



Ayr-Stranraer rail regeneration study Final report

Deltix Transport Consulting
for Transform Scotland
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Report commissioned by:



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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The planned switch of ferry services from Stranraer to Cairnryan creates the opportunity for the first time in the Ayr-Stranraer railway's history to gear the train service to the needs of local users, leisure visitors and tourists, rather than through-travellers from Scotland to Northern Ireland.

In December 2007 TRANSform Scotland, the campaign for sustainable transport, commissioned Deltix Transport Consulting to undertake the *Ayr-Stranraer rail regeneration study*. The study has been funded by Passenger Focus, Strathclyde Partnership for Transport ('SPT') and the South West of Scotland Transport Partnership ('SWestrans').

The study has been both desk and field based. 28 organisations represented by more than 40 individuals were consulted – in the rail industry, central & local government and agencies, and other public, private and NGO organisations.

Context – national:

The Scottish Government's agency, Transport Scotland, now has responsibility for the majority of rail powers in Scotland, enabling it to plan future services and target investment.

In December 2006 'Scotland's Railways' was published, setting out Scottish Ministers vision for the rail network over the next 20 years. For rural routes, the document notes that "without development, these routes will fail to attract new customers and costs will remain high", and that "promoting social inclusion is a driver in these areas as is economic growth through tourism.

National and regional rail policies are required to contribute to the current Scottish Government's Strategic Objectives for Scotland. Regional Transport Strategy outcomes also have to contribute to the Scottish Government's required National Outcomes for transport, namely (i) improved connectivity, (ii) access for all, (iii) reduced emissions, and (iv) attractive, seamless, reliable travel

Context – regional:

SWestrans covers an area contiguous within the boundaries of Dumfries & Galloway Council. Its Regional Transport Strategy was submitted to Ministers for approval in March 2007, and highlights the current dual domestic and trans-national role of the Stranraer line. It notes that the potential reduction in patronage following the Stena move to Cairnryan "could be balanced by re-adjustment of the timetable to make better usage by local residents in Stranraer itself".

SPT covers a diverse area of the West of Scotland, ranging from the city of Glasgow to rural South Ayrshire through which the Ayr-Stranraer line runs to the regional boundary with SWestrans south of Barrhill. Its Regional Transport Strategy submitted in March 2007 for Ministerial approval notes that it is keen to see a high priority given to "retaining a direct rail service between Stranraer and Glasgow without the need for interchange at Ayr".

The SPT strategy submitted for Ministerial approval also notes the importance of improving rail and road links to the Loch Ryan ports, and states that "The delivery of improvements will rely on good partnership working between Transport Scotland,

SPT, the South West Scotland Transport Partnership, and other public and private sector stakeholders.”

Context – wider transport trends:

While this study is primarily concerned with the short to medium term regeneration of the Ayr-Stranraer railway, a key concern for Transform Scotland is the potential impact of major global environmental and resource threats – in particular climate change and oil supply – including their wider economic implications.

These wider trends may bring substantial changes to the competitive circumstances surrounding the Ayr-Stranraer railway in the medium to long term. Given that passenger and freight trains (when well loaded) are much more energy-efficient than competing modes of overland transport, future market and policy responses to these challenges are likely to contribute to a potentially bigger and more strategic role for the railway in a future low-carbon economy.

The Ayr-Stranraer railway today:

Since the line through to Stranraer Harbour opened in 1877, the railway’s primary function has been to link the Northern Ireland ferries with Glasgow. Even now – in the face of the hitherto inexorable rise of competition from low-priced airlines, the coach and the car – more than 50% of rail passengers at Stranraer are ferry travellers.

End-to-end journey times vary significantly between Glasgow and Stranraer, essentially due to the different operating capabilities of the two routes between Glasgow and Ayr – the ‘traditional’ well-aligned and faster double track route via Paisley, and the more recently utilised, largely single-track, and slower route via Kilmarnock.

First ScotRail undertake sample counts of train passengers at various (non-peak) times of the year. Analysis of available statistics from 2007 allows some key patterns of patronage to be deduced:

- the large majority of trains arriving at or departing from Stranraer convey less than 40 passengers
- the pattern of patronage at Stranraer peaks heavily at weekends, with typically ‘trainload’ quantities of passengers (80 or more) on key Saturday and Sunday trains.

The Ayr-Stranraer service has remained unchanged since 1996, but Transport Scotland, First ScotRail and Network Rail are planning for a major timetable recast in 2009. This has been prompted by changes to the Glasgow-Kilmarnock service when an extended dynamic loop is opened from Lugton to Stewarton on the single-track section between Barrhead and Kilmarnock.

The Stranraer to Ayr Line Support Association (‘SAYLSA’):

SAYLSA was launched as a volunteer support group for the line in September 2007, and has already organised three events to raise awareness of the railway and encourage greater use by local people. The group is currently working in conjunction with First ScotRail on the development of a ‘windowgazer’ guide to lineside attractions and the distinctive features of the line.

After an absence of 20 years, the station shop at Girvan has been re-opened by SAYLSA, with the support of South Ayrshire Council and First ScotRail. The shop is open every Saturday morning and sells refreshments and souvenirs.

A partnership between SAYLSA, the National Autistic Society's Daldorch House School and First ScotRail has seen the school make 10 planters for Girvan station and fill them with shrubs, which the students will tend as part of their curriculum. Planters have also been provided for Barrhill station, with the Network Rail signallers undertaking the maintenance.

Strengths of the line:

Research for this study suggests that the Ayr-Stranraer route has a number of key strengths, including:

- on through trains from Stranraer to Glasgow via Paisley, a competitive speed versus coach and car – with fastest journeys of 2h 8m (47mph average)
- timetabled ferry connections are relatively good, particularly in the 'from Belfast' direction and on Mondays-Fridays
- the route traverses attractive countryside and has the potential to tap into a significant market for day leisure trips from the Glasgow area to visitor attractions in south Ayrshire and western Galloway.

Weaknesses of the line:

The line has some significant weaknesses including:

- the timetable is the most complex and irregular in Scotland (only in part due to ferry timings), with gaps of up to 5 hours at Stranraer
- the timetable does not adequately cater for the (domestic) Stranraer area to Glasgow day trip market
- the timetable does not cater at all for the Glasgow to western Galloway day trip leisure market
- the Stranraer line has not enjoyed the benefits of the 'partnership' approach for the rural Highland network, which has produced in excess of £3m funding for the region's rail system over the last 3 years.

As a result of the above and other factors – notably competition from low-priced airlines between Belfast and Prestwick / Glasgow – the route is poorly patronised, with typically around 500 passengers a day (Monday-Friday) on 24 trains with a total seating capacity of 3,480 people, ie an average of 21 people per train, each of which has a minimum capacity of 145 people.

Developing new passenger business:

There are three key reasons why it is important to develop new passenger business for the railway:

- (i) the railway (particularly south of Girvan) and its train services are substantially underutilised
- (ii) the railway has unrealised potential to fulfil a bigger economic, social and environmental role, in line with regional and national policy objectives
- (iii) the anticipated Stena departure will remove a significant minority of the line's passengers, at least south of Girvan.

There is no single panacea for the regeneration of the railway, but rather a range of variables which are capable of change or improvement in order to secure the regeneration of the railway, falling broadly into the following categories:

- new markets, marketing & branding opportunities
- timetable recast opportunities
- stations and rail-bus-ferry integration opportunities.

New markets, marketing & branding opportunities:

From an inbound leisure market perspective, the Ayr-Stranraer line offers a journey of great variety 'over the hills' through attractive scenery, traversing virtually roadless country south of Barrhill to the Luce Valley.

The railway itself is of interest, and not just for rail enthusiasts:

- Stranraer is Britain's oldest working harbour station
- Girvan has Scotland's only surviving 'art deco' style station building, dating from 1951 after a fire destroyed the previous structure
- Barrhill is Scotland's last traditional rural station with a staffed signal box.

The railway also offers existing or potential access to a variety of visitor attractions in South Ayrshire and the Rhins and Machars of Galloway, either directly or by means of integrated rail-bus connections (with associated rail-bus-entrance integrated tickets) – including Glenluce Abbey, Culzean Castle, Logan Botanic Gardens, Mull of Galloway Lighthouse & Visitor Centre, the Southern Upland Way and the Carrick Way.

The south west coast of Scotland is renowned for its mild climate and associated garden attractions featuring exotic plants, and the current initiatives to develop station gardens at Girvan and Barrhill provide a potential theme for the line, reflecting the character of the route itself and the countryside to which it gives access.

Timetable recast opportunities:

It is widely agreed that there are significant opportunities to recast the Stranraer line timetable, which has remained virtually unchanged for more than 10 years – a period during which markets have changed significantly. Rail should concentrate on what it can or could do best, ie:

- connecting with the ferry at Stranraer
- providing attractive services from Greater Glasgow and Ayrshire to south Ayrshire and Stranraer, integrated with bus/coach links to key visitor attractions

- providing attractive services from Stranraer / Girvan to Ayr and Glasgow, including the important intermediate stations at Kilmarnock, Paisley and Irvine.

Given the impenetrability of the current irregular timetable, an evident priority must be to create more consistent departure times and to fill some of the long gaps between departures. It appears important – resources permitting – to incorporate at least three fast through trains each way Mondays to Saturdays between Stranraer and Glasgow via Paisley in the new timetable. Without these it will be more difficult for rail to retain existing passengers and penetrate key new markets.

Edinburgh is already – despite the lack of through trains to Stranraer, Girvan (or indeed Ayr) – the fifth biggest source of rail journeys south of Ayr. Given its population size and large tourism base, and the linkage between the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh and Logan Botanic Garden, there is a case for examining the scope for a summer Saturdays through service from Edinburgh to Ayr, Girvan and Stranraer.

As the train connects with only 5 out of 12 ferries on Sundays, and trains do not currently serve the Glasgow-Galloway or Glasgow-Girvan day trip markets, there is scope for summer Sunday service enhancement, perhaps one extra round trip between Glasgow and Stranraer.

There is wide agreement that the aspiration for Girvan should be to secure an hourly regular-interval service to Ayr, with different views of the priority destinations beyond Ayr. Unfortunately, with the current infrastructure, a running time of 27 minutes from Ayr to Girvan is just too long to secure an out-and-back service within one hour. Until such time as infrastructure investment can be justified to reduce the running time, the most realistic aspiration for Girvan may be to fill some of the key gaps in the timetable.

Stations & rail-bus integration opportunities:

The major planned station change is at Stranraer, where Dumfries & Galloway Council obtained Public Transport Fund funding from the then Scottish Executive towards the cost of a new Public Transport Interchange. At the time, this was predicated on the departure of Stena to a shared terminal with P&O at Cairnryan, as the footprint of the planned PTI encompasses operational Stena land.

The PTI and associated park-and-ride facilities are long overdue – there is no road-rail integration and the current station is a long, windswept and traffic-dominated walk from the town centre. The PTI will offer modern facilities and will occupy a prominent public site adjacent to Cairnryan Road, helping to raise the profile of rail services.

It will also transform the opportunities for integration, both using scheduled bus services and some selected bespoke services for Days Out packages. Some initial pump-priming may be required to establish such services, for example on Sundays when there are very few scheduled buses (but, as a result, plenty of spare bus and driver capacity), and to destinations which currently have no scheduled bus services, such as the Mull of Galloway Visitor Centre.

There may be an opportunity to create a new station directly serving Glenluce Abbey (which lies just a third of a mile from the railway) and the wider Dunragit / Glenluce / Machars area. The Abbey is a 4-star rated Historic Scotland attraction which draws

3,000 visitors annually – however, it has recently been closed in winter as it is perceived as being off the beaten track.

Barrhill, as the last traditional staffed rural station in Scotland, has the potential to attract more visitors, including a potential return of the Royal Scotsman luxury train. A partnership approach involving the rail industry, local government, local business (including timber and stone workers), SAYLSA and community organisations could fully restore the rural charm of the station and provide improved passenger facilities.

Girvan is already an impressive station, but there is scope to make more of it, including further planting work, utilisation of empty rooms for business / community activities, and external repainting of the main building.

A start to the improvement of Maybole station has been made with platform planters, but more could be done to raise the station to a level of attraction commensurate with the opportunities identified for other stations on the line.

Developing a partnership:

Partnership in its widest sense is a long-established aspect of railway development, with the rail industry, the public sector, local businesses and community organisations coming together in various combinations to facilitate new stations, additional services, publicity, etc. In recent years, First ScotRail has launched an 'Adopt a Station' initiative nationally, and locally has worked with SAYLSA to facilitate station enhancements at Girvan and Barrhill.

Community Rail Partnerships – which have been widely developed in England and Wales – have been very effective in working with local partners to raise awareness of their lines and have secured external funding for projects, including station improvements and extra train services, allowing services to better meet local needs. They go beyond a simple 'transport' agenda and link into wider strategies for accessibility, rural regeneration, social inclusion and sustainable tourism.

In the case of the Stranraer line, there appear to be broadly two options in terms of the model which might be developed to bring key stakeholders together, with the objective of regenerating the railway and its wider role in the South Ayrshire and Western Galloway corridor, namely either:

- 1) SAYLSA forms the partnership body, with commercial and statutory agencies (and cross-boundary sustainability projects) joining its Executive Committee to develop a programme of initiatives for the line, or
- 2) A separately constituted rail partnership is established, potentially led by one or both of the regional transport partnerships, and encompassing all the key stakeholders, including representation from SAYLSA.

