PARLIAMENTARY BRIEFING
Edinburgh South Suburban Railway

Members' Business – S4M-14678 Jim Eadie: Reinstatement of the Edinburgh South Suburban Railway, Wednesday 3 February 2016
Joint briefing from Capital Rail Action (CRAG) and Transform Scotland

1. Introduction

1.1. The Capital Rail Action Group and Transform Scotland welcome today's debate by Jim Eadie MSP on re-using Edinburgh's South Suburban Railway line to serve local passenger transport needs.

1.2. The Edinburgh South Suburban Railway (or 'South Sub') is a railway line maintained to high Network Rail standards and carrying both freight and occasional passenger trains. It is also a line proposed for electrification. It therefore makes little sense that it should stand idle for much of the day - whilst around it our capital city becomes increasingly congested and polluted.

1.3. The success of recent rail re-openings has shown the appetite of the public for rail transport. These re-openings have served to increase the choice available to those accessing our towns and cities - and to decrease their journey times.

1.4. It is now time for those benefits to be also applied within our growing capital city - where around half a million folk live and where current choice is largely limited to on-road modes along congested streets. We all know the frustrations of travelling around Edinburgh.

1.5. Tram-train technology is not new - it has a proven track record on the continent. We are happy that it will soon be a technology applied here in the UK (between Sheffield and Rotherham).

1.6. The use of tram-trains on the South Suburban railway neatly circumvents the main operational argument made against the return of local passenger services on the line in that such a tram-train service would not require to occupy the already congested heavy rail tracks between Waverley and Haymarket station - tracks dedicated to those travelling to and from the city rather than within it.

1.7. Indeed, tram-trains would deliver passengers on-street in the city centre where, for the most part, they really want to be.

1.8. Tram-trains on the South Suburban would offer an innovative expansion of current tram provision in the city, opening up new public transport opportunities and involving very little disruption to bring about.

1.9. Re-opening the line to local passenger has always been a very popular option with Edinburgh citizens.

1.10. Additionally, such a scheme may well attract private sector funding - E-Rail Ltd, through securing Voluntary Contribution Agreements with developers along the route of the South Suburban, expected to raise between £6,000,000 and £7,875,000 towards the cost of re-introducing passenger services back in 2007.

1.11. The whole point of the exercise is not about transport and shiny new vehicles *per se*, of course. It's about making the city a better place to live, work and play in. It's about a better overall economy.

1.12. Buses will rightly have a large role to play in that scenario - but not exclusively so. This is, in fact, a point recognised by Ian Craig, the Managing Director of Lothian Buses, in written evidence to the Scottish Parliament in 2007 when he said that re-opening the South Sub. would "provide a fast inner orbital service, capable of by-passing known congestion black spots" and "would undoubtedly improve connectivity and support sustainable development which, if properly developed and integrated with [Lothian Buses'] services, would be a welcome step forward and one we would support".[1]

1.13. Thus, if you travel by bus from Haymarket to Cameron Toll, for instance, it will currently take you between 25 and 32 minutes (according to Traveline Scotland) - with an additional 3 minutes walking time at the end. Tram-trains would do this journey in around 15 minutes. This time saving would, of course, also be seen with respect to journeys continuing on-street by tram-train to the Royal Infirmary.

1.14. Similarly, Traveline Scotland reckons that journeying from Haymarket to Morningside should take 19 minutes - but 7 minutes of this involves walking from Haymarket to Tollcross. That's an option not available to all. Trains used to take 10 minutes for this journey.

1.15. Local passenger services on the South Suburban railway line have been absent for over 50 years now. It's time for our nation's capital city to join the growing movement towards rail transport to help to meet the needs of our daily living in an attractive, sustainable and efficient way.

2. About CRAG

2.1. Capital Rail Action Group (CRAG) is Edinburgh's rail campaign. For over twenty years, it has been campaigning for better public transport, in particular rail and light rail development, in South-East Scotland. See <http://www.capitalrail.org.uk> for more details.

3. About Transform Scotland

3.1. Transform Scotland is the national alliance for sustainable transport, bringing together organisations from the private, public and voluntary sectors. We campaign for a society where everyone can have their travel needs met within the limits of a transport system that is environmentally sustainable, socially inclusive and economically responsible. Transform Scotland Limited is a registered Scottish charity (SC041516). See <http://www.transformscotland.org.uk> for more details.

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[1] Previously available on the Parliament's website at www.scottish.parliament/uk/business/petitions/docs/PE1080.him