

Ministerial Statement on Borders Rail Link

Wednesday 5th March 2008, 2.00pm
Briefing from TRANSform Scotland

1. Introduction

The closure of the Waverley Route in 1969 was one of the most severe and ill-judged of the Beeching-era cuts. We believe that reinstating a railway to the Borders will bring real and lasting benefits not only to the people of that area, but also to Midlothian and the rest of South-East Scotland. It is therefore welcome that efforts are belatedly being taken to correct this error.

Over the past decade, there has been a vigorous campaign for the reinstatement of the Waverley Route, commencing with the Campaign for Borders Rail's 17,000-strong petition to Parliament in 1999, and concluding with the Waverley Railway (Scotland) Bill receiving Royal Assent in June 2006.

2. Benefits of reinstating the Waverley Route

The Waverley Railway Project would bring the Borders back on to the railway map. There are no railway stations in the Borders or Midlothian, and the Borders is the only mainland region of Britain without a rail service.

The Waverley Railway (a.k.a. "Waverley Route" or "Borders Rail") would reduce car dependence. The promoters have asserted that the project will cut car journeys "by more than 700,000 per year". As well as reducing emissions, this would reduce traffic levels on the A7 and A68.

The project will also improve safety for travellers. Rail is ten times safer than car travel.

The project will have significant tourism benefits. The Waverley Railway will enable the millions of visitors who come to Edinburgh every year to spend a day in the Borders by utilising a fast and high-quality public transport service.

Finally, it is essential that we future-proof our transport systems to take account of the combined challenges of climate change and peak oil. Firstly, it is well known that transport is the fastest-growing source of climate change emissions. Secondly, oil depletion is making more expensive; this is leading the UK to be becoming increasingly dependent on imports of oil, often from unstable parts of the world. As such, we need to give people real alternatives to the car and other carbon-intensive modes of transport.

3. Funding

In recent years, many rail schemes in Scotland have been delayed because funding gaps have appeared, or because there has been conflict (often due to the complexities of the privatised rail industry) over who is responsible for project costs.

It is therefore imperative that the Scottish Government sets out a clear funding package for the Waverley Railway Project.

4. Possible extensions to existing scheme

It has been a long-standing desire of many, including Scottish Borders Council, to see the full reinstatement of the Waverley Route southwards through to Carlisle, in order to provide a third long-distance rail route from Scotland to England.

On a somewhat smaller scale, it would be welcome to see the Waverley Route extended at an early stage an extra 1.5 miles from Tweedbank to Melrose, thereby providing a direct rail link to this important tourist centre.

5. Conclusions

We urge a prompt start to construction of the Waverley Route. There is much talk in transport circles about "missing links" – many of which are nothing of the sort – but this is one scheme that is manifestly required. It is unjust that the Borders has been left with no rail services, and it is important that steps are taken to correct this situation as soon as possible.

TRANSform Scotland is the national sustainable transport alliance, campaigning for a more sustainable and socially-just transport system. Our membership includes bus, rail and shipping operators; local authorities; national environment and conservation groups; consultancies; and local transport campaigns.

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