Ideally, a part-time (perhaps one or two days per week) Development Officer would be funded by a range of parties working within the structure of the regional transport partnerships and based in either Girvan or Stranraer.

Developing new freight business:

There has been no regular freight traffic on the Stranraer line since 1993. However, with the wider national resurgence of rail freight (including its penetration of

supermarket supply chains), rising oil prices and growing concerns about climate change, there has been a revival of interest in prospects for new rail freight business between Ayr and Stranraer, including an Ireland-Galloway-Forth Estuary-Mainland Europe 'rail landbridge'.

The Scottish Government's recent consultation on the draft National Planning Framework (planning for major infrastructure projects) highlights the potential for a rail landbridge between Loch Ryan and the east coast ports of Grangemouth and Rosyth. While the imminent demise of the Rosyth-Zeebrugge freight & passenger roll-on roll-off ferry might have some impact on realisation of such a landbridge concept, Grangemouth is an established container 'feeder' port with a wide range of regular shipping services to mainland Europe.

At this stage it is not clear who would lead a landbridge project. Some infrastructure works would be required – both to upgrade a number of weak underbridges and potentially to raise the clearance for 9'6" high and other tall containers to be conveyed on standard wagons through tunnels and overbridges. As the Stranraer line is TEN-T (Trans European Network) designated, upgrading work might attract EU funding, and the growing dialogue between the Scottish Government and the Northern Ireland Assembly appears to strengthen the case for Government taking a lead.

The North East Scotland Rail Freight Development Group was instrumental in securing £4m Scottish Executive funding for recent infrastructure upgrading for the movement of tall containers between Central Scotland and Aberdeen. This highlights the merits of creating a dedicated and bespoke rail freight partnership for the Stranraer line which can focus specifically on the key issues in the logistics market, as opposed to a wider partnership trying to address both freight and passenger markets.

Key conclusions:

- 1) The Ayr-Stranraer line has been neglected in the past, due to (a) its physical isolation from other rural Scottish rail routes, (b) the traditional focus on only its ferry market, and (c) the lack of a cross-boundary and cross-sector line partnership to promote its regeneration.
- 2) The case for the regeneration of the railway is supported by the rail development policies and strategic transport objectives of the Scottish Government and by the regional transport strategies of SPT and SWestrans.
- 3) Given that passenger and freight trains (when well loaded) are much more energy-efficient than competing modes of overland transport, future market and policy responses to climate change and oil supply challenges are likely to contribute to a potentially bigger and more strategic role for the railway in a future low-carbon economy.
- 4) There is no single panacea for the regeneration of the railway, instead there is a wide range of possible national, regional, route corridor and location-specific measures which could help secure increased patronage and net revenue, and improved economic, social and environmental value.
- 5) The line has a range of genuine freight prospects, and both Network Rail and the public sector have a key role to play in realising these, for example

through strategic route investment and/or the Scottish Government's Freight Facilities Grant scheme to achieve wider strategic policy objectives.

Key recommendations:

- 1) Transport Scotland, First ScotRail and Network Rail should assess the operational, resourcing and market implications of a number of possible timetable changes geared to regenerating the Stranraer line, including:
 - at least three fast through trains each way daily between Stranraer and Glasgow via Paisley, with Monday-Friday departures from Glasgow at 07.XX, 09.XX and 16.XX, and from Stranraer at 06.40, 09.40 and 16.40
 - the scope for different Monday-Thursday / Friday, Saturday and Sunday timetables (as opposed to the current Monday-Saturday and Sunday split), reflecting different market patterns and the availability of extra rolling stock at weekends
 - departure pattern of standard minutes past the hour at Stranraer, with trains running at intervals to specifically suit the key markets available
 - a summer Saturdays through service from Edinburgh to Ayr, Girvan and Stranraer, and return
 - summer Sunday service enhancement, with one extra round trip between Glasgow, Girvan and Stranraer
 - filling in some of the major gaps in the timetable at Girvan, with a long-term aspiration to secure an hourly regular-interval service.
- 2) If there is slippage in the timetable recast from May 2009 to say December 2009, the scope should be considered for key free-standing changes to Saturday / Sunday services for the May timetable in order to start developing new markets without undue delay.
- 3) With regard to Stranraer station, clarification is needed on two questions arising from the current uncertainty over Stena plans:
 - (i) If Stena does move to a dedicated pier at Cairnryan, but not until 2010 /11, can their operational arrangements at Stranraer be modified to permit the opening of the much-needed Public Transport Interchange at an earlier date?
 - (ii) If Stena decides to remain at Stranraer, what can be done to accommodate both the PTI and convenient interchange between train and ferry?
- 4) Research should be undertaken by First ScotRail, SWestrans and SPT into the opportunities for integrated train-bus services providing access to key visitor attractions – including scheduled bus services on Mondays-Saturdays, and bespoke bus services on Sundays or to destinations which currently have no scheduled services, such as the Mull of Galloway Visitor Centre.
- 5) Passenger Focus and Transform Scotland – as independent 'honest brokers' – should facilitate the establishment of a cross-sector and cross-boundary rail

regeneration partnership, incorporating a wide range of potential funders, facilitators and delivery agents for specific improvement measures.

- 6) Amongst a number of freight prospects for the line, the concept of a strategic rail 'landbridge' has potentially the greatest public funding implications. It is recommended that Transport Scotland should take the lead in bringing interested parties together to discuss possible ways forward, including the development of a bespoke freight partnership for the line.



Ayr - Stranraer Track Route Map



Context Map



Track Route Map from ESR Cartography National Network data
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BRIEF & METHODOLOGY

2.1 Brief

In December 2007 TRANSform Scotland, the campaign for sustainable transport, commissioned Deltix Transport Consulting to undertake a scoping study on the regeneration of the Ayr-Stranraer railway. The study has been funded by Passenger Focus, SPT and SWestrans.

The planned switch of ferry services from Stranraer to Cairnryan creates the opportunity for the first time in the railway's history to gear the train service to the needs of local users, leisure visitors and tourists, rather than through-travellers from Scotland to Northern Ireland.

An antidote to a potential downward traffic spiral and reduction in service level, following loss of a core traditional market will be to identify new ways of operating, marketing and managing the railway, and to explore the scope for a partnership approach in the specification and (non-financial) support of the railway.

A strategy is needed to regenerate the railway, improving its socio-economic value and cost-effectiveness. This strategy also needs to take account of linkages and integration with the Glasgow/Ayr-Kilmarnock-Dumfries-Carlisle line, such as cross-boundary train services and shared rolling stock diagrams.

The study brief requires identification of key issues in the following areas, primarily through secondary research and consultation with key private, public and voluntary sector stakeholder organisations:

- 1) Overview of the existing railway and rail service.
- 2) Demand issues – including new passenger & freight markets.
- 3) Partnership issues.
- 4) Supply-side issues.
- 5) Recommendations for more detailed research and a development strategy.

As this is the first report for many years to focus specifically on the Ayr-Stranraer line and to seek to address primarily the non-technical aspects of its role, it is intended that the study will also provide a source of reference for future development strategy and for further more detailed research in key areas for development.

2.2 Methodology

The study has been both desk and field based. The following organisations were consulted:

(i) Rail industry

- Colas Rail
- Direct Rail Services
- First ScotRail
- Network Rail
- Orient Express Trains (Royal Scotsman)
- Passenger Focus

- Rail Freight Group
- SRPS Railtours
- WH Malcolm.

(ii) Central & local government and agencies

- Ayrshire Joint Structure Plan & Transportation Committee
- Dumfries & Galloway Council
- Forest Enterprise
- Girvan Horizons
- Her Majesty's Railway Inspectorate
- Historic Scotland
- Highland Rail Partnership
- Scottish Enterprise Dumfries & Galloway
- South Ayrshire Council
- SPT
- SWestrans
- Transport Scotland.

(iii) Other organisations

- Association of Community Rail Partnerships
- Galloway & Ayrshire Biosphere (through East Ayrshire Woodlands)
- Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh
- SAYLSA (Stranraer to Ayr Line Support Association)
- Transform Scotland
- Visit Scotland
- Wigtownshire Tourist Trains Project.

Individual and joint meetings were held with Network Rail and First ScotRail, and two meetings were held with SAYLSA, including attendance at and presentation to its quarterly meeting in Girvan.

Study visits were undertaken by rail to Maybole, Girvan, Barrhill and Stranraer, including a cab ride on the 10.00 Stranraer-Ayr train accompanied by the First ScotRail Driver Team Leader. The site of the proposed Barrhill timber railhead site was visited in conjunction with Forest Enterprise, and potential freight handling sites were viewed in Stranraer.

The opportunity was taken to discuss rail issues with 10 members of ScotRail / Network Rail staff and management based at Ayr, Girvan, Barrhill and Stranraer.

Through First ScotRail, the study author was invited to write an article on the Ayr-Stranraer line by Modern Railways magazine – this appeared in the April issue of the magazine as part of a special supplement on scenic railways.

2. CONTEXT – TRANSPORT POLICIES & WIDER TRENDS

3.1 National rail policies

(i) Responsibilities

The rail industry in Scotland has undergone much change in the eleven years since privatisation. Under the Railways Act 2005 the Scottish Executive and the UK Government agreed that Scottish Ministers would take greater responsibility for rail powers in Scotland, including:

- management and monitoring the performance of ScotRail services
- sole responsibility for securing future ScotRail franchises
- power to take long term, strategic decisions about future investment
- power to fund and specify where resources are targeted by Network Rail on track maintenance and investment in Scotland.

The Scottish Government's agency, Transport Scotland, now has responsibility for the majority of rail powers in Scotland, enabling it to plan future services and target investment. Safety and licensing of rail operators remains reserved to UK Ministers.

Network Rail's principal accountabilities are to:

- passenger & freight operator customers under track access contracts and the network code
- the Regulator under statute and network & station licences
- providers of public funds, eg Transport Scotland
- the Health & Safety Executive.

In April 2004, the Scottish Executive took on full funding responsibility for the ScotRail franchise. It is part of the franchise agreement to maintain previous levels of service as a minimum. The rail franchise contract was awarded to First Group in 2004 and First ScotRail started operating services for a seven year franchise period, with a three year extension to 2014 recently agreed. As part of the franchise contract, First ScotRail is required to meet certain performance targets and standards, and to work with the Scottish Government to develop a service level agreement and a timetable of improvements and proposals.

(ii) Strategy

In December 2006 'Scotland's Railways' was published, setting out Scottish Ministers vision for the rail network over the next 20 years. This accompanies the National Transport Strategy, showing how rail can contribute to achieving the three strategic outcomes for transport of (i) improving journey times and connections, (ii) reducing emissions and (iii) improving quality, accessibility and affordability.

For rural routes, the document notes that "without development, these routes will fail to attract new customers and costs will remain high", and that "promoting social inclusion is a driver in these areas as is economic growth through tourism. It goes on to list a number of actions to tackle this, including:

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- revise train services in the light of changing travel patterns and markets including tourism developments
- improvements to Class 156 trains for passengers
- continue to refine journey times where opportunities arise, for example at times of asset renewal.

National and regional rail policies are required to contribute to the current Scottish Government's Strategic Objectives for Scotland, namely:

- Wealthier & Fairer
- Healthier
- Safer & Stronger
- Smarter
- Greener.

Regional Transport Strategy outcomes also have to contribute to the Scottish Government's required National Outcomes for transport, namely:

- Improved Connectivity
- Access for All
- Reduced Emissions
- Attractive, Seamless, Reliable Travel

'Scotland's Railways' groups the Ayr-Stranraer line with the rural Highland routes, citing as a group characteristic that "train frequencies on these routes are low and journey times are generally slow compared to the car".

While this is certainly true of the Highland routes and end-to-end journey times to the key termini at Inverness and Glasgow, it is generally not true of the Stranraer line with a total of 24 trains daily (including services to Girvan) and end-to-end journeys from Stranraer to Glasgow reaching averaging speeds of up to 47 mph.

In practice, the Stranraer line is physically separate from the Highland network, and in operational and marketing terms is in many ways different, albeit sharing some of the key characteristics of rural routes, such as low population and higher car ownership. The largest settlements served directly by the railway are Stranraer (population 11,000) and Girvan (7,000).

Other than the Stranraer line, and the neighbouring Glasgow-Kilmarnock-Dumfries-Carlisle through route (which has a major freight role), all the routes operated by ScotRail in practice fall into one of three categories:

- the Central Scotland commuter network
- inter-urban lines linking Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dundee, Aberdeen & Inverness
- the rural Highland network.

The fact that the Stranraer line does not fit into any of these boxes has led to some neglect of its potential in the past. However, with a new focus now being directed towards the future of the line, the route 'over the hills' to Stranraer has an opportunity

to make the most of its distinctive and indeed unique attributes, which Section 4 summarises.

(iii) Strategic Transport Projects Review

Transport Scotland is undertaking the Strategic Transport Projects Review (STPR), a major study to help shape Scotland's transport network from 2012 until 2022. The review is designed to let the Scottish government "plan and prioritise projects and improvements to deliver an efficient, integrated transport network fit for the 21st century to grow the economy, provide key connections and open up opportunities".

