organisations. Scotland should feature strongly in all these inquiries. SCDI has recently joined with many other organisations in the High Speed 2 Scotland (HS2S) group to support the work of the Greengauge 21 campaign and ensure that the Scottish dimension (an Anglo-Scottish line is one of five corridors that Greengauge 21 are considering) is fully factored into its work.

What do you think could be the potential economic and environmental benefits from the development of a high-speed rail link network?

5. The introduction of high-speed, high quality rail services in addition to the existing north-south transport connections will enhance Scotland's connectivity with the rest of the UK, Europe and, with a direct link to London Heathrow, further afield. Significant reductions in point-to-point journey times between Scotland, London and other population centres on the route will bring benefits to the Scottish economy in terms of business connections, accessibility for tourism and productivity improvements. Reports into a high-speed line seem to indicate a benefit/cost ratio of around 2:1 for the line.
6. Benefits to freight should be provided by freeing up capacity on the existing East and West Coast Main Lines.
7. Environmental benefits should come from a substitution of some air journeys to the south, particularly London, by rail and also providing another high quality option to the car, both stimulated by the shorter journey times high-speed rail provides. This should reduce carbon emissions. Although high-speed rail travel does have higher environmental impacts than conventional rail, if powered by electricity which is increasingly being generated from renewable, non-carbon emitting sources rather than carbon based fuels, this should ensure the environmental impact of high-speed rail travel is reduced.

What would be the costs of any new links and how would they be funded?

8. Inevitably, the cost of such a line would be considerable - measured in the tens of billions of pounds. Furthermore, initial estimates can tend to be wildly optimistic for ambitious projects such as these. 2M Group, an alliance of English Local Authorities, estimates its proposals for north-south high speed line at £30 billion which is similar to the costs given by the consultant Atkins in its 2008 report, "Because Transport Matters: High Speed Rail." However, there will also be costs if no action is taken to improve rail capacity. Furthermore, the potential economic and environmental benefits, as mentioned above, can also be measured in the billions of pounds according to the same consultants.
9. As this is a north-south UK rail route, the bulk of the funding should be from UK Government, however, Scottish Government should play an appropriate part in supporting this infrastructure. Given this share of funding, construction of the line should not simply start from London and work its way up the country but begin simultaneously at either end to be completed in northern England, or alternatively construction could perhaps be at various points along the route and joined together.

What would be the most appropriate technology and type of train required for use in the UK?

10. Electric powered, wheel to rail trains that are compatible with European standards would be the most appropriate.

How could the existing rail links with Scotland be improved to ensure that all rail users are able to take advantage of improved high-speed connections?

11. As mentioned above, the existing rail links with Scotland, the ECML and WCML, will also have to be improved to increase capacity. Given the likely time scale in constructing a high-speed line and forecast growth in demand for rail services, this will be necessary whether or not it goes ahead. The Train Operating Companies on both Main Lines are investing to reduce journey times, increase capacity and improve quality. If a high-speed line is constructed, though, these lines will remain very important for freight and for journeys to destinations that will not be served by the high-speed line. By easing capacity it should also help further improve services on existing lines. There will also, presumably, be different fare structures for services on the existing routes compared to the high-speed services, although these would need to be competitively priced. However, services on the existing routes should not be seen as a lesser form of transport and will need to continue to provide high quality and efficient rail transport for those passengers that do not wish, for whatever reasons, to take the high-speed option. This will need to be taken into account in the franchising process and different business models may be required for each type of service.
12. It is not only existing rail links with Scotland that will need to be improved, but also existing rail links *within* Scotland. It is extremely important that all of Scotland benefits from high-speed rail connections. Were a high-speed line to come to Scotland, realistically it is most likely to end somewhere in the central belt. Therefore, areas north of the central belt will need to rely on existing rail and road infrastructure to connect with the high-speed services. Ensuring that routes to the north of the country are provided with investment and improved to make the connections as efficient as possible with, for road and rail, reduced journey times and, for rail, improved frequency will be necessary. Without such improvements, the comparison between travel times from points north to central belt Scotland and those to points south will become increasingly stark.
13. Finally, in regard to other north-south transport links, SCDI believes that high-speed rail links are complementary to direct air links to London and these options should not be thought to be either/or decisions. It is important that the travelling public has a choice of high quality modes that can be utilised to suit personal circumstances. One further benefit of a high-speed rail link would be in removing air services from airports south of Scotland to London, thereby freeing up slots that could be reallocated to services from Scottish airports, particularly those north of the central belt such as Aberdeen and Inverness. For this reason, SCDI does not believe that a high-speed rail link is something that would negate the need to expand Heathrow Airport.

Iain D Duff
Chief Economist
The Scottish Council for Development and Industry
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