



Scottish Council for  
Development and Industry

## POLICY SUBMISSION

### NETWORK RAIL SCOTLAND RAIL ROUTE UTILISATION STRATEGY

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SCDI is an independent and inclusive economic development network which seeks to influence and inspire government and key stakeholders with our ambitious vision to create shared sustainable economic prosperity for Scotland.

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## Scotland Rail Route Utilisation Strategy

1. SCDI is an independent membership network that strengthens Scotland's competitiveness by influencing Government policies to encourage sustainable economic prosperity. SCDI's membership includes businesses, trades unions, local authorities, educational institutions, the voluntary sector and faith groups.

### Introduction

2. SCDI's *Blueprint for Scotland* is our vision for the Scottish economy and it highlights 21<sup>st</sup> century connectivity of our infrastructure as a policy priority. SCDI welcomes the improvements to the Scottish rail network in recent years and Network Rail is to be congratulated on the delivery of the Airdrie-Bathgate scheme. The *Blueprint* also welcomes proposals identified in the Scottish Government's Strategic Projects Review for rail infrastructure projects, including electrification, and highlights the Edinburgh – Glasgow Improvement Programme which is being progressed by Network Rail. However, apart from it, we do raise concerns about a lack of detail over the timing of the delivery of many other projects. Clarity in the programme of works, including funding mechanisms, enables the construction industry to plan, train and invest accordingly, and its involvement at an early stage of all projects encourages value engineering and sensible contracts, and avoids expenditure on repetitive procurement processes. Improvements have been prioritised for the Highland Main Line and Aberdeen – Inverness, but electrification to the North is not scheduled for over 20 years. SCDI believes that with Scotland projected to generate ten times the renewable energy it consumes, and challenging climate change targets for 2050, there should be a more ambitious programme of electrification and investment in improving line speeds on the Scottish rail network. The *Blueprint* suggests that the next phases should be between Central Scotland and Dundee, including the Fife Circle, and around Aberdeen and Inverness, from where it should be extended.
3. The *Blueprint* identifies priorities for freight on key routes such as Glasgow-Inverness, Caithness/ Elgin/ Aberdeen – South, and Fort William – Mossend.
4. SCDI therefore welcomes consultation on the Scotland Route Utilisation Strategy (Generation Two) and offers the following comments and recommendations.

### Methodologies and Forecasting Approach

5. Growth in passenger numbers in Scotland in the last ten years has been underestimated by the Passenger Demand Forecasting Handbook methodology. In the Route Utilisation Strategy, two methodologies are used to develop alternative scenarios for the future, one in which growth returns to a level predicted by standard methodologies, the other in which strong growth continues. SCDI believes that increasingly strong rail passenger demand is most likely. Options development should take into account forecasting exercises for demand

which will be undertaken, for example by Regional Transport Partnerships, and local authority's land use strategies, particularly in and around rail corridors, many of which contain significant plans for population growth and house-building.

6. The Route Utilisation Strategic provides specific figures for growth scenarios for the Glasgow conurbation (24-38%) and the Edinburgh conurbation (90-115%) by 2024/25. Although it is stated that strong growth and crowding is forecast outside the Central Belt, similar information is not included for Scotland's other cities or interurban routes. This makes it difficult to assess whether the options which are proposed for these services will be sufficient to accommodate demand and take advantage of opportunities to grow the commuter market, such as into Aberdeen.
7. The Route Utilisation Strategy is based on methodologies which focus on numbers of passenger journeys and levels of crowding rather than on the average distance travelled by passengers and service quality. They may not therefore fully assess the benefits of improvements to non-suburban journeys.
8. SCDI believes that Scottish and UK transport models should be reviewed to improve their accuracy in quantifying the real economic benefits of investment and alignment between economic growth strategies and Network Rail's priorities.

### **Gaps**

9. The Route Utilisation Strategy has a narrow definition of a gap which focuses on existing provision. As a result, it does not appear to assess opportunities for new stations or the reopening of mothballed lines (even though a number are marked in the maps of its geographic scope) for freight and/ or passenger services.