The STPR is the first time a nationwide, multimodal evaluation of Scotland's key strategic transport network has taken place. The scope of work is possible due to the devolution of additional rail powers to Ministers by the Railways Act 2005.

When complete in summer 2008, the review will recommend a programme of interventions for implementation between 2012 and 2022. This could include new infrastructure projects, better incentives for sustainable travel and more carefully targeted investment across the country. The programme will aim to make a significant contribution to delivering the National Transport Strategy.

One of the 20 corridors being examined is from Glasgow to Stranraer and the South West, which is attracting increasing attention through the growing cross-border dialogue between the Scottish Government and Northern Ireland Assembly.

3.2 Regional rail policies

The Transport (Scotland) Act 2005 placed a duty on the Scottish Ministers to create Regional Transport Partnerships covering the whole of Scotland, with a statutory requirement of each to produce a Regional Transport Strategy.

The **South West of Scotland Transport Partnership** ('SWestrans') covers an area contiguous within the boundaries of Dumfries & Galloway Council. Its Regional Transport Strategy was submitted to Ministers for approval in March 2007, with the following vision:

"A transport system for the South West of Scotland that delivers the internal and external connectivity required to sustain and enhance the region's economy and communities whilst minimising the impact of transport on the environment."

The strategy highlights the current dual domestic and trans-national role of the Stranraer line, and notes that the potential reduction in patronage following the Stena move to Cairnryan "could be balanced by re-adjustment of the timetable to make better usage by local residents in Stranraer itself". The strategy also notes that car ownership is higher in the South West than in Scotland as a whole, and that rail use is very low by Scottish standards – with just 1% of people in the South West using the train once or more a week, compared to a Scottish average of 5%.

[To some extent these contrasts reflect the difference between Scotland as a whole as a predominantly urban country and the South West as an overwhelmingly rural region. There are however also other factors such as the poor internal connectivity of the South West's three rail routes (none of which physically link up within the region) and the fact they predominantly serve inter-regional as opposed to intra-regional

needs. This is particularly the case for the Stranraer line, which has just one station within the South West region.]

The strategy also highlights negative perceptions of the convenience and quality of public transport as part of the reason for low usage. The current study has identified perception issues (and some actual problems with the service) as being an evident factor in the relatively low usage of Stranraer station by local residents – see Section 6.

Of nine priority transport interventions listed in the strategy, four are relevant to the Stranraer line:

- Rail Services Upgrade (including line frequency / journey time enhancements to Stranraer)
- Region-wide rail stations strategy (including a new station at Dunragit)
- Stranraer Waterfront and Town Centre Public Realm Improvements including Public Rail/Bus Interchange Hub and Walking and Cycling Enhancements
- Regionwide Cycling and Walking Projects including Completion of the National Cycle Network (with Route NCR 73 Newton Stewart - Cairnryan passing under the Stranraer line by Glenluce Abbey).

John Swinney, MSP, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance & Sustainable Growth, wrote to each of the Regional Transport Partnerships in January 2008 indicating his wishes on how Regional Transport Partnerships should take their strategies forward. This is being progressed by SWestrans and it is hoped to resubmit the document within the next few months.

Strathclyde Partnership for Transport ('SPT') covers a large and diverse area of the West of Scotland, ranging from the city of Glasgow to rural South Ayrshire through which the Ayr-Stranraer line runs to the regional boundary with SWestrans south of Barrhill. Its Regional Transport Strategy submitted in March 2007 for Ministerial approval has the following vision:

"A world class sustainable transport system that acts as a catalyst for an improved quality of life for all."

There are three 'shared goals' which communicate the link between a high quality transport system and a high quality of life:

- develop the economy, through improving connectivity for business and freight, making transport more effective and efficient, providing access to employment, education, shopping and leisure, and by improving transport integration;
- promote social inclusion and equality, by providing a transport system that is safe, accessible, and affordable to all sections of the community; and
- improve health and protect the environment, by minimising emissions and consumption of resources and energy, by promoting active travel, quality public transport and modal shift.

The strategy notes that it is keen to see a high priority given to a number of Network Rail's priorities set out in its 2007 Route Utilisation Strategy for Scotland, including:

- "retaining a direct rail service between Stranraer and Glasgow without the need for interchange at Ayr"
- "supporting the introduction of the 'Caledonian Express' service" [which would provide regular-interval fast trains from Edinburgh via Shotts to Glasgow Central, with potential cross-platform interchange to Stranraer services, as would National Express East Coast services]

SPT has a Rail Development Action Plan, whose purpose is to develop and enhance the rail network in the west of Scotland, in partnership with Transport Scotland and Network Rail. Its areas for action include:

- work in partnership with others to enhance rail services across the region
- develop rail park and ride
- encourage further transfer of freight from road to rail.

The strategy submitted for Ministerial approval also notes the importance of external connections, and in the context of the Loch Ryan ports states that:

"Improving the transport links by rail and road from our region to Stranraer and Cairnryan form part of the Strategy, although both ports are in the South West Scotland Transport Partnership area. The delivery of improvements will rely on good partnership working between Transport Scotland, SPT, the South West Scotland Transport Partnership, and other public and private sector stakeholders."

3.3 Wider transport trends

While this study is primarily concerned with the short to medium term regeneration of the Ayr-Stranraer railway, a key concern for Transform Scotland is the potential impact of major global environmental and resource threats, including their wider economic implications.

The general acceptance of the reality of climate change is now leading to widespread changes in public and private sector attitudes to the importance of reducing carbon footprint, and the rail network has a potentially key role to play in offering a less environmentally damaging option than road or air transport.

Less well known, but fast moving into mainstream awareness, is the concept of 'Peak Oil', namely the theory that global oil production is likely to peak in the short to medium term and thereafter decline evermore.¹ Higher oil prices are of course already having a significant impact on the economics of shipping, air travel and road transport worldwide.

These wider transport trends may bring substantial changes to the competitive circumstances surrounding the Ayr-Stranraer railway in the medium to long term. Given that passenger and freight trains (when well loaded) are much more energy-

¹ 'Peak Oil and Transport'; Transform Scotland; 2007

efficient than competing modes of overland transport, future market and policy responses to these climate change and oil supply challenges are likely to contribute to a potentially bigger and more strategic role for the railway in a future low-carbon economy.

4. THE AYR-STRANRAER RAILWAY IN 2008

4.1 A brief history

The railway opened in 1877 from Girvan to Challoch Junction, seven miles east of Stranraer, where it joined the Dumfries-Stranraer line which had opened in 1861. Stranraer Harbour station opened for rail and ferry traffic in 1862, and thereafter the primary purpose of the railway at Stranraer has been to provide a link from the Northern Ireland ferry to Central Scotland.

The 1963 Beeching Report ('The Reshaping of British Railways') recommended the withdrawal of all passenger train services from Ayr to Stranraer and Dumfries to Stranraer, on grounds that services were uneconomic. The report showed that fewer than 5,000 passengers per week used either route. The Ayr-Stranraer line was reprieved on grounds of social hardship, but the direct Dumfries-Stranraer line closed in 1965, leading to an increased number of trains south of Ayr, as the direct day and night sleeper services between Stranraer and London were diverted to run via Mauchline. In 1965 intermediate local stations at Pinmore, Pinwherry, Glenwhilly and New Luce also closed.

In 1984 the diesel multiple units which had operated Glasgow to Stranraer services since dieselisation in 1959 were withdrawn and replaced with locomotive-hauled rolling stock for three years. The passenger coaches were painted in a bespoke Sealink ferry company livery, the only period in the line's history when 'local' branding has been applied.

In 1988, a nationwide local train replacement programme by British Rail brought new and more cost-effective Class 156 2-car diesel units to the line, including through services from Stranraer to Dumfries, Carlisle and Newcastle, as part replacement for the withdrawal of the day-time Inter-City service from Stranraer to London Euston. These units continue to operate the service in 2008.

In 1990, as part of a rationalisation of the overnight sleeper network by British Rail – in the face of changing travel patterns, including increased airline competition – the Stranraer to Euston sleeper train was withdrawn.

For a brief period in the mid 1990s (at a time when Class 156 units were maintained in Edinburgh), one train a day in each direction operated between Edinburgh and Stranraer, running non-stop between Haymarket and Glasgow Central.

Rail freight services at Stranraer, which had been as frequent as three trains a day in each direction in the late 1980s, were almost entirely eliminated in 1991, when BR's Speedlink nationwide network of trains for wagonload (less than full train load) traffic was withdrawn. The one surviving freight train to Stranraer – a once weekly dedicated company steel train from Tees-side to the rail-connected Stockton Haulage depot in Stranraer (for onward road trailer movement on the Irish ferry) – lasted only until 1993, when the routing was switched to the Heysham ferry.

Until the late 1980s the railway was a significant employer in Stranraer – with around 100 staff – but this is no longer the case, with combined First ScotRail and Network Rail staff now totalling less than 20.

The Ayr-Stranraer service has now remained unchanged since 1996, except for the withdrawal of trolley catering services which during the late 1990s were provided on 4 trains a day in each direction.

Since the line through to Stranraer Harbour opened in 1877, the railway's primary function has been to link the Northern Ireland ferries with Glasgow. Even now – in the face of the hitherto inexorable rise of competition from low-priced airlines, the coach and the car – more than 50% of rail passengers at Stranraer are ferry travellers.

With seven train departures and seven arrivals daily at Stranraer on weekdays (linking Glasgow via Paisley or Kilmarnock, and Newcastle via Dumfries and Carlisle), the railway still offers an attractive service. Most ship arrivals and departures have good train connections, and rail can also be relatively fast – direct trains to Glasgow via the traditional Paisley route take as little as 2 hours 8 minutes, an average of 47mph for the 101-mile journey.

4.2 Current infrastructure & management

The speed of Stranraer trains is all the more remarkable for the difficult geography of the route south of Girvan. Train drivers have to negotiate steep gradients, including 2½ miles continuous 1 in 54 from Girvan station, a 543 yard tunnel at Pinmore, and four viaducts, before reaching the isolated station and crossing loop at Barrhill.

From Barrhill the railway climbs at 1 in 67 to the 690' Chirmorie Summit, then traverses some bleak upland country, past the lonely crossing loop at Glenwhilly (which has no mains water), to the 'Swan's Neck', where the line forms an 'S' curve sufficiently tight that the curve can be seen from the train window before reaching it.

Descending into the valley of the Water of Luce, the train passes close to Glenluce Abbey, and joins the alignment of the former 'Port Road' direct line from Dumfries, closed in 1965, before reaching Dunragit, the last crossing loop before Stranraer. Currently Stranraer box is switched out from Mondays to Fridays, with the six-mile single-track section being operated under 'one train working' arrangements.

The line between Girvan and Stranraer is one of the last in Scotland to be operated by the electric token block system, with semaphore signals and staffed signal boxes at all crossing loops. Tokenless block is in operation over the formerly double-track section north from Girvan to Kilkerran loop, and beyond Kilkerran through Dalrymple Junction (where the Waterside coal branch diverges) to Ayr, the track circuit block system is controlled by Paisley Signalling Centre. Network Rail employs around 20 signallers on the line, managed from Ayr. There are also permanent way staff based at Maybole and Stranraer.

As a safety measure to improve sightlines for train drivers, the majority of 'distant' (advance warning) signals south of Girvan have been converted from semaphore to colour light operation during the last 5 years.

The maximum line speed is 65 mph between Ayr and Girvan, and 60 mph south of Girvan, but there are a significant number of structure-related lower speed restrictions, particularly between Girvan and Barrhill. The condition of structures – and the absence of regular freight traffic since 1993 – has led Network Rail to introduce a temporary 'Network Change', involving more severe speed restrictions for locomotive-hauled trains, as described in Section 4.7 below.

Ironically, for a line which carries neither freight nor inter-city trains, the Ayr-Stranraer route is 'TEN-T' (Trans European Network - Transport) designated. Designation dates from the 1990s when lobbying across Scotland led to virtually every longer distance rural route being incorporated in the TEN-T network. In practice this designation has as yet not brought any tangible benefits to the Stranraer line, but there may be freight-specific opportunities in the future, as discussed in Section 12.8.

Just three intermediate stations break up the 59 miles between Ayr and Stranraer. There are single-platform stations at Maybole and at the Stranraer terminus, and two platforms at Girvan and Barrhill. Although the footbridge to the second platform at Stranraer has been removed, the track layout still allows locomotive-hauled trains to be 'rounded'² and a number of trains to be stabled simultaneously.

Three of the four stations are unique – Stranraer is Britain's oldest working harbour station; Girvan has Scotland's only surviving 'art deco' style station building, dating from 1951 after a fire destroyed the previous structure; and Barrhill is Scotland's last traditional rural station with a staffed signal box. In common with many rural stations in England & Wales (but relatively few in Scotland), at Barrhill passengers who wish to access the Ayr-bound platform across the two tracks from the main station building must cross the line at grade on a 'barrow crossing' – there is no footbridge or underpass. This is recognised as being a sensible 'fit-for-purpose' approach at stations with low throughput, and is a feature of a number of the designated 'community railways' on the Network Rail system south of the Border.

