

TRANSform Scotland

the campaign for sustainable transport

Lib Dem debate on the Waverley Route

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Briefing from TRANSform Scotland

1. Introduction

TRANSform Scotland strongly supports the reopening of the Waverley Route. We believe that this project should proceed as a matter of urgency.

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.

TRANSform Scotland therefore welcomes the continuing Scottish Government support for the scheme.

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 Route (a.k.a. "Waverley Railway" 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 Route 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.

3. Future-proofing our transport systems

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 transport more expensive; this is leading the UK to be becoming increasingly dependent on imports of oil, often from unstable parts of the world.

Given these challenges, it is essential that priority is given to investment in alternatives to the car and other carbon-intensive modes of transport. We believe that the Waverley Route would make an important contribution to this task.

4. Funding

We currently have no position on the merits of the project being procured using a non-profit distributing vehicle ("NPD"). Our concern is that this project, after a number of years of limited progress, is now brought to fruition as a matter of urgency.

We have previously raised the concern that, 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. Providing that this matter can be prevented from reoccurring, we are content with the proposal to pursue procurement via NPD.

We note that the project is now costed at £235-295m at 2013 prices. However, we would observe that even this increased price is less than half of that of the M74 Northern Extension – and instead of 5 miles of damaging urban motorway, the Waverley Route will deliver a 35-mile sustainable transport link connecting the Borders and Midlothian to Edinburgh and the rest of the Scottish mainline railway.

5. Enhancements to the 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.

We would like to see double-tracking of the route between Edinburgh and Gorebridge to allow adequate capacity for commuter trains on this part of the route to run in tandem with regional trains from the central Borders to Edinburgh. This would allow improved journey times for trips between the Borders and Edinburgh – which would provide opportunities for a more competitive service than the 55 minute end-to-end journey time currently being proposed.

We would also like 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.

6. 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.

TRANSform Scotland
5 Rose Street, Edinburgh, EH2 2PR
t: 0131 243 2690

e: <info@transformscotland.org.uk>
w: <www.transformscotland.org.uk>