### **Ticketing and Integration**

10. The draft Route Utilisation Strategy mentions that "steps may be taken to encourage staggering working hours in Edinburgh, Glasgow and other major centres – perhaps incentivised by fares policy". SCDI agrees that further steps to encourage peak spreading and efficient use of rail infrastructure should be explored, including a review of fares policy to assess the impact on all markets.
11. The roll-out of smart ticketing, integration of the rail network with other transport modes and networks, and investment in facilities which improving the travelling experience for passengers, whether from Scotland or visitors, is clearly important in maximising the benefits of infrastructure investment for the Scottish economy.

### **30 Year Vision**

12. SCDI welcomes the intention to suggest a 30-year vision, but questions whether the schemes which are identified represent a sufficiently ambitious vision Scotland's rail network to 2040. It appreciates that this is not a Route Development Strategy. However, consideration of more visionary schemes for the longer-term may help to identify gaps. Recommendations for electrification in

the Scottish Government's Strategic Transport Projects Review were very positive, but SCDI hopes that an accelerated programme can be developed.

### **Gaps and Options – Glasgow Conurbation**

13. SCDI broadly welcomes the options proposed to increase peak capacity and services. Further electrification of the Glasgow network and additional capacity on the Argyle and Whifflet lines would help to address overcrowding on the routes. SCDI was disappointed by the cancellation of the Glasgow Airport Rail Link project and it remains supportive of proposals to improve rail connectivity across the city. It hopes that both concepts can be developed in the future.

### **Gaps and Options – Edinburgh Conurbation**

14. SCDI generally welcomes the options to improve services from Fife, through train lengthening and new stopping patterns, and from East Lothian, although it hopes that connectivity to Haymarket from the North Berwick line can be maintained. The optimal solution for crowding on North Berwick services should ultimately be higher density three-car rolling stock which can be strengthened to six cars.

### **Peak Capacity at Inverness**

15. Network Rail assesses the option of providing an additional peak service between Inverness and Dingwall to reduce crowding, but concludes that it does not produce adequate benefits to justify the costs. SCDI believes that Network Rail should assess the option of increasing the carriages on the crowded service.

### **Peak Capacity Aberdeen Commuting**

16. The Route Utilisation Strategy states that services operating to and from Aberdeen in the morning and evening peak are forecast to be overcrowded by 2019. However, SCDI understands that it would already appear to be a feature of some services. As previously mentioned, SCDI believes that the forecasts for 2019 on journeys to and from Aberdeen may underestimate potential for growth. A key objective of the Aberdeen City and Shire Structure Plan, approved by the Scottish Government, is for 9% population growth in the region over the next 24 years, especially in the Huntly-Aberdeen-Laurencekirk rail and road corridor.
17. Network Rail does not recommend train lengthening of Aberdeen services to and from Glasgow, Edinburgh and Inverness or additional services between Dyce and Aberdeen to reduce overcrowding because of the costs involved in each. A new north bay platform at Aberdeen Station and an additional service between Stonehaven and Aberdeen in the morning peak are both recommended to close gaps, both of which are welcomed by SCDI. However, further options - including between Dyce and Aberdeen – needed to be considered and solutions identified.

### **Edinburgh – Glasgow**

18. SCDI strongly welcomes the investment in improved services between Edinburgh and Glasgow. The successful completion of the Airdrie – Bathgate project and the Edinburgh - Glasgow Improvements Programme will significantly improve the competitiveness of the Scottish economy. Electrification of Edinburgh – Glasgow via Falkirk High and the routes to Cumbernauld, Grangemouth, Stirling, Dunblane and Alloa will deliver a step change in peak passenger capacity and journey times by 2016. While also welcoming the introduction of semi-fast services via Shotts, SCDI hopes that longer-term options which would enable further reductions in journey times, such as electrification, will be assessed.

### **Aberdeen – Inverness**

19. Increased frequencies and faster journey times between Aberdeen and Inverness is one of SCDI's key five transport priorities for the Highlands and Islands, and for the North East. SCDI hopes for an hourly frequency and, with track infrastructure upgrades, a 20 minute reduction in journey times. We also support new stations and higher local frequencies for commuters into both cities.