The shortest single-track section is 6 miles from Dunragit to Stranraer and the longest is the 12 miles from Girvan to Barrhill, the latter section previously being split by a loop at Pinwherry, which was dismantled in 1992 following the loss of most freight services on the line in 1991. Since then the track and signalling infrastructure has remained basically unchanged, other than the mothballing of the Stockton Haulage freight sidings at Stranraer Town Yard following the loss of the weekly steel train in 1993. The sidings have recently been lifted, but the main line connection remains in situ.

As the total number of trains (south of Girvan) is significantly less than 20 years ago, but route infrastructure is largely unchanged, there is spare capacity available at most times of the day. It is understood that between Stranraer and Dunragit and between Glenwhilly and Barrhill less than 30% of available route capacity is utilised by scheduled services.

However, there is a specific problem at Girvan station where a lorry 'bridge bashing' incident at a road underbridge some years ago led to Network Rail banning locomotive-hauled trains from the 'Down' crossing loop line. Network Rail has still not returned the bridge to its former condition and capability, effectively creating a 20-mile long single-track section between Kilkerran and Barrhill for such trains. In April 2008 this led to a planned Stobart Pullman charter train to Girvan being terminated at Ayr.

² Allowing the locomotive to detach from the front of the train which has arrived from the Ayr direction, run round it on the parallel loop line, and attach on to the 'back' of the train, ready to haul the train on the return journey towards Ayr.

4.3 Rolling stock

All trains on the line are operated by Class 156 2-car diesel units introduced in 1988. The Class 156s are regarded as one of the most fit-for-purpose of the regional railway train designs introduced throughout Britain in the late 1980s. As well as being generally very reliable mechanically, for a potential tourist route they offer the advantage of large picture windows with good spacing of seats in relation to windows, plus low seat backs to avoid views being obscured. They have relatively generous luggage accommodation and can carry up to six bikes per 2-car unit – the highest level of bike accommodation on trains of this generation.

When 2 x 2-car units are coupled together there is a through corridor connection so, for example, any catering trolley could serve all 4 coaches. As the platforms at Barrhill do not extend to 4 coaches, on trains of this length the conductor deploys selective door opening to allow just one supervised door at the platform to be opened. This type of arrangement is potentially applicable at any new short-platform station on the line, subject to appropriate safety case and risk assessment procedures.

The 156 has three aspects of design which are less satisfactory, two of which may be capable of low-cost modification. The units are not air-conditioned and the hopper-type opening windows can only be fully open or fully shut, so draughts can easily penetrate from one open window to the whole coach environment. A related point is that the sliding (manually-operated) doors from each seating area to the coach-end vestibules do not have a spring mechanism to ensure the default position is closed. Finally, each 2-coach unit has just one toilet, a problem if there is a failure and/or on trains carrying large numbers of football fans.

A number of Class 156s were internally refurbished with Transport Scotland funding in 2007, and these provide a very comfortable and attractive travelling environment. Units refurbished under the auspices of Strathclyde PTE some years ago are however now looking somewhat tired by comparison.

While the normal train operation is 2-car Class 156, strengthening to 4-cars is typically the case for the main Sunday services and the 10.00 Stranraer-Newcastle train in summer, which can also be busy on winter Saturdays with football fans from Northern Ireland heading for Celtic and Rangers games in Glasgow. Interestingly, a degree of voluntary segregation seems to take place, with Rangers fans using Stena Ferries to Stranraer and then the train, while Celtic supporters favour P&O to the nearby port of Cairnryan and then coach to Glasgow.

First ScotRail employ 8 train crew and 6 station staff based at Stranraer and managed from Ayr, and Girvan station is staffed on a part-time basis. Maybole and Barrhill are unstaffed, although Network Rail signallers at the latter can and do provide a point of customer contact, although tickets must be purchased on the train.

4.4 Current services

(i) Timetable & performance:

Train services on the Ayr-Stranraer railway are a complex mix of different train service groups, with rolling stock inter-working with Glasgow southside peak hour

commuter services, as well as through trains as far as Newcastle. The ScotRail franchise is very prescriptive in setting out when trains must run.

The weekday key features of the service at **Stranraer** are as follows:

- on Mondays-Saturdays, 7 daily train arrivals at Stranraer, and 7 train departures (6 on Saturdays)
- the daily train arrivals at Stranraer are 4 from Glasgow, 2 from Newcastle and 1 from Ayr
- the daily train departures from Stranraer are 5 to Glasgow, 1 to Newcastle and 1 to Ayr (except Saturdays).

North of **Girvan** there are additional services, with the following weekday key features:

- on Mondays-Saturdays, 12 daily train services from the north arrive at Girvan, and 12 depart northwards (11 on Saturdays)
- the daily train arrivals at Girvan from the north are 5 from Glasgow, 3 from Ayr, 2 from Newcastle and 2 from Kilmarnock
- the daily northbound train departures from Girvan are 6 to Glasgow, 2 to Kilmarnock, 2 to Newcastle and 2 to Ayr (1 on Saturdays).

On **Sundays** the train service is much more limited, but also much simpler to follow. There are two trains from Glasgow via the faster Paisley route to Stranraer, and three trains from Stranraer via Paisley to Glasgow.

Partly due to the traditional need to link in with irregular ferry departure and arrival times at Stranraer, there is little or no consistency in the **pattern of train service**, either in terms of intervals between trains or standardised ('clockface') departure / arrival times. With regard to the latter, all 7 daily train departures from Stranraer leave at different times past the hour. At Girvan the position is slightly better, with 4 out of 12 daily northbound departures at 40 minutes past the hour.

The pattern of time intervals between trains varies enormously during the day. There are no train departures from Stranraer between 14.37 and 19.40, but trains then depart at 19.40, 21.10 and 23.25. There are no train arrivals at Stranraer between 13.56 and 17.55, and between 17.55 and 20.52, but trains then arrive at 20.52, 22.24 and 00.37.

At Girvan, the additional 5 daily train services to the north make the interval between trains generally less, with the longest interval between northbound departures being 2 hours 11 minutes, and arrivals from the north 2 hours 55 minutes.

The level of **punctuality performance** on the line is recorded in detail by First ScotRail for franchise monitoring and other purposes. Figures for the last complete year (to Period 11, 2007) are as follows:

- 93% within 10 minutes of scheduled arrival time
- 85% within 5 minutes of scheduled arrival time.

49% of delay minutes were attributable to Network Rail, 28% to First ScotRail and 13% to other train operating companies. Of the ScotRail delays, 54% were attributed to the fleet, 21% to crew issues and 12% to station working.

(ii) Journey times between Glasgow and Stranraer:

End-to-end journey times vary significantly between Glasgow and Stranraer, essentially due to the different operating capabilities of the two routes between Glasgow and Ayr – the ‘traditional’ well-aligned and faster double track route via Paisley, and the more recently utilised, largely single-track, and slower route via Kilmarnock. Both involve virtually the same distance, at 101 miles, and throughout the week all trains call at all stations between Ayr and Stranraer.

The fastest scheduled journey time between Glasgow and Stranraer is 2 hours 8 minutes (via Paisley), achieved by one train daily (Monday-Saturday) in each direction. Interestingly, the latter’s 47 mph average compares to a 46mph average (1 hour 52 minutes) for the 86-mile Glasgow-Stranraer road route equivalent advised by the AA Route Planner. The southbound Citylink coach service is scheduled to take 2 hours 30 minutes from Glasgow to Stranraer, averaging 34mph.

As illustrated in Appendix 1, train services between Glasgow and Stranraer average end-to-end journey times as follows:

- 2 hours 12 minutes (46mph) for through services via Paisley
- 2 hours 39 minutes (38 mph) for through services via Kilmarnock
- 2 hours 26 minutes (42mph) for connecting electric services at Ayr.

(iii) Scheduled ferry connections:

The train and the ferry at Stranraer have traditionally provided timetabled connections. However, as ferries and trains are now operated by different companies with different operating constraints and target markets, it can be difficult for rail to provide good connections with all sailings.

The train has a number of internal rail network constraints which in part dictate arrival and departure times at Stranraer.³ Notwithstanding these, in terms of rail / ferry operating constraints at Stranraer itself it should in theory be relatively easy for a train at Stranraer to provide good connections both to the ferry and from the ferry.

An arriving HSS (‘High Speed Ship’) will enable its foot passengers to board a train well within 20 minutes of arrival, and (quick turnround being critical to the economics of HSS operation) will typically depart again 35-45 minutes after arrival. Given that check-in times for ferry foot passengers are 30 minutes, a train should ideally arrive

³ These include (a) availability of joint-user (with Glasgow suburban services) train sets during peak hours at Glasgow Central, (b) train paths on the intensively-used main line between Glasgow Central and Kilwinning, (c) train paths on the busy single-track section between Barrhead and Kilmarnock (although this will be eased when an extended ‘dynamic loop’ is provided between Lugton and Stewarton), (d) train paths on the single-track Kilmarnock-Barassie Junction and Dalrymple Junction (south of Ayr)-Stranraer sections – although both have spare capacity at most times of the day, and (e) the need to maximise utilisation of train sets, eg it would make little sense for an incoming train (with relatively heavy demand) to lay over for 2-3 hours at Stranraer to await a period of greater demand.

perhaps 45 minutes before ferry departure (to allow for some late running and for the walk from train to ferry terminal) and depart again around 35 minutes later⁴, representing a sufficient buffer for late running, as well as time to clean out trains internally. In practice, incoming ferry passengers can be on the train within 7 minutes of the vessel docking.

The actual pattern of scheduled connections at Stranraer, as shown in Appendix 2, is variable through the week:

- Monday-Friday trains connect from 3 out of 4 foot passenger ferries, with connection times all falling within the range 32-40 minutes, ie close to the optimum
- Monday-Friday trains connect into 3 out of 4 foot passenger ferries, with connection times of 34, 54 and 145 minutes
- Saturday trains connect from 4 out of 7 foot passenger ferries, with connection times all falling within the range 32-40 minutes, ie close to the optimum
- Saturday trains connect into 4 out of 6 foot passenger ferries, with connection times of 34, 54, 82 and 145 minutes
- Sunday trains connect from 3 out of 6 foot passenger ferries, with connection times of 35, 35 and 80 minutes, ie two out of three close to the optimum
- Sunday trains connect into 2 out of 6 foot passenger ferries, with connection times of 54 and 70 minutes.

Overall, therefore, the number of ferry-rail connections is a relatively high proportion (75%) of all ferry sailings Monday to Friday, with qualitatively better connection times from Belfast compared with to Belfast.

A lower proportion (62%) of ferries are connected on Saturdays, but overall the quality of connection times is only slightly poorer than on Monday-Friday.

The lowest proportion of ferry connections (42%) is made on Sundays, with around half of these connections providing a quality of connection time close to the optimum.

(iv) Prestwick Airport connections:

Prestwick Airport has grown substantially since the 1990s, largely through the expansion of low-priced⁵ flights by Ryanair. The dedicated airport station - the only one in Scotland - provides the opportunity for relatively seamless travel from a variety

⁴ If a train arrives at XX.05 (with the ferry arriving at xx.10, its passengers being available to board the train by 00.30, but say allow 10 minutes for late ferry running), this would allow a robust connection with an XX.50 ferry departure. The train would then depart at XX.40, representing a reasonable 35 minute turnround, similar to the 40 minute ferry turnround. The rail-ferry connection would be 45 minutes and the ferry-rail connection 30 minutes. As rail does not have check-in times it is best – other things being equal – to have a shorter connectional time from ferry to rail than rail to ferry.

⁵ The term 'low-priced' is used deliberately instead of 'low cost', as the wider environmental costs imposed by air travel are substantial.

of rail stations to the airport terminal, in particular on the half-hourly electric Glasgow-Ayr services.

Currently 2 out of 6 trains a day from Stranraer which pass through the airport station actually call there. In the reverse direction 3 out of 6 call there. 3 out of 3 'short workings' to and from Girvan also call there. There are no formal or guaranteed connections between train and plane.

Around 25 plane arrivals and 25 departures are spread throughout the day at Prestwick, with some peaking in departures around 07.00, 14.00 and 16.00, and arrivals around 13.30 and 15.30. Broadly, trains from Stranraer connect with around 5 plane departures, and trains to Stranraer connect out of virtually no plane arrivals.

There may be future opportunities to develop improved air/rail connections and this should be considered, particularly since rail/access/air infrastructure currently exists at the same location. Such consideration is however outwith the scope of this study and requires further detailed study work.

(v) Fares:

Fares are a fundamental factor in attracting potential passengers to rail in competition with coach and car. In the case of travel from Scotland to Northern Ireland, ScotRail and Stena have long offered attractive through fares.

Domestic rail fares from Stranraer and Barrhill to Ayr and Glasgow – together with coach comparisons, where available – are summarised in the tables below.

