



CNER submission to Scotrail Regional Roundtable. (North East)

24th March 2023

Service Provision

Providing for late night leisure travel

By far the most frequent comment in regards to service was the lack of late night services. The main barrier preventing people using the train for leisure travel is access to appropriate return services. Currently, all local trains arrive back into Aberdeen by midnight, and the intercity trains are back in Aberdeen by 0030. If the goal is attractive leisure travel, then services should be provided to allow people to travel home safely after a night out in the City. This means final services on a Friday and Saturday should depart Aberdeen after 0100, if not later.

Additionally, many responses reported the impossibility of taking the train home to Aberdeen from the Central Belt after attending music gigs, theatre or sporting events. These events typically end close to 2300. Last train to Aberdeen departs Edinburgh at 2131, and Glasgow 2140. A single hour later, 2240, would be enough to attract many gig goers, or 2330 would serve all events of this type. General consensus was that NE locals were happy to travel back late to attend these shows, particularly when Glasgow or Edinburgh are frequently the furthest north these shows go.

Providing for Sporting Events

A lot of responses featured comments on sporting events. Many are frustrated at how tightly packed trains become during major sporting events, both attendees and people who regularly use the trains who do not attend these events mentioned the problem. Solutions suggested were additional 'special' services with limited stops and tickets sold in advance (e.g. A train with stops Aberdeen-Dundee-Haymarket only), or strengthened units. Particular mention was made of Rugby events, and how trains leave Edinburgh already full and standing, then receive significant delays at Haymarket. A solution could be certain trains skipping Haymarket, while others begin at Haymarket Platform 0.

Providing Services on Sunday

Similarly to how people can't get the train socially because there's no train home, there is also a lack of provision for return journeys that would facilitate a weekend away with family or friends. All efforts should be made to work with unions and agree for Sunday to operate as a Saturday service, or Scotrail should provide the service at cost under the existing arrangement. For example, on Sunday, the earliest one can arrive in Inverness from Aberdeen is 1215, this makes attending football games at Caledonian (Thistle) Stadium impossible by train. Shops open from 1000 on Sunday, but first train arrivals in Aberdeen are after midday, as a result, Scotrail is handing weekend shoppers to other forms of public transport or private car usage. Trains on Sunday should start circa 0700.

Providing for Holiday Makers

Aberdeen Airport is not served by Dyce Station at all. The station is on the opposite side of the airfield than the terminal, there is no shuttle bus, and a taxi from Dyce Station to Aberdeen Airport costs similarly to a taxi/bus from Aberdeen City centre. This is not a problem Scotrail can resolve currently. However, many, if not most North East residents choose not to fly from Aberdeen Airport directly. This is due to a number of factors, including availability of routes and cost. Therefore, there is a market for Scotrail to capture serving North East travellers heading to Inverness, and Edinburgh Airports. Many responses highlighted that trains do not arrive at Inverness Airport station in time for early flights from the Airport. This is a particular concern for return flights arriving on a Sunday. In Edinburgh, responders highlighted that connections could be improved. Currently, travellers using Edinburgh Gateway Station for Edinburgh Airport from stations Dundee to Aberdeen can either change in Dundee to catch a 'local' Edinburgh service, extending their travel time significantly, or, travel to Haymarket to backtrack, catching a tram, or 'local' Fife Circle or Dundee service that serves Edinburgh Gateway. This is also an issue for International (or English) Students travelling to and from St Andrews. Since every express Aberdeen service stops at Leuchars, providing an additional stop at Edinburgh Gateway (i.e. all express Aberdeen-Edinburgh trains should stop Dundee-Leuchars-Gateway-Haymarket) will significantly improve connections to and from the Airport for many up and down the East Coast.

Providing for locals north of Aberdeen

Scotrail run an empty set to Huntly in the morning to capture commuters, but don't run one to Huntly at night with an empty return for revellers. Why not? The last train to Inverurie should continue through to Huntly, and be much later. Similarly, there should be more local services that run through to Huntly, rather than stop at Inverurie. Existing dual track Inch-Kennethmont makes this possible in terms of frequency, and should mirror the Inverness-Elgin service.



Pricing

Local Services

Glasgow to Hamilton £4.40 15miles

Inverurie to Aberdeen £6.20 16miles

Prices overall are too high, general consensus is a wholesale reduction in prices would result in an increase in foot-fall. However, even without an overall reduction, local services should be charged at local prices. See the example above. Montrose-Aberdeen-Huntly should be charged at a lower rate to encourage day returns, or offers should be given across this route, such as Fife's £5 deal of previous years.

Infrastructure

Step Free Access

Insch Platform 2 has no step free access. Stations which do have step free access, but no lift bridge, should be fitted with signage or maps to direct passengers to the step-free route. (e.g. Stonehaven via Arduthie Road, Inverurie via Oldmeldrum Road).

Level Boarding

With an entire fleet replacement on the horizon for the North East, Scotrail should be lobbying Transport Scotland and ScotGov to undertake the investigations **now** to understand what works are required to implement network wide level boarding, such that Scotland's Railway is not locked out of the provision for decades to come.

Plusbus and Integration

Accessing towns nearby the rail network is extremely difficult in the North East without access to a car. Scotrail should work with bus companies and councils to use the PlusBus framework to provide integrated Train-Bus connections such that much more of the area can be reliably travelled car free. PlusBus is already a good system, but it is implemented in the wrong places, journeys should be shorter, in addition to rail, to allow for proper integration, not entire journeys in and of themselves. PlusBus tickets should be available to buy in all places rail tickets are, and vice versa for bus tickets. Timetables should show connections with buses, and buses should operate as an extension to the railway on these routes, i.e. picking up passengers for onwards connections and dropping off passengers at an awaiting train. Towns that used to have rail connections can be integrated to the network using this system. Examples of suitable integration routes are; Montrose-Brechin, Laurencekirk-Fettercairn-Edzell, Dyce-Airport, Dyce-Newmachar, Kintore-Kemnay-Alford, Inverurie-Oldmeldrum, Keith-Dufftown.

Car Parking

Dyce has inadequate car parking. NESTRANS produced proposals in 2015 but work has not progressed since. CNER have built upon these proposals to provide a solution which we believe better serves the community.

Aberdeen Station Upgrades

Aberdeen Station is a bottleneck that holds the North East back. Only two through roads exist, Platforms 6 & 7. As a result, 80+ hours per week is spent simply shunting trains out of the way for other services. Reintroducing Platform 8 and upgrading the single crossover to a double crossover would be transformative, providing capacity for our aspirations, eliminating this unproductive shunting work, and opening up opportunities for Rail Freight, which is a major STPR2 aim.

New Stations on the existing lines

Cove and Newtonhill should be reconnected to the rail network. NESTRANS undertook a study into the corridor in 2022, but progress has stalled. CNER note that a significant response was provided in favour of rail links by study respondents. Work has also stalled on stations to the north of Aberdeen, previously studied, namely Bankhead for TECA and Don Steet for Aberdeen University, this should be continued. Further consideration should be made to station possibilities in light of targeting of leisure travel, partially reopening Oyne and Kennethmont, even seasonally, or as request stops, will provide rail access to local attractions such as Bennachie, the Ardmores Distillery, and Leith Hall.

New Lines