20. Network Rail's report on Aberdeen – Inverness improvements had been due for publication last year and SCDI hopes that it will be made available shortly. SCDI notes that options for rebuilding Forres station, extending the loop at Keith, improvements at Inveramsay and potential for a new station at Kintore are mentioned in the draft Route Utilisation Strategy, but that no reference is made to a Dalcross loop and station, which we understand are also part of the project. With these upgrades, resignalling of the entire route should also be considered.

### **Aberdeen - Central Belt**

21. SCDI is disappointed that recasting one service per hour between Aberdeen and both Edinburgh and Glasgow as an express service is not recommended due to the impact on freight services and passengers at intermediate stations; and that – based on current passenger numbers - additional infrastructure on the Montrose – Usan section in order to reduce journey times on the route is said not to be recommendable due to the high cost of construction and operating costs.

22. The Scottish Government's Strategic Transport Projects Review identifies 29 transport investment priorities for the next 20 years. These are the recommendations which most effectively contribute towards increasing sustainable economic growth. Rail service enhancements between Aberdeen and the Central Belt which reduce journey times are highlighted by the Scottish Government as a transport investment priority as they would allow travellers to achieve an effective working day when travelling between Scotland's four largest cities. This underlines the strategic importance of this intervention to the network and the Scottish economy, with potential benefits which are greater and more widespread than can be analysed from *current passenger numbers* on the route.

23. Reduced journey times on improved infrastructure have been identified as a national priority and SCDI believes that options to deliver them must be found.

Further work is clearly required by Network Rail to identify costed infrastructure options, with delivery plans, for the Scottish Government. It will then be for Ministers to determine and fund which best supports their strategic objectives.

24. SCDI recognises the concerns about the impact of the option assessed to recast hourly services on the existing infrastructure as express services on freight operations during the day and on passengers at intermediary stations. It suggests that, while improved infrastructure is not yet available, Network Rail also considers alternative specifications for local and longer distance trains, potentially with express services only at the times of day which would be of greatest benefits to businesses, thus supporting the objective “to achieve an effective working day” when travelling between Aberdeen and the Central Belt.
25. One of the options to remove the constraint at Montrose – Usan – diverting the railway via the old solum through Friockheim - is discounted partly because it would bypass Montrose. If express services do not stop at Montrose in any case this would appear to have less of a negative impact as stopping services between Aberdeen - Dundee could continue to run on the existing infrastructure. This option is also said to have been discounted because of the highest costs. Without knowing them, it is hard to assess whether these are far greater, or might be justified by potential benefits – such as maintaining a clear path for freight and/ or negating the need for any construction over the Montrose Basin.

### **Inverness – Central Belt**

26. Improved journey times and frequencies between Inverness and the Central Belt is one of SCDI’s five key transport priorities for the Highlands and Islands. SCDI welcomes the announcement in the Scottish Budget of two additional services. Our aspirations are for an hourly frequency and express services in the shorter-term, with track infrastructure improvements and new rolling stock subsequently further reducing journey times to two and a half/ two and three quarter hours.
27. Analysis within the Route Utilisation Strategy on how to speed up journey times has been passed to the development project considering the Highland Main Line. SCDI welcomes the option assessed for linespeed upgrades and additional passing loops, which it believes will bring benefits for passengers and freight.
28. In order that passengers on Highland Main Line services can more conveniently connect to Aberdeen-Glasgow and Perth-Edinburgh trains at Perth, the existing station layout should be remodelled to facilitate interchanging between platforms.

### **Strategic Gaps – Rural**

29. The costs of schemes and the journey times reductions they would produce are assessed as not justifying capital spend to increase speeds on rural routes.
30. The draft Route Utilisation Strategy highlights the benefits for rural communities of improving journey times, including accessibility and increasing access to

services and opportunities in larger centres. However, in the last ten years, safety regulations have actually decreased speeds on sections of these routes. Scotland's rural economy has been forecast to experience strong growth due, in particular, to opportunities in tourism, food and drink, and renewable energy. SCDI believes that investment is overdue to modernise these routes and maximise their benefits to the rural economy and communities, and that options should be developed which, at least, return journey times to previous performance. The existing signalling on rural routes will need to be replaced at some stage and fibre optic cabling may enable the provision of further capacity.