To Ayr:

	Stranraer		Barrhill	
	Ticket price	Price per mile	Ticket price	Price per mile
Cheap Day Return	£14.50	11p	£10.60	16p
Saver Return	£18.20	15p	-	-
Standard Open Return	£20.10	17p	£13.40	20p
Daytripper *	-	-	£9.00 **	14p
Coach	£11.80	13p	-	-

* Daytripper tickets cannot be purchased at Barrhill station nor on the train, and therefore must be purchased in advance on a previous trip to a staffed station or SPT travel centre

** £9 for 1 adult and up to 2 children, £16 for 2 adults and up to 4 children

To Glasgow:

	Stranraer		Barrhill	
	Ticket price	Price per mile	Ticket price	Price per mile
Cheap Day Return	£21.60	11p	-	-
Supersaver Return	£30.70	15p	-	-
Saver Return (Fridays)	£35.70	18p	-	-
Standard Open Return	£36.50	18p	£22.70	15p
Daytripper *	-	-	£9.00 **	6p
Bus / coach	£17.60	10p	-	-

* Daytripper tickets cannot be purchased at Barrhill station nor on the train, and therefore must be purchased in advance on a previous trip to a staffed station or SPT travel centre

** £9 for 1 adult and up to 2 children, £16 for 2 adults and up to 4 children

(vi) Patronage:

First ScotRail undertake sample counts of train passengers at various (non-peak) times of the year. Analysis of available statistics from 2007 allows some key patterns of patronage to be deduced:

- the large majority of trains arriving at or departing from Stranraer convey less than 40 passengers
- a significant minority of these trains at Stranraer convey 10 or fewer passengers, notably (but not exclusively) Monday-Saturday evening services
- the pattern of patronage at Stranraer peaks heavily at weekends (in part reflecting football travel and other Scottish-Irish leisure travel), with typically 'trainload' quantities of passengers (80 or more) on the 10.00 Saturday departure from Stranraer and the 11.42 and 16.25 Sunday departures from Glasgow – there is also some Friday peaking compared to Monday-Thursday
- almost without exception, trains increasingly fill up as they call at stations north of Stranraer, particularly from Girvan northwards where the route (despite its irregular and relatively infrequent service) is just within the Ayrshire / Central Scotland commuting belt
- 65% of journeys originating south of Ayr are destined for Ayr itself, with the next most popular destination being Glasgow at around 15% - all other destinations account for 3% or less
- overall the route is poorly patronised, with typically around 500 passengers a day (Monday-Friday) on 24 trains with a total seating capacity of 3,480 people – 14 trains to/from Stranraer and 10 trains to/from Girvan
- similar total numbers are typically carried on just 5 Sunday trains, most of which are strengthened to 4-car operation – load factors per train are consequently much higher on Sundays

2007 First ScotRail sample statistics (based on on-train surveys rather than ticket sales) show 56% of rail customers at Stranraer making ferry connections. An on-train survey undertaken for Passenger Focus in 2006 recorded 52% of passengers at Stranraer making ferry connections, so it may reasonably be concluded that the average figure lies in the range 50%-60%.

ScotRail statistics also point to Stranraer patronage being a much higher proportion of the line's business at weekends, compared to Monday-Friday when commuter traffic at Girvan and Maybole is more significant.

4.5 The changing port dimension

During World War II Cairnryan military port and the six-mile Stranraer-Cairnryan military railway were built to provide back-up in case Liverpool docks were severely bombed. The railway closed in 1962, but in the 1970s P&O established a new ferry port for Northern Ireland at Cairnryan. Until recently it had been anticipated that Stena would be shifting their terminal from Stranraer to a new joint port operation with P&O, reducing the transit time for HSS operation to the port of Belfast.

A Joint Venture Company named the Port of Cairnryan Ltd was set up by P&O and Stena Line to develop the Port of Cairnryan. It had been intended that Stena line would move from its current base in Stranraer and re-locate its operation and share an extended port facility with P&O. In October 2007, the Port of Cairnryan Ltd announced that due to escalating costs, it had decided to halt expansion plans at the port. Stena Line have advised that they have not abandoned plans to re-locate ferry services on Loch Ryan and are looking at various options for the future.

Rail-ferry interchange at Stranraer is therefore likely to be a significant continuing business factor for the railway for the next three years, and this also gives a long lead-in time for new markets to be developed.

The case for re-opening the Cairnryan branch has been examined, but the projected cost and the circuitous routing make this an unlikely proposition compared to a direct bus link from the ferries (perhaps both P&O and Stena) possibly to Girvan station. Arguments based on freight traffic have struggled in the face of the fact that the Stranraer line has carried no regular freight since 1993, but this issue is explored in Sections 5.2 and 12.

4.6 The Stranraer to Ayr Line Support Association ('SAYLSA')

SAYLSA was launched as a volunteer support group for the line in September 2007, and has already organised three events to raise awareness of the railway and encourage greater use by local people.

On October 5th, to mark the 130th anniversary of the opening of the railway, pupils from two schools from Girvan and Stranraer took part in an on-train exchange, with First ScotRail providing free travel and Stagecoach Western providing connecting bus travel at Stranraer.

After an absence of 20 years, the station shop at Girvan has been re-opened by SAYLSA, with the support of South Ayrshire Council and First ScotRail. The shop is open every Saturday morning and sells refreshments and souvenirs.

A partnership between SAYLSA, the National Autistic Society's Daldorch House School and First ScotRail has seen the school make 10 planters for Girvan station and fill them with shrubs, which the students will tend as part of their curriculum. Planters have also been provided for Barrhill station, with the Network Rail signallers undertaking the maintenance.

SAYLSA, which hopes to act as a local marketing arm of the railway, wants to see hourly services between Girvan and Ayr and improved timetabling for the whole route to ensure better connections at all points between Stranraer, Glasgow and Newcastle. Like rail user groups and the Community Rail Partnerships (see Section 11), which exist predominantly south of the Border, SAYLSA will also seek improved facilities at stations including floral decorations and facilities for the disabled, in partnership with community groups and Network Rail.

The group is currently working in conjunction with First ScotRail on the development of a 'windowgazer' guide to lineside attractions and the distinctive features of the line.

SAYLSA's charitable purpose is:

“To provide through community involvement, education and information, support for the Stranraer to Ayr railway line by encouraging rail in preference to road travel so as to protect the environment and promote sustainable development. The organisation aims to promote the culture and heritage of the districts through which it operates and seeks to work with appropriate organisations, permitting the railway to play its part in overcoming physical, financial and social barriers to travel and access to employment, healthcare and social facilities including travel on the line itself to see the natural beauty of the landscape often inaccessible by other means.”

Its aims and objectives are:

“(a) To promote and develop the Stranraer–Ayr line for passenger and freight traffic in accordance with local, regional and national transportation policies

(b) To establish a mechanism for liaising with the ScotRail franchise holder, Network Rail, other freight and train operating companies, central and local government, groups and individuals interested in the line

(c) To act as a respected rail user group for local rail travellers

(d) To work with local community based groups to enhance the ambience of the stations along the rail line through station adoption schemes.

(e) To work with the franchise operator and local tourism agencies to market the line for visitors

(f) To work with local agencies to allow the rail line to play its part in overcoming barriers to economic and social inclusion

(g) To assist in improving physical and modal accessibility and

(h) To further heritage-based activities on and along the line.”

4.7 Current plans for the railway

Partly in anticipation of the withdrawal of shipping services at Stranraer, Network Rail’s 2006 consultation on a Route Utilisation Strategy for Scotland proposed the withdrawal of through trains between Glasgow and Stranraer, to be replaced by connections at Ayr or Kilmarnock into a Kilmarnock-Ayr-Stranraer shuttle service. This met with significant opposition, and the finalised 2007 RUS document noted that “following a review of the timetable proposals and resources, it was considered appropriate that some services should continue to operate as through services between Glasgow and Stranraer.” It was also noted that “further work is ongoing to identify a revised timetable which can be delivered within the existing resource base.”

The Ayr-Stranraer service has remained unchanged since 1996, but Transport Scotland, First ScotRail and Network Rail are planning for a major timetable recast in 2009. This has been prompted by changes to the Glasgow-Kilmarnock service when an extended dynamic loop is opened from Lugton to Stewarton on the single-track section between Barrhead and Kilmarnock.

A number of timetable conferences have been held, and while the presumption has been that most Stranraer trains will run to/from Kilmarnock (Newcastle trains being

withdrawn) with some continuing through trains to Glasgow, the precise details have yet to be finalised.

In the absence of freight for 15 years, in December 2007 Network Rail announced (under formal consultation procedures) a proposed 'Network Change' reducing the line's 'Route Availability' to RA5 (maximum 19 tonne axleloads), as a result of the condition of 11 underbridges which had been maintained only to accommodate lighter-weight diesel unit passenger trains.

In light of protests from a wide range of stakeholders within and outwith the rail industry, and intimation of aspirations for freight use, Network Rail advised in February 2008 that a Short Term Network Change would be issued instead. This will allow freight trains to be operated up to the existing 22.5t ('RA8') capability with appropriate dispensations and speed restrictions, with Network Rail monitoring the frequency of heavier traffic crossing the structures to protect their structural integrity and prolonged operational robustness. In the longer term the structures will be reinstated to full permanent RA8 capability if traffic is committed and an appropriate business case can be made.

However, one of the potential rail operators over the route, DRS, has expressed concern that the speed restrictions on heavier axleload trains could add 20-25 minutes in each direction to the Ayr-Stranraer transit. This is a potentially significant impact on locomotive utilisation and train crew diagrams.

5. RECENT STUDIES OF THE LINE

5.1 Introduction

It would appear that the current study is the first for many years, if ever, to look holistically at the operations, business and wider role of the Ayr-Stranraer railway specifically. However, a number of studies in recent years have examined particular aspects of the railway, notably:

- the 2004 Stranraer Public Transport Interchange Study
- the 2005 Dumfries and Stranraer Rail Routes Study
- the 2006 Passenger Focus study
- the 2007 SWestrans Region Wide Rail Station Strategy.

5.2 2004 Stranraer Public Transport Interchange Study

In light of the planned Stena Line move of ferry terminal from Stranraer to Cairnryan, Dumfries and Galloway Council obtained funding from the Scottish Executive for the development of Stranraer station as a Public Transport Interchange, involving its relocation to a more suitable site closer to Stranraer town centre.

In 2004 the Council commissioned a feasibility study to review and appraise two potential sites for the proposed Public Transport Interchange – Option 1 adjacent to Cairnryan Road (around a third of a mile south of the existing station) and Option 2 at the former Town Yard / Station area. A variety of sub-options were appraised at each site, with either site being able to meet the key rail-specific requirements:

- Network Rail and Her Majesty's Railway Inspectorate ('HMRI') guidelines
- platform capacity for ScotRail trains up to 6-coach length
- protection of any future requirement for rail freight handling facilities in Stranraer, and 'run-round' facilities for locomotive-hauled freight trains and/or passenger charter trains.

An assessment was also made of the opportunities to reinstate the former Stranraer-**Cairnryan** branch line. These identified a range of infrastructure requirements, including signalling; earthworks, fencing and track over a 6-mile corridor; 6 new bridges over roads or rivers; a new bridge to take the A77 over the railway; and provision of 4 road level crossings. It was concluded that a through train service from Cairnryan to Glasgow via Stranraer would, at best, take 2 hours 25 minutes, ie longer than a competing coach service.

Subsequent to this study, Dumfries & Galloway Council concluded that Option 1 adjacent to Cairnryan Road would provide the best location in terms of capital costs, rail operational flexibility, amenity and environment. Further work was undertaken by consultants in late 2006 including investigation of passenger charter and rail freight market implications of the station relocation.

The station design provides for a single platform accommodating a 6-car Class 156, while loco-hauled charter trains of up to 10 coaches will be able to use the associated platform track (and rounding loop).

The implications of the changed Stena plans (and associated timescale) for the Public Transport Interchange – whose design involved the utilisation of some operational Stena land – are not known at this stage.

5.3 2005 Dumfries and Stranraer Rail Routes Study

In 2005, Dumfries & Galloway Council commissioned the 'Dumfries and Stranraer rail routes study', which examined options for rail operations and timetabling, projected patronage, service provision, as well as infrastructure improvements and the associated technical issues and preliminary STAG appraisals.

An operational and financial evaluation of the scope for a **recast timetable** was modelled, taking account of the impact on operating costs, diesel unit requirements, changes in passenger volumes and profitability. The principal aim of the modelling was to maximise demand whilst maintaining costs at reasonable levels, with the basic principle being that all trains would seek to serve Glasgow, although pathing constraints and fleet resources might require certain Stranraer line trains to terminate at Kilmarnock.

The total number of trains to/from Stranraer would increase from 14 to 16 per day, with the following pattern of arrivals and departures:

- arrivals at 09.21, 11.11, 13.11, 14.11, 18.11, 19.31, 21.32 and 23.32
- departures at 07.09, 10.00, 12.00, 14.00, 15.00, 18.22, 20.22 and 22.22

So far as Dumfries & Galloway patronage is concerned, the main projected beneficiaries on the Stranraer line would be Stranraer to Glasgow at +900 journeys pa (+4%) and Stranraer to Ayr at +840 journeys pa (+4%). Overall, trips to Stranraer were estimated to increase by 1900jpa (+5%).

A sub-option of the above – ie again without deploying additional train resources – would have involved all Stranraer trains running limited stop north of Ayr and not travelling via Kilmarnock. The effect on Stranraer was a projected increase in volume of 3,900 or (+9%). This sub-option, maximising Stranraer journey opportunities, was projected to generate 293,000 passenger journeys annually on the Stranraer train service, compared to the then (2005) figure of 276,000 (excluding passengers travelling to between Glasgow and stations to Kilmarnock). However, routing trains via Paisley rather than Kilmarnock would be more expensive because the Stranraer trains then have to cover their full costs between Ayr and Glasgow.

