

**AYRSHIRE JOINT STRUCTURE PLAN AND TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE
23 MARCH 2001**

**Comments on the Scottish Executive's Consultation Paper: 'Strategic Priorities for
Scotland's Passenger Railway'**

PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1 To provide a Joint Committee response on the document 'Strategic Priorities for Scotland's Passenger Railway' which sets out the aims and aspirations of the Scottish Executive for Scotland's passenger rail network over the next 15 to 20 years.

BACKGROUND

- 2 The existing Scottish passenger rail franchise, let to the National Express Group and operated through ScotRail, accounts for 95% of the country's passenger rail services. Although the current franchise is due to run until 2004, a revised policy climate has prompted the Strategic Rail Authority and the Scottish Executive to replace the seven year franchise as soon as possible. The new franchise is expected to last between 15 and 20 years and will require the operator to deliver additional capacity and better performance, improve integration and offer sustained and cost effective benefits to passengers.
- 3 A twelve-week consultation period has been set by the Executive to seek views and ideas from all those with an interest in the Scottish rail industry. These comments will form the basis of the Executive's statutory guidance and directions issued to the SRA in drawing up the detailed specification for replacing the existing Scottish franchise. Comments on the document were invited for submission to the Executive by 28 February.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES FOR SCOTLAND'S PASSENGER RAILWAY

'We want the railways to play a full part in a sustainable, effective and integrated transport system. We want a railway network that is safe and accessible. We want a railway system that supports economic development, meets social needs and supports a better environment'

- 4 The above vision represents the Scottish Executive's priorities for the rail network over the next two decades. Three objectives of attracting more passengers, achieving full integration and securing more investment are then explored in the document in order to accomplish this vision. A series of questions are posed to provide a focus for responses on how to meet the objectives. The document discusses ways in which more passengers can be attracted to rail, for example through investment in trains, track and service levels, safety initiatives and quality of service.
- 5 The following section then goes on to discuss how rail can play a part in an integrated transport system by reducing congestion, pollution and peripherality, supporting social justice and developing a seamless journey. As integration cannot be achieved in isolation, the section concludes with proposals on how the development of passenger rail services can be integrated with the roles of local authorities and SPT, cross-border train operating companies and rail freight operators. It is outlined that Local and Joint Transport Strategies should show a clear appreciation of the realities of developing railways based on ongoing dialogue with the industry itself and equally, the rail industry should be fully conversant with the policies of local authorities. Finally, the document discusses ways for the industry to secure investment and demonstrate value for money.

COMMENTS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR AYRSHIRE

- 6 In general, an opportunity to comment on the Scottish Executive's strategic priorities for the passenger rail network over the next 20 years should be welcomed. The approved Ayrshire Joint Structure Plan and three Ayrshire Local Transport Strategy documents have similar objectives in seeking to encourage greater use of the rail network by passengers and integrating rail with other modes of transport. In 1999, a transportation component was included in the remit of the Ayrshire Joint Structure Plan Committee and the Ayrshire Transport Group was formed in order to link transport with other strategic policies within Ayrshire and to adhere to the Government's wish to see partnerships at work. Specifically, the Structure Plan seeks to consider further investment in the rail network to increase capacity, encourage interchange between different types of transport, consider new stations and retain and improve rail services.
- 7 In order to meet Ayrshire's strategic rail-related objectives, a number of initiatives are sought by the Ayrshire authorities. A number of Railtrack's proposed Incremental Output Statements such as reducing journey times between Glasgow and Ayr to 45 minutes, supplying longer trains to reduce overcrowding and providing a regular half-hourly service between Glasgow and Kilmarnock should help to encourage modal shift from road to rail. In particular, an enhancement to the Barrhead/Kilmarnock line should be completed in conjunction with the opening of the extended M77 in order to reduce further commuting by road. Enhanced links, including a greater frequency, between Ayr and Irvine to Kilmarnock should also be considered in order to allow for better access to labour markets across Ayrshire. The increased train frequency on the Ayr/Glasgow route is welcomed and should be seen as a positive step towards attracting new passengers to rail. However, the projected growth in passengers through Prestwick Airport could have

implications on the capacity of this line and this should be taken into account when planning for future provision on the route. Appendix 1 shows aspirations for future new railway stations in Ayrshire, including those contained in the three authorities' Local Transport Strategies and SPT's Public Transport Strategy.

- 8 As increased frequency, longer trains and shorter journey times are the Executive's principal priorities for attracting customers to rail, such existing proposals should help to raise the profile of rail in Ayrshire. However, it should be emphasised that resources must be available for lengthening platforms at some stations if nine car sets are to be introduced. In addition, in line with Government guidance and the Structure Plan policy to improve rail freight links to and from Ayrshire, it should also be stressed that any enhancements to passenger services should not be planned in isolation to the detriment of the rail freight industry. As further rail freight initiatives in Ayrshire are anticipated, it is suggested that freight and passenger service operators as well as other key players such as Railtrack and SPT liaise closely when forward planning in order to avoid difficulties between each sector.
- 9 The Ayrshire authorities support a partnership approach between the rail industry and other sectors as outlined in the document. The Ayrshire Transport Group as well as Ayrshire's role in the WESTRANS partnership are good examples of how authorities are already interacting with key players to enhance sustainable methods of transport and encourage integration. The concept in the document of promoting railway stations as focal points for local economic development, retail activity or community regeneration is supported and could be pursued through local enterprise in association with the individual local authority and the rail industry.

CONCLUSION

- 10 To conclude, the Scottish Executive's aspirations to attract more passengers, achieve full integration and secure more investment in the Scottish rail industry are supported. The impending enhanced Ayrshire service, along with a number of IOS schemes should help to raise the profile of rail in Ayrshire although a significant amount of additional investment is fundamental if rail is to compete adequately with road, particularly in light of the approved M77 extension. The Ayrshire Structure Plan states that the three Ayrshire Councils shall work with the surrounding authorities and supporting agencies to improve rail freight links to and from Ayrshire. It should be highlighted that any improvements to passenger services should not be to the detriment of this policy. Finally, as illustrated by existing joint working such as WESTRANS and the Ayrshire Transport Group, a partnership approach to implement strategic policy is welcomed and authorities would wish to see more interaction with the rail industry in the future.

RECOMMENDATION

11 It is recommended the Committee:

- (i) note the contents of this report; and
- (ii) submit this report as a response to the Scottish Executive on the consultation document 'Strategic Priorities for Scotland's Passenger Railway'.

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APPENDIX 1

Aspirations for Future New Railway Stations in Ayrshire

North Ayrshire Council Local Transport Strategy

- **Ardrossan North (Montfode)**
- **Largs Marina/Kelburn Country Park**
- **South Gailes**

East Ayrshire Council Local Transport Strategy

- **Mauchline**
- **Altonhill (West Kilmarnock)**
- **Queens Drive/East Kilmarnock**

South Ayrshire Council Local Transport Strategy Plan

- **Ayr Hospital**
- **Heathfield**

Strathclyde Passenger Transport Public Transport Strategy

- **Development of 3 new railway stations on SPT network (unspecified)**

Additionally, in conjunction with the M77 extension, further rail enhancements along an A77/M77 multi-modal corridor might include new stations at:-

- **Cumnock** (East Ayrshire)
- **Belmont/Alloway** (South Ayrshire)