



A STRATEGIC VISION FOR BORDERS RAIL – ONWARDS TO HAWICK

Campaign for Borders Rail briefing for Scottish Cabinet meeting 20/08/13

1. Introduction

The Campaign for Borders Rail (CBR) welcomes the occasion of the Scottish Cabinet meeting in Hawick. With construction of the new Borders Railway well under way, the visit is an important opportunity to re-emphasise the major role that the new railway will play in the economic rejuvenation of the region, putting right a long-standing social injustice and giving the Borders a safe and sustainable link with Scotland's capital.

While one Borders MSP has sought to portray this important new link as 'the Galashiels railway', in practice the new line will bring significant benefits to people in Hawick, Melrose, Selkirk, St Boswells and beyond, through the new bus-rail interchange at Galashiels and park-and-ride facilities at Tweedbank.

2. Hawick – the big loser from closure of the Waverley Route

When the 98-mile Waverley Route from Edinburgh to Carlisle via the Borders was closed by the Labour Government on 6th January 1969, it left Hawick further from the rail network than any other town of its size in Britain, and the town has retained that unwelcome status ever since. A train service taking around 1¼ hours to Edinburgh was replaced by buses which needed 2¼ hours to negotiate the 51 miles up the A7 to the capital.

Today, public transport from Hawick to Edinburgh – still provided by a basic bus rather than an express coach, and taking 2 hours 7 minutes – is slower than it was in 1901. Hawick's population has declined – it has now lost the status of largest town in the Borders to Galashiels – and a large part of the Burnfoot district of Hawick is included in the 15% 'Most Deprived Areas' of Scotland. A third of households in the town do not have access to a car.

Two generations of Hawick people have missed out on the opportunities for access to education, employment and involvement in rail-based tourism which they would have enjoyed if the railway to Edinburgh had not been closed in 1969.

There will of course be a significant improvement in the public transport journey time from Hawick to Edinburgh when the Borders Railway opens – around 1 hour 40 minutes, half an hour quicker than at present – but this will not yield the step-change in journey time reduction and overall quality of service which Galashiels, Stow and Tweedbank will enjoy from 2015. An express rail service from Hawick to Edinburgh could complete the journey in just over an hour, transforming the town's accessibility and attraction.

3. Building a strategic vision – onwards by rail to Hawick

Past experience of Scottish rail re-openings suggests that the Borders Railway will be a big success – and it is important that planning should begin now to build on that success.

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Page 1 of 2



It is just 18 miles along the old rail corridor from the future Tweedbank station to the heart of Hawick (population 14,000). A new railway would also serve Melrose (a key centre of Borders tourism, with a population of 3,000) and St Boswells / Newtown St Boswells (pop. 2000 and HQ of Scottish Borders Council), and potentially a railhead for Kelso and Jedburgh).

A lack of strategic vision from the 1970s to the 1990s has resulted in a number of breaches of the old Waverley Route by new roads between Tweedbank and St Boswells. However, there are several viable options for new alignments where necessary to reinstate the railway. South of St Boswells, while some former railway bridges over roads have been removed, almost all of the old alignment remains in situ. In the centre of Hawick, there is room for a new station conveniently located adjacent to the Leisure Centre which was built on the site of the old railway station.

The existing Scottish Borders Local Plan provides for protection of the alignment of the former Waverley Route, and the Draft Strategic Development Plan for South East Scotland (SESplan) recommends that the forthcoming new Local Development Plan for the Scottish Borders should safeguard land for extension of the Borders Railway to Hawick and Carlisle. However, this safeguarding needs to ensure that where necessary (for example, on sections between Tweedbank and St Boswells) potential new alignments of the railway are also protected from inappropriate development.

Hawick, along with the rest of the central Borders, would also greatly benefit from a direct rail link southwards. CBR calls on the Scottish Government to accept our recommendation to the recent National Planning Framework consultation that the full reinstatement of the Borders to Carlisle railway be given 'National Development' status, especially in view of the wider strategic benefits that such a new and appropriate link would deliver.

4. What needs to be done now to develop the strategic vision for Hawick?

We contend that there are three key issues which need to be addressed now by the Scottish Government and Scottish Borders Council, to start planning for onwards extension of the Borders Railway to Hawick:

- i. Scottish Government must urgently review whether the current predominantly single-track Borders Railway specification – which is still being finalised in terms of detailed design – is sufficiently 'future-proofed' to allow for extension to Hawick, for example through scope for cost-effective future lengthening of currently planned sections of double track.
- ii. Scottish Government and Scottish Borders Council should commission a STAG (Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance) analysis of the cost and benefits (economic, environmental and social) – of an 18-mile rail extension from Tweedbank to Hawick, also serving Melrose and Newtown St Boswells.
- iii. Scottish Borders Council should ensure that the Local Development Plan's safeguarding of land for extension of the Borders Railway on from Tweedbank to Hawick and Carlisle also protects sections of potential new alignment of the railway from inappropriate development.

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Page 2 of 2