The study report highlighted the potential for **tourism and leisure markets** in two particular areas – leisure cycling opportunities around a potential new station in the Dunragit area, and potential rail / bus / garden visitor attraction package developments in the 'post-Stena' era on the Stranraer line, served by both ScotRail trains and occasional charter trains from points other than Glasgow.

The study examined the case for a station at **Dunragit**, and concluded this would generate an increase in annual volume of 10,000 journeys / 567,000 passenger miles, with additional revenue of £45,000. Capital costs would be £680,000 and an allowance of £20,000 p.a. was made for operating costs. Funding support would be required to meet the capital costs of the scheme, and net operating revenue would achieve payback in about 29 years.

The study concluded that there did not appear to be any immediate prospects for rail **freight** on the Stranraer line (other than timber developments at Barrhill in South Ayrshire), but it would be prudent to retain a strategic capability for freight handling at Stranraer - including freight sidings, a rounding loop, hardstanding for transfer of container traffic and good-quality road access for HGVs.

5.4 2006 Passenger Focus study

In late 2006, on behalf of Passenger Focus, Continental Research undertook on-train survey work between Ayr and Stranraer on passengers' priorities. A 72% response rate was secured from passengers, of whom 77% were travelling for leisure purposes, 19% commuting and 4% on business. 55% of respondents were under 35 years of age.

Passengers were questioned on the importance, experience and expectation of various service attributes for trains and stations on the line. For stations, the biggest gap between expectations and experience were (in descending order):

- provision of information about train times / platforms
- ticket buying facilities.

For on-train attributes, the biggest gap between expectations and experience were (in descending order):

- value for money for price of ticket
- frequency of trains on the route
- personal security while on the train
- punctuality / reliability of the train
- speed.

Weighting the gaps by the importance attached to each service attribute, a weighted gap analysis showed the following priorities for improvement (in descending order):

- provision of information about train times / platforms
- value for money for price of ticket
- ticket buying facilities.

A number of route-specific questions were put to passengers, responses to which included:

- 71% of passengers were travelling to/from Stranraer rather than intermediate stations, and 52% of these were making ferry connections
- 73% of passengers on the route also make rail journeys to or from Glasgow and/or Paisley
- just over half of those going to/from Glasgow and/or Paisley would still make this journey if this involved a change of trains (26% would not)
- if a change of trains was required:

- 65% would be very concerned (88% concerned) about being able to make the connection on time
- 60% would be very concerned (88% concerned) about adding extra time to their journey.

5.5 2007 SWestrans Region Wide Rail Station Strategy

Atkins consultancy delivered their strategic overview on station enhancements and re-openings in March 2007. The case for a station at Dunragit was concluded to be one of two new station proposals within the region which “seem to offer a lower level of benefits relative to their potential high costs and...high complications of implementation”.

The estimated cost of a new station was £913,000, plus an ‘optimism bias’ of 68% to allow for any issues arising in the building process, giving a total of £1,534,000. The largest single physical works cost element was £248,000 for the 2-platform construction. The forecast daily demand was just 5 passengers, with the stated transport objectives being firstly to cater for local communities and secondly to provide a gateway to the area for tourism. It was recommended that station re-opening should be adopted as a long-term proposal to be taken forward as circumstance permit.

The report also noted that “Glenluce Abbey is located some 2.5 miles north of Dunragit and is a staffed Historic Scotland site which attracts around 3,000 visitors annually. It is recognised as being somewhat ‘off the beaten track’, although it is located within a third of a mile of the railway track”.

6. STRENGTHS & WEAKNESSES OF THE LINE

Research for this study suggests that the Ayr-Stranraer route has a number of **strengths**, notably:

- on through trains from Stranraer to Glasgow via Paisley, a competitive speed versus coach and car – with fastest journeys of 2h 8m (47mph average)
- timetabled ferry connections are relatively good, particularly in the ‘from Belfast’ direction and on Mondays-Fridays
- the Class 156 trains – particularly those refurbished in 2007 – provide an attractive and comfortable travelling environment, with large picture windows and generous bike capacity
- the traditional signalling system – with face-to-face contact between signallers and train crew south of Kilkerran – facilitates a resilient and integrated Network Rail / ScotRail operation, and provides valuable rural employment
- on-train and station staff have a reputation for being friendly and attentive to passenger needs
- the SAYLSA support group is unique in Scotland and has demonstrated its ability to organise events which bring new publicity and potentially new custom to the railway
- the route traverses attractive countryside (with three unique stations) and has the potential, through integrated marketing packages, to tap into a significant market for day leisure trips from the Glasgow area to visitor attractions in south Ayrshire and western Galloway – it also offers potential access to leisure walking and cycling markets.

Currently however, the line has some significant **weaknesses**, notably:

- the timetable is the most complex and irregular in Scotland (only in part due to ferry timings), with gaps of up to 5 hours at Stranraer
- rail-ferry connections are not necessarily maintained when either mode is running late, and there appear to be continuing uncertainties about the principle and practice of when connections should be held
- the timetable does not adequately cater for the (domestic) Stranraer area to Glasgow day trip market, through (a) lack of trains at convenient times (including no arrival in Glasgow before 09.50), and (b) lack of standard minutes past the hour timings to simplify the timetable
- fares from Stranraer are perceived as expensive (and free bus travel for Senior Citizens limits the attraction of rail)
- the timetable does not cater at all for the Glasgow to western Galloway day trip leisure market

- for its size and proximity to Central Scotland, Girvan has an irregular and relatively infrequent train service with some long gaps (up to 3 hours)
- the Stranraer line has not enjoyed the benefits of the 'partnership' approach for the rural Highland network, bringing service innovations, new station openings and fares initiatives – see Section 14.1.

As a result of the above and other factors – notably competition from low-priced airlines between Belfast and Prestwick / Glasgow, the route is poorly patronised, with typically around 500 passengers a day (Monday-Friday) on 24 trains with a total seating capacity of 3,480 people, ie an average of 21 people per train, each of which has a minimum capacity of 145 people.

Data from the Transport Model for Scotland in the Final Report Draft of Transport Scotland's Strategic Transport Projects Review indicate that for journeys between Glasgow and Stranraer in 2005, public transport's share (rail + bus) of the daily demand (12 hour) of 3,200 trips was less than 100, ie less than 1%. This tends to confirm that rail is not playing sufficiently to its strengths (notably speed), and is hampered by weaknesses such as lack of trains timed to reach Glasgow in the peak and to serve the day trip market from Glasgow to western Galloway.

7. DEVELOPING NEW PASSENGER BUSINESS

7.1 Introduction

A central objective of this scoping study has been to identify key demand issues (for more detailed research, and incorporation in a development strategy) in the regeneration of the Ayr-Stranraer railway, primarily through gearing its services better to the needs of local users, leisure visitors and tourists.

It should be acknowledged that there is a limited availability of data on market sizes, both existing and potential – in the case of the former, for example, rail's current share of the Central Scotland to Northern Ireland market is not known. It is however apparent that low-priced airlines have had a major impact on the surface transport modes, and this in part explains the now relatively modest rail patronage levels south of Girvan on Mondays to Fridays.

In part, therefore, specific rail development measures along the corridor will have to reflect experience elsewhere (what works and what doesn't), as well as seeking to satisfy wider policy objectives – all within resource constraints. Some corridor-specific survey and modelling work may however be appropriate as part of the follow-up to this study.

The Transport Model for Scotland quoted in the Final Report Draft of Transport Scotland's Strategic Transport Projects Review projects that public transport's already small (less than 1%) share between Glasgow and Stranraer will decline even further by 2022 to less than 100 trips out of a daily (12 hour) demand of 4,400. This projection tends to underline the limitations of high-level modelling, and its failure to take account of the scope for significant practical improvements in the rail offer *and in public awareness of the rail offer*.

A useful approach to the task of developing new passenger markets is to break this down into five key questions:

- why?
- by how much?
- how?
- who?
- what, where & when?

7.2 Why?

There are three key reasons why it is important to develop new passenger business for the Ayr-Stranraer railway:

- (iv) the railway (particularly south of Girvan) and its train services are substantially underutilised
- (v) the railway has unrealised potential to fulfil a bigger economic, social and environmental role, in line with regional and national policy objectives

- (vi) the anticipated Stena departure will remove a significant minority of the line's passengers, at least south of Girvan.

7.3 By how much?

While ferry passengers represent broadly 50-60% of rail users at Stranraer, it needs to be borne in mind that over the line as a whole, passengers at Stranraer can represent – depending on the day of the week and the train – typically only between one third and one half of all users south of Ayr.

Based on on-train passenger counts undertaken by First ScotRail in May 2007, it is possible to project the broad scale of the task of ferry passenger replacement, at least south of Girvan. While three Stranraer trains did not have passenger counts undertaken, none of them had ferry connections.

On the weekday count, with 161 passengers boarding and alighting at Stranraer, and an assumption of 55% ferry passengers, then 88 would be 'lost' from the train between Stranraer and Girvan at least. This equates to an average of just 6 passengers per train, based on all 14 trains to and from Stranraer.

On the Saturday count, with 447 passengers boarding and alighting at Stranraer, and an assumption of 55% ferry passengers, then 245 would be 'lost' from the train between Stranraer and Girvan at least. This equates to an average of 19 passengers per train, based on all 13 trains to and from Stranraer.

On the Sunday count, with 260 passengers boarding and alighting at Stranraer, and an assumption of 55% ferry passengers, then 143 would be 'lost' from the train between Stranraer and Girvan at least. This equates to an average of 29 passengers per train, based on all 5 trains to and from Stranraer.

Clearly there are limits to the usefulness of averages, but given the relatively modest numbers of rail-ferry passengers on Mondays-Fridays it can be seen that the task of replacing these is not as large as might otherwise be assumed. The task is greater at weekends, but as this is the key time of the week for leisure travel then the opportunities are likely to be greater.

7.4 How?

There is no single panacea, but rather a range of variables which are capable of change or improvement in order to secure the regeneration of the railway. These will have varying capital expenditure and operating expenditure implications, and some will be more easily delivered than others. They range from 'hard' issues like route infrastructure through to 'soft' or 'people' issues like management and partnership. In practice it may be easier to secure one-off capital investment than ongoing funding for operating expenditure.

Current performance, potential for change and expenditure implications in different 'action areas' are summarised in the table below.

	Current condition / performance	Potential for change / improvement	Expenditure implications
Route infrastructure	Acceptable to good.	Scope to (a) remove bridge speed restrictions south of Girvan and (b) return locomotive accessibility to the Girvan 'Down' loop	Medium to high, but (a) will have to be undertaken eventually, and (b) could be pressed on Network Rail by a prospective rail haulier.
Stations	Acceptable to underperforming. Stranraer station is 'out of sight, out of mind' for much of the local market. 26-mile gap between Barrhill and Stranraer	All stations would benefit from upgrading / greater use being made of accommodation. Stranraer PTI crucial to an improved rail offer for 'domestic' traffic. Could usefully be filled by a station to serve local and inbound leisure markets	Partnership sharing of expenditure will be crucial. Funds already allocated by Scottish Executive / Government. A range of potential funders for a new Glenluce Abbey station, but could cost £0.5m+.
Trains	Good quality.	Refurbish the remainder of the train fleet.	Medium to high – Transport Scotland.
Train timetable	Some trains are ideally timed, others are poor. The timetable is complex and irregular.	Scope to improve as knock-on from 2009 recast of Glasgow-Kilmarnock services.	Need to obtain improvements while also containing operating costs.
On-train services	Minimum standard – 145 seats and toilet. Good bike accommodation.	Opportunity to re-introduce regular catering facility. Scope for one-off on-train events (eg dining) organised by SAYLSA.	Depends on balance of voluntary / commercial input. Could be cost-neutral.
Service integration with other modes	Train-ferry good at Stranraer, and train-bus good at Girvan, but otherwise poor.	Stranraer PTI and integrated rail-bus packages to key attractions eg Logan Botanic Garden and Mull of Galloway.	May need some initial public sector pump-priming for leisure packages, particularly if pre-PTI opening
Fares and integrated ticketing	Through rail-ferry fares to N Ireland but no local rail-bus tickets. Perception that 'domestic' fares from Stranraer are expensive.	Integrated rail-bus packages to key attractions Need for marketing campaign.	Marketing expenditure.

	Current condition / performance	Potential for change / improvement	Expenditure implications
Marketing / branding	No marketing other than N Ireland traffic.	Plenty of scope for improvement. Needs to be co-ordinated between First ScotRail and SAYLSA.	Marketing expenditure, but also some voluntary SAYLSA input
Management, staff and community input	Local management at Ayr is relatively close. Staff reputation as friendly and attentive. SAYLSA has already had an impact, demonstrating ability to organise.	Ayr probably remains the most cost-effective centre, but the line needs its own distinctive strategy. Scope for more staff ideas and initiatives. Scope for formal route partnership, but the best model is not yet clear.	Unclear. Unclear. Depends on the outputs sought. Funding for part-time Development Officer might be needed.

7.5 Who?

Ideally a development strategy for the line should be delivered by a cross-sector and cross-boundary partnership, utilising a wide range of potential funders, facilitators and delivery agents for specific improvement measures.