## **Freight**

31. The options recommended by Network Rail are all to be welcomed. Enhanced gauge clearance on the East Coast Main Line will provide an alternative to the West Coast Main Line for cross-border freight services and improve connections between freight facilities in the Central Belt and gateway ports in eastern and southern England. This will be beneficial as Scotland and the UK prioritise increasing exports, and it will encourage modal shift from road to rail. Gauge clearance in Scotland must be linked to enhancements in northern England.
32. Electrification of the Whifflet and Shotts line may also offer opportunities to increase the options for access to central Scotland freight terminals, providing diversionary routes, reducing journey times, creating new opportunities for modal shift to rail freight and reducing pressure on the West Coast Main Line.
33. The recommendation that overnight freight services to Inverness on the Highlands Main Line are enabled by undertaking overnight maintenance one week in six and operating services via Dundee and Aberdeen on those nights is a practical way to increase freight services to Inverness which SCDI supports.
34. However, SCDI believes that Network Rail should also develop infrastructure options to increase freight capacity on the Highland Main Line to improve access to Mossend, Grangemouth and Rosyth freight terminals, and enable modal shift.
35. Options to address the constraints on efficient freight operation due to the limited loop lengths on the West Highland Line from Fort William should be assessed.

## **Strategic Gaps – Anglo Scottish**

36. The Scotland Route Utilisation Strategy must be closely aligned with the strategies for the West Coast Main Line and East Coast Main Line and with the plans for High Speed 2. SCDI will be responding to the consultations on them.
37. Capacity and competitive journey times on Anglo Scottish routes are key priorities for Scottish business and tourism due to the size of the UK market.
38. SCDI strongly supports the construction of a dedicated high speed rail line between London and Glasgow/ Edinburgh. As Network Rail has shown in its

reports, inclusion of Scotland within the high speed rail route is necessary to maximise the economic and environmental benefits of this major investment. SCDI accepts that it will be delivered in phases and has called on the UK and Scottish Governments to work together to begin planning the route in Scotland.

39. SCDI believes that, given the timescales for the full high speed route, investment in the existing West and East Coast Main Lines must continue to increase capacity and reduce journey times. Projects could also facilitate the delivery of high speed rail. One suggestion would be to begin construction of the high speed route between Glasgow and Carstairs at an early stage, reducing conflicts between local and Anglo-Scottish trains, and improving the Carstairs junction.

### **Overnight Service between Glasgow and Edinburgh**

40. SCDI welcomes the recommendation that services between Glasgow and Edinburgh start one hour earlier. It notes that the operational analysis from Network Rail is that an all night service would have to use alternative routes to allow maintenance access to the main routes. It is therefore assumed that it would run non-stop. This would reduce demand and Network Rail concludes that the socio-economic business case cannot be recommended for implementation.
41. SCDI agrees that these services have the potential to increase opportunities to access employment and benefits the cities' cultural, events and tourism sectors.
42. The new Airdrie-Bathgate route has, largely, only recently been constructed or upgraded. The need for maintenance access is therefore likely to be reduced which would allow for all night stopping services on this line. New rolling stock will also become available to increase services on the route. SCDI supports the proposal that Network Rail takes advantage of this unique opportunity to trial late night/ all night stopping services between Glasgow and Edinburgh on the Airdrie-Bathgate route to gauge the level of demand and socio-economic benefits.

### **Terminal Capacity**

43. SCDI welcomes the recommendation to protect land for an additional platform at Glasgow Queen Street. Longer-term decisions on increased or new terminal capacity for high-speed trains are vital for the cities and for Scotland. Both local authorities must be fully involved in consideration of the options. The locations which are selected must allow for good interchange with rail services to the North and local services. Access to the existing Scottish rail network must be taken into account when assessing the location and capacity of high speed rail terminals.

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