

31 January 2012

Edinburgh – Glasgow Improvement Programme Consultation
Network Rail
Buchanan House
58 Port Dundas Road
Glasgow
G4 0LQ

Dear Sir/ Madam

EDNBURGH – GLASGOW IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME

The Scottish Council for Development and Industry (SCDI) is an independent membership network that strengthens Scotland's competitiveness by influencing Government policies to encourage sustainable economic prosperity. The membership of SCDI includes businesses, trades unions, local authorities, educational institutions, the voluntary sector and faith groups.

The Edinburgh – Glasgow Improvement Programme (EGIP) was identified in SCDI's *Blueprint* for the Scottish economy as a priority project for Scotland's connectivity. We welcome this consultation, which is an important stage towards delivery of EGIP by 2016.

The Central Belt represents the heart of the Scottish economy and, taken together, the wider Edinburgh area and the wider Glasgow area have one of the highest GVA per capita in the UK. A recent study by Aecom, cited in *Fast Track Scotland*, suggests that Glasgow and Edinburgh have complementary strengths in key sectors and together provide an important counter-balance to London's dominance in some key sectors such as Financial Services and Creative Industries, thereby helping to secure the growing strength of these sectors in the UK. Stirling has also identified Creative Industries as a strength that it aims to nurture and grow.

The rail network in Central Scotland already offers connectivity between Edinburgh and Glasgow which is competitive with any other pair of cities in the UK. Following the recent reopening of the Airdrie-Bathgate line, there are now four lines and a total of ten direct services per hour between the two cities, including four on the express line via Falkirk High, not including extra services at peak times and cross-border trains which connect them both. Feedback from businesses is that the significant improvements which have been made to rail infrastructure in the last ten years have maintained and attracted investment into the region.

However, in a globalised economy where Scotland must compete with cities throughout Europe and beyond for investment, its infrastructure needs to be internationally competitive. The European Cities Monitor 2011, a survey of senior executives from 501 European companies, from Cushman and Wakefield found that both Glasgow and Edinburgh were relatively lowly ranked for external and internal transport links. While their positions in the rankings are respectable results for cities of their comparatively small size, the results of the

survey suggests that, for Scotland to compete internationally for investment, there is a need to integrate and promote Central Scotland – along with Scotland’s other cities - as more of an integrated economic unit. SCDI has been a partner in the development of Scotland’s recently published *Cities Strategy*. This highlights that “investment in our cities will play a vital role in driving future economic performance and growth” and that one of the key characteristics of successful cities that supports their growth is that they are connected cities with strong transport infrastructures. The Scottish Government and the cities, along with SCDI, make a commitment that transport infrastructure should “keep pace with evolving technology and international standards” and to work with the industry “to continually improve interurban connectivity and reduced journey times between the cities...to shrink the effective distance, changing the way Scotland’s labour, consumer and business to business markets operate.”

To inform SCDI’s response to this consultation, SCDI has surveyed our members on EGIP as part of a wider survey on the future of Scotland’s railways. This demonstrated strong support for the project, with 48% of respondents from Central Scotland saying that they and/ or their business would be more likely to use services on these routes following these improvements.

While reliability and punctuality are the highest priorities of when considering overall priorities for rail services, SCDI’s survey found that reduced journey times were the improvement which would most attract people to use EGIP services, with 66% stating that this was a high priority. The second and third highest-rated improvements were increased frequency (46%) and increased capacity (40%). SCDI recognises that there may be trade-offs between different priorities and between these priorities and costs and affordability. However, these results suggest that, particularly for businesses, reduced journey times would be the greatest benefit of EGIP. SCDI would, therefore, recommend that Network Rail aims, as far as possible, to achieve the journey times improvements which have been proposed.

Following EGIP, the fastest journeys between Edinburgh-Glasgow would be 37 minutes, down from 49 minutes, with 13 services across all routes per hour, up from 5 or 6 pre-Airdrie-Bathgate, with additional peak and cross border services. Central Scotland would have an excellent balance between new, fast, non-stop city-centre to city-centre services and the current number of stopping services for the communities in between. This represents a competitive advantage for Edinburgh - Glasgow over all other pairs of UK regional cities. For example, planned improvements to connectivity between Liverpool – Manchester and Manchester – Leeds are at an earlier stage and even when they are completed, there will probably be half the number of services per hour between them in both cases as will be delivered for Edinburgh – Glasgow, and over only two routes and one route, respectively.

In our *Blueprint*, SCDI strongly supports EGIP as the starting point for the electrification of the core Scottish rail network, utilising Scotland’s capacity to generate low carbon electricity. We welcome Network Rail’s plans to complete electrification in Central Scotland, and have called for an accelerated programme to extend electrification to Aberdeen and to Inverness.

Finally, SCDI believes that it is important that the EGIP improvements are integrated effectively into the existing and planned Scottish rail network, including station redevelopment in the cities and Edinburgh Trams. Parking capacity, integration with other

public transport services such as buses, smart ticketing and pricing should all have a role in promoting modal shift from road to EGIP services. We hope that there will be scope for enhancements to local rail services and are interested in the potential to re-open rail stations should future demand support them. We look forward to details on how the additional capacity for Fife and the North East of Scotland might be utilised for further improved services. While it is outwith this consultation, SCDI is very keen that the rolling stock released by EGIP is refurbished for the longer-distance routes between Aberdeen/ Inverness – Central Scotland and we have also been surveying our members for their priorities. It will be especially important that the EGIP programme is joined-up with the early work by HS2 Ltd, Transport Scotland, the cities and their partners on routes and terminals for high-speed rail lines in Scotland in order that all of Central Scotland, and beyond, can benefit from them.

SCDI supports EGIP and looks forward to working with Network Rail in the forthcoming phases of consultation to help it engage with views from rail users and those which would benefit, particularly businesses, and to address the points which we have made in this letter.

Yours sincerely

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