The most appropriate parties to be involved in specific initiatives will depend on the nature of the measures involved. For example, Transport Scotland could be involved in funding towards any specific timetable / train improvements, but would not be a candidate for undertaking station garden maintenance. Equally, SAYLSA could be a key agent for local marketing and awareness-raising, but would not be expected to provide investment towards a new station.

Key potential stakeholders include the following:

- Transport Scotland
- First ScotRail and Network Rail
- SWestrans, SPT, Dumfries & Galloway Council, South Ayrshire Council, and Community Councils
- SAYLSA
- Visit Scotland, Historic Scotland, Logan Botanic Garden and other visitor attractions
- local bus and coach hire companies
- Stena Line and P&O.

7.6 What, where and when?

There is a wide range of possible national, regional, route corridor and location-specific measures which could help secure the regeneration of the railway, through increased patronage and net revenue and improved economic, social and environmental value. Many of these stem from assessment of the current strengths and weaknesses of the line, from experience of best practice elsewhere, and from the regional and national policy contexts.

Potential timescales for implementation vary significantly from measure to measure, spanning short-term through medium-term to long-term. The various measures can be usefully grouped under three broad headings:

- new markets, marketing & branding opportunities
- timetable recast opportunities
- stations and rail-bus-ferry integration opportunities.

Opportunities under these headings are explored specifically in Sections 8, 9 and 10 respectively below.

8. NEW MARKETS, MARKETING & BRANDING OPPORTUNITIES

8.1 Attractions of the immediate rail corridor and the railway itself

From an inbound leisure market perspective, the Ayr-Stranraer line offers a journey of great variety through attractive scenery, traversing virtually roadless country south of Barrhill to the Luce Valley:

- firstly climbing from Ayr through the open countryside of the River Doon valley to Maybole
- then dropping down into the wooded valley of the Water of Girvan, with distant views to the hills of Carrick Forest
- on the steep climb out of Girvan, there are dramatic coastal views towards Ailsa Craig, then the line plunges through Pinmore Tunnel, around steep hillsides and over four viaducts to reach the lonely outpost of Barrhill station
- beyond Barrhill is another steep climb, with distant views to Merrick, the highest mountain in the Southern Uplands; then in the words of Michael Pearson ⁶ “you are engulfed by forestry and you cease to feel yourself so much in Scotland as in Central Europe; the Harz Mountains perhaps, or even further east in the Carpathians”
- south of Chirmorie Summit the line reaches another lonely railway outpost at Glenwhilly crossing loop, and then traverses bleak upland country which has been described as reminiscent of the interior of the Falkland Islands
- descending into the lush valley of the Water of Luce, the railway passes close to Glenluce Abbey, and with brief views towards Luce Bay and the Mull of Galloway turns westward over farmland towards Stranraer
- after reaching the outskirts of Stranraer, the train drops into a steep cutting with no hint of the dramatic final arrival at the coast, bursting out under the A77 road bridge to emerge on to a long causeway towards the harbour station, with unrestricted views across the water of Loch Ryan towards Cairnryan and the South Ayrshire hills – a real sense of arrival.

The railway itself is of interest, and not just for rail enthusiasts:

- Stranraer is Britain’s oldest working harbour station
- Girvan has Scotland’s only surviving ‘art deco’ style station building, dating from 1951 after a fire destroyed the previous structure
- Barrhill is Scotland’s last traditional rural station with a staffed signal box.
- south of Girvan the line is one of the last in Scotland to be operated by the traditional Electric Token Block system, with semaphore signals and signallers manually exchanging the single line tokens with train drivers.

⁶ Iron Roads to Burns Country; Michael Pearson; 2006

8.2 Attractions accessible from the rail corridor

The railway also offers existing or potential access to a variety of visitor attractions in South Ayrshire and the Rhins and Machars of Galloway, either directly or by means of integrated rail-bus connections (with associated rail-bus-entrance integrated tickets). Key examples are listed below:

(i) Adjacent to the railway:

- Glenluce Abbey (Visit Scotland 4-star rated historic attraction)
- Southern Upland Way – crosses the railway two miles north of Glenluce Abbey
- The Carrick Way – (currently under development) a new 100-mile trail, accessible from Girvan, Maybole and Barrhill stations
- National Cycle Route – Route NCR 73 Newton Stewart-Cairnryan will pass under the railway near Glenluce Abbey (also linking to a leisure cycle network in the Machars, and northwards by minor road to Barrhill)
- North West Castle Hotel, Stranraer – where curling tournaments are held.

(ii) Within 5 miles of Maybole / Girvan stations:

- Culzean Castle & Country Park (5-star rated visitor attraction)
- Crossraguel Abbey, Maybole (3-star rated historic attraction)
- Souter Johnnie's Cottage, Kirkoswald
- Turnberry Hotel and Golf Course (where the 2009 Open Championship will be held)
- Lendalfoot Beach and Girvan Harbour.

(iii) Within 15 miles of Stranraer station:

- Logan Botanic Gardens (4-star rated gardens)
- Dunskey Gardens, Portpatrick (4-star rated gardens) plus the village of Portpatrick as an attraction in itself
- Castle Kennedy (3-star rated gardens)
- Glenwhan Gardens, Dunragit (3-star rated gardens).

(iv) Within 25 miles of Stranraer station / Glenluce Abbey:

- Mull of Galloway Lighthouse & Visitor Centre (4-star rated visitor attraction)
- Wigtown, Scotland's National Book Town
- The Whithorn Story (4-star rated visitor attraction).

8.3 Other potential markets

Travel from Stranraer line stations to **Ayr** is currently by far the dominant market for the railway, accounting for 65% of journeys. Ayr is a natural centre for western Galloway and South Ayrshire, and provides employment, leisure, shopping, education and other opportunities. All the current trains in the timetable serve Ayr, albeit with an irregular pattern of service.

By contrast, all other destinations / origins of Stranraer or Girvan trains – including **Glasgow** – involve a complex timetable with low frequency / changes of train / different routing options. This in part may explain how much less important all other locations are than Ayr, in current line patronage terms:

- Glasgow 15%
- Kilmarnock 3%
- Paisley 2%
- Edinburgh 2%
- Irvine 2%

The available statistics do not give a definitive picture of the proportion of the line's users who are **ferry connectors**. First ScotRail passenger counts in May 2007 point to around one third of Monday-Friday line users being passengers to or from Stranraer, with around a half at weekends being to or from Stranraer. Of those who responded to the 2006 Passenger Focus on-train survey, 71% were travelling to or from Stranraer.

From the foregoing, and from separate First ScotRail and Passenger Focus data indicating that 50%-60% of Stranraer rail passengers are ferry connectors, it may be concluded that the latter represent between 20% and 40% of the line's total patronage, depending on the day of the week, the season, etc.

During consultation for this study, a number of consultees mentioned the importance of **Kilmarnock** as an educational centre and a point of interchange for trains to Dumfries, Carlisle and Newcastle. However, the current Girvan-Ayr-Kilmarnock timetable is both infrequent and irregular (even more so from south of Girvan to Kilmarnock), with just 7 trains daily, and patronage is consequently low. Doubts were also expressed as to whether rail can provide an attractive alternative to the bus or the car without a very substantial improvement in frequency and regularity. It may be that improvements would be best built on the railway's existing success between Girvan and Ayr, where – with some targeted investment – an hourly regular interval service could be achieved.

In the absence of a regional airport, SWESTRANS attaches significant importance to being able to market South West Scotland as a region with direct rail links to **Prestwick International Airport** station. Currently 2 out of 6 trains a day from Stranraer which pass through the airport station actually call there. In the reverse direction 3 out of 6 call there. 3 out of 3 'short workings' to and from Girvan also call there. Interestingly, none of the 2 trains in each direction daily linking the Stranraer line with Dumfries call at Prestwick International.

The rail-air link from Glasgow to Prestwick has been very successful, reflecting a fast electric service and crucially a half-hourly frequency throughout the day, enabling good connections to be made with any of the 25 or so flights daily from the airport.

As shown by the ScotRail figures quoted earlier, passengers from the Stranraer line to **Dumfries, Carlisle** and **Newcastle**, represent a very small proportion of the line's users, with each of these locations representing less than 2% of the line's patronage. This is not surprising, since the train from Stranraer to Dumfries via Ayr and Kilmarnock takes 3½ hours and operates just once / twice daily, compared to 8 journeys a day by direct bus /coach, taking just 2¼ hours.

The railway will always be in a weak competitive position on this route – in contrast to the Glasgow-Kilmarnock-Dumfries-Carlisle-Newcastle service – and this explains why Transport Scotland and First ScotRail are minded to withdraw the through services and concentrate the Stranraer line's train services on where rail is strongest.

However, to mitigate actual and perceived negative impacts, there may be scope (with inter-operator co-operation) to provide through rail-bus fares from Newcastle to Stranraer, changing modes at Dumfries. All the X75 / 500 buses between Carlisle/Dumfries and Stranraer already call at Dumfries station, and an integrated package could offer a price and frequency *improvement* on current rail arrangements.

One market which does not necessarily involve any geographical destination is the possibility of providing **on-train entertainment and dining events**. This is a market that has been successfully tapped by community rail partnerships in England, bringing new custom to trains which would otherwise be poorly patronised. SAYLSA have been exploring such possibilities for the Stranraer line, and this is potentially another useful market which can both raise local awareness of the railway and increase patronage.

8.4 Potential marketing and branding initiatives

Timetable recasting, station improvements / integration with other modes, and partnership are all key elements of a strategy to develop new markets, and these are discussed in some detail in Sections 9, 10 and 11 below. However marketing and branding initiatives will be critical to bringing infrastructure and service improvements to the attention of potential users, and persuading them to sample the line.

(i) Fares:

The study has heard from a number of consultees that there is a public perception of high fares in the Stranraer area and that this contributes to a relatively low rail mode share of trips to Ayr and Glasgow. In part this perception may stem from an historic cross-border anomaly relating to the former Strathclyde Passenger Transport Executive area and associated cheaper per mile fares, including the past availability of the Daytripper ticket at Barrhill. However, as shown in the tables in Section 4.4 (v), this ticket is no longer available for purchase at Barrhill or on the train, and its continuing availability at Girvan station is only from the 10.52 train onwards, restricting its practical use for day trips to Glasgow.

One national policy issue with relevance to mode share on the Stranraer line is the availability of free bus travel for Senior Citizens and its impact on rail patronage. It is noteworthy that in Wales the Welsh Assembly Government is funding free rail travel for senior citizens on two rural lines – the Conway Valley branch line and the Central Wales line from Swansea to Shrewsbury. This could be introduced by Transport Scotland on a trial basis on the Stranraer line (a) to test the potential costs and benefits for a possible wider introduction to other rural Scottish routes, and (b) to encourage greater sampling of the Stranraer rail offer at the time of the timetable recast.

Clearly it is important to raise public awareness of the competitiveness of current fares. There will also be a major opportunity to highlight fares (including possible short-term promotions) as part of a re-launch of the Stranraer line to coincide with the

2009 timetable recast and the opening of the new Public Transport Interchange (year uncertain).

It has been suggested by SAYLSA that the Stranraer line is missing out on potential fare offers such as those enjoyed by Highland routes, in particular the Highland Railcard which at a cost of £7.50 allows residents to get 50% off adult Singles, Day Returns, and Savers on the North Highland, Kyle and West Highland lines. In the latter case the offer is valid through to Glasgow, which is of course outwith the Highland or Argyll & Bute Council areas.

A Wigtownshire or Western Galloway Railcard would be a one-station arrangement unless it embraced Stranraer-Ayr, but potential users would presumably also expect a discount to Glasgow and this could conflict with SPT products like their Zonocard.

A partial alternative, appealing particularly to the leisure market, could be to consider the introduction of an Ayrshire & Galloway Rover card, similar to the existing Highland Rover and Central Scotland Rover. The latter allows 3 out of 7 consecutive days unlimited travel for only £31 in an area bounded by Edinburgh, Glasgow, North Berwick, Bathgate, Dunblane, Markinch, Falkirk and all intermediate stations. The Rover is not valid on services timed to depart before 0915 Monday to Friday, in order to avoid abstraction of normal fare traffic.

An Ayrshire & Galloway Rover could allow First ScotRail to generate additional revenue from visitors to Ayrshire associated with the 2009 Robert Burns 'Homecoming' festival and the 2009 Open Golf Championship at Turnberry, potentially bringing additional tourism to western Galloway.

(ii) Integrated ticketing:

As indicated earlier, developing new markets for rail travel to visitor attractions will depend on integrated ticketing (and in many cases on integrated bus-rail connections). There are a number of long-established such packages – agreed between First ScotRail, bus/ferry operators and the visitor attractions – available in other parts of Scotland, including:

- Benmore Botanic Garden, by Dunoon
- Mount Stuart House, on Bute
- Brodick Castle, on Arran
- New Lanark
- Scottish Seabird Centre, North Berwick.

Two of the four Strathclyde attractions involve journeys of over 2 hours from Glasgow. Taking a sub-3 hour journey as the specification, then a range of South Ayrshire and western Galloway attractions potentially fall within such a catchment from Glasgow, including Culzean Castle, Portpatrick Village, Logan Botanic Garden, Castle Kennedy and Glenluce Abbey. The Mull of Galloway and Wigtown Book Town are more distant, but could fall within the catchment of day trips by rail from Ayr.

(iii) Production of a line 'windowgazer' guide:

Both traditionally and in modern times, rail companies have produced 'windowgazer' guides to the lineside features and attractions of their most scenic lines. Within Scotland this has been particularly associated with the rural Highland lines, but

British Rail did produce such a guide for the Stranraer line in the 1980s under the branding of the 'Galloway Line'.

SAYLSA is currently working with First ScotRail on the development of a modern guide to the Stranraer line for distribution on trains, at stations and in hotels, visitor attractions and tourist information centres. A free such leaflet could also be used to market sales of the excellent 64-page 'Iron Roads to Burns Country' booklet published by Michael Pearson in 2006 with funding assistance from a variety of organisations including Dumfries & Galloway Council, Scottish Enterprise Ayrshire and SPT.

(iv) Coach tours:

A growing market on Scottish scenic lines is the block-booking of seats on trains for coach parties, to provide a change within the itinerary from road-based travel – often where the rail line traverses countryside not penetrated by principal (or any) roads. Examples include Golspie-Wick, Rannoch-Fort William, Crianlarich-Fort William and Dingwall-Kyle.

Coach touring is increasingly popular amongst an ageing population, and ACORP (the Association of Community Rail Partnerships) has advised that experience suggest that when customers have sampled rail as part of a coach-based package, they then can be attracted to return independently the next time, by train. This market sector is organisationally easy and a potential 'quick win', and provides a baseload market for on-train trolley catering, including refreshments and souvenirs.

First ScotRail is keen to explore this market on the Stranraer line (which traverses virtually roadless country between Barrhill and Glen Luce), and this year has attracted the major operator of accompanied rail touring, Great Rail Journeys, to use the Stranraer line en route to Ireland.

(v) Branding:

Naming of rail routes is a long-established practice, as in the case of the world-famous West Highland Line or the Far North Line to Caithness, but in modern times the practice has been consciously extended as a branding exercise, particularly as part of wider promotional packages on routes with Community Rail Partnerships.

ACORP advises that 'top-down' naming of routes can struggle to gain public acceptance if the name is not popular or already used. In contrast, SPT's decision some years ago to formally adopt the name 'the Subway' for the Glasgow Underground embraced a long-established nickname in popular parlance. In the case of the Stranraer line, the traditional railway name for the route was 'the Paddy', but this is not a realistic proposition for a re-launch of the railway, as (a) the term now sounds outdated and pejorative, and (b) it says nothing about the character of the line or the corridor through which it runs.

At a recent SAYLSA meeting it was noted that the south west coast of Scotland is renowned for its mild climate and associated garden attractions featuring exotic plants, and the current initiatives to develop station gardens at Girvan and Barrhill provide a potential theme for the line, reflecting the character of the line itself and the countryside to which it gives access. Maybole station, which is currently not as attractive as it might be, has a good setting for development of a garden on the redundant platform.

With 'palm trees on the platforms' south of Ayr – even at the new Stranraer Public Transport Interchange, where Logan Botanic Garden might be able to assist in the design of a station garden – a gardens theme could be a unique marketing tool for the railway, also helping to emphasise its green / sustainability credentials.

(vi) Website:

As and when a partnership and development strategy for the railway are established, a website would become a key element of marketing of the route. There are many examples of high-quality rail route websites throughout Britain, particularly for lines which have benefited from Community Rail Partnerships, including:

- the Borderlands Line in Wales – <http://www.borderlandslines.com/>
- the Conway Valley Line in Wales – <http://www.conwy.gov.uk/cvr/>
- the Highland Rail Partnership – <http://www.highlandrail.org/>
- the Wherry Lines in East Anglia – <http://www.wherrylines.org.uk/>

8.5 Charters and steam-hauled trains

(i) Charter trains

Charter trains – typically linking major centres with leisure destinations which do not have direct scheduled trains, and/or featuring older diesel locomotives which are of particular interest to enthusiasts – represent an important niche market for rail travel in Britain. Such trains have visited Stranraer in recent times – twice during 2007 – but the lack of profile of (a) the Stranraer line as a scenic route, and (b) western Galloway as an attractive destination, as opposed to the current perception of Stranraer as purely a transit point en route to Northern Ireland, has limited development of this market. The bridge restriction on loco-hauled trains at Girvan is also a deterrent, as highlighted in the recent case of the Stobart Pullman train discussed in Section 4.2.

The luxury Royal Scotsman train, which operates from Edinburgh throughout the holiday season, offers a number of 'land cruise' itineraries traversing the Highland and West Highland lines, but has not been a regular visitor to the Stranraer line since the early 1990s, when the collapse of the Ness Bridge prevented rail access to the Far North and Kyle lines for a couple of seasons. During that period the train regularly visited the Stranraer line, berthing overnight in the crossing loop at Barrhill.

It is understood that the Royal Scotsman has not returned since the reinstatement of the Ness Bridge, but this is clearly a potential market for the railway in the future, given its scenic value, the opportunity to enhance the traditional rural station feel of Barrhill, and the accessibility of Culzean Castle, Turnberry Golf Course and the 5-star Glenapp House hotel at Ballantrae.

(ii) Steam-hauled trains

Steam-hauled trains are an important niche sector in the tourist and leisure market, both on preserved (primarily volunteer-staffed) branch lines and operating over Network Rail tracks, typically for day or weekend 'land cruises' from major population

centres, or on scenic routes in popular tourist areas such as the long-established 'Jacobite' from Fort William to Mallaig.

There are no such operations in the South West of Scotland, although the Ayrshire Railway Preservation Group has been endeavouring for many years to establish a regular service at its Waterside base beyond the Scottish Coal terminus on the Chalmerston branch line. The nearest regular steam services on standard gauge lines are at Bo'ness and in the southern Lake District.

Scope to fill this gap in the market has been identified by the Wigtownshire Tourist Trains Project (WTTP), which was launched in 2007. WTTP argues that the Stranraer waterfront development "which is crucial to the future of the town once Stena moves to Cairnryan, needs many more tourists than the area currently enjoys to make it viable in its present, proposed format". WTTP sees steam and diesel-hauled tourist trains as an innovative way to bring significant numbers of tourists right into the heart of the proposed waterfront development, thereby boosting the economy of Wigtownshire which has an extremely low profile nationally.

A main concern of WTTP is that the role of the railway should be more central to the waterfront development and that "decisions taken now (such as a relocation of Stranraer station) won't inadvertently lead to this opportunity being 'killed at birth' before its full potential and viability can be explored".

Two key issues arise from the WTTP proposal:

- the potential viability and wider economic contribution of steam and diesel-hauled tourist trains
- the future of the existing harbour station, its potential to form part of the waterfront development, and the relationship to the Public Transport Interchange plan.

On the supply side, steam operations over Network Rail tracks are expensive to resource – locomotives have to be maintained, coal and water needs to be supplied, train crews have to be deployed, the locomotives are heavy on the track and therefore higher access charges are payable to Network Rail, and ideally turntables are required to avoid locomotives running tender-first (with crews exposed to the elements). There are also 'pathing' issues around scheduled trains, and in light of the foregoing WTTP has suggested that an operation from Girvan to Stranraer (at 38 miles, very similar to Fort William-Mallaig) might be the best option.

With regard to demand, attracting sufficient custom to cover costs is considerably easier where at least one end of the transit is already a popular tourist centre and ideally where the railway itself is already a tourist attraction due to its scenic qualities. These two factors have enabled the Fort William-Mallaig service to become a success.

The circumstances between Girvan and Stranraer are very different. Girvan has a tourist profile, albeit relatively modest compared to West Highland circumstances, but Stranraer is known only as a transit port en route to Northern Ireland. This should change with the impact of the planned waterfront development, but the likely timescale for a widespread change in perceptions of Stranraer is medium-term to long-term. The Girvan-Stranraer railway has plenty of scenic interest, but in the absence of any significant marketing of these qualities over the last 20 years it is not

perceived as being in the same league as the world-renowned rural Highland routes. This will also take time to change.

The foregoing suggests that while tourist trains may be a valuable long-term aspiration, detailed analysis of its potential viability and contribution to the local economy is required. A potential scenario is that an agreed development strategy for the line initially concentrates on the key task of attracting more passengers to the existing train service, building up the leisure profile of the route to the point where steam-hauled trains could be the next logical step in regenerating the railway. If such an aspiration is supported then it clearly is important not to prejudice long-term opportunities by short to medium term land use decisions at Stranraer.

WTTP would like to see the existing 19th century station building (the oldest working harbour station in Britain) preserved, either as the continuing station location or as a heritage museum location. Given the wider transport and economic importance of securing a new and visible Public Transport Interchange closer to the town centre, the option of rail services remaining at the existing station does not appear appropriate. There is no room for a proper regional interchange between train, bus and car, and the location is 'out of sight, out of mind' for Stranraer residents.

A stronger prospect might be the conversion of the station to a heritage site (with long-term scope for steam trains to terminate there) but this raises a number of issues around conceptual and physical fit with the waterfront plan, capital funding and ongoing maintenance responsibilities. These require clarification to assess the practicality of protecting and using the station in this way.

8.6 Synergy with non-transport sustainability initiatives

(i) Introduction

As noted in Transform Scotland's 2007 briefing on Scotland's Railways, "as well as relieving road congestion, and offering a substantially safer mode of travel, rail in the right circumstances offers substantial environmental advantages over competing forms of transport. In particular, rail offers significant advantages in terms of carbon emissions compared to road and air transport".

Recent data⁷ suggests that:

- the average carbon dioxide emission for the same passenger rail journey is about half that of an equivalent car journey
- rail is 23 times safer than passenger cars.

Rail also has some strong environmental advantages for freight movements, producing per tonne-kilometre "a small fraction of the particulates, carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides and volatile organic compounds emitted by even the latest most 'environmentally friendly' Heavy Goods Vehicles."⁸

It does however need to be recognised that cross-modal comparisons do depend on the specific circumstances involved, for example the load factor of the train and the car – so a poorly patronised train is likely to show a much poorer environmental performance per passenger than a small well-filled car. However, as the aim of this

⁷ 'The case for rail 2007'; Department for Transport

⁸ 'Scotland's Railways'. Transform Scotland: 2007

study is principally to highlight measures which will attract more passengers to existing trains, it is reasonable to promote the railway as a potential green transport corridor providing synergy with a variety of primarily non-transport initiatives which are being driven by sustainability and environmental imperatives. These are discussed below.

(ii) The Sustainable Tourism Partnership

Scotland's Tourism Framework for Change, which is the tourism strategy for Scotland agreed between the tourism industry and the Scottish Government, sets the twin challenge of establishing Scotland as Europe's most sustainable destination by 2015 and also growing revenue from tourism by 50 per cent over the same period.

As Visit Scotland states on its website, "there are huge benefits to becoming carbon neutral. Not just for the tourism industry, but for everyone living and working in Scotland. Being carbon neutral would give Scotland a chance to gain a competitive edge on other tourism destinations".

In practical terms "as well as improving their energy efficiency and reducing their energy use, businesses can help by reducing the miles that they and their visitors travel. They can highlight public transport on their website, offer to pick visitors up from the local railway station, provide bikes and maps showing local cycle routes and join VisitScotland's Walker and Cyclists welcome schemes".

The Sustainable Tourism Partnership ('STP') is a private and public sector organisation set up by the Scottish Executive in August 2006 under the Tourism Framework for Change. Its aim is to build up links with tourism businesses interested in the sustainable development of Scottish tourism. STP comprises private sector and public sector representatives, including the Scottish Government, Visit Scotland, Scottish Tourism Forum, Scottish Natural Heritage, Scottish Enterprise, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Transform Scotland and visitor attractions including the Scottish Seabird Centre. STP is chaired by Tom Brock, of the Scottish Seabird Centre, which in conjunction with First ScotRail operates a successful integrated Day Out ticket comprising rail travel from Edinburgh and admission to the centre.

One of the first issues for action for the group is to identify indicators for sustainable tourism in Scotland. These will be used to measure progress towards the goal of becoming Europe's most sustainable tourism destination. There will also be opportunities to develop sustainable tourism projects demonstrating innovation and best practice. This could be an opportunity for the Ayr-Stranraer line.

An evidently related initiative is **Climate Change Scotland**, a not-for-profit organisation which is being set up to sponsor projects which will produce outcomes which are 'carbon lean' or can provide a 'carbon win' or 'carbon compensation'. The concept of a pilot project to establish best practice around a green rail-based corridor (see (iii) below) for sustainable access to South Ayrshire & Galloway could have a good fit with this initiative.

(iii) The Green Business Tourism Scheme

The GBTS is the leading sustainable tourism certification scheme in the UK, with over 1400 members. Businesses opting to join are assessed by a qualified grading advisor against a rigorous set of criteria, covering a range of areas, like energy and

water efficiency, waste management, biodiversity and travel. Businesses that meet the required standard, receive a Bronze, Silver, or Gold award based on their level of achievement. The current network of members is comprised of a wide range of business types, including accommodation providers, visitor attractions, corporate offices and others.

Tourism businesses can help by encouraging visitors to use less polluting options. The travel information given to customers can influence them to make their journeys with lesser impact. Sustainable travel options introduce customers to new experiences and positive lifestyle choices.

Of 28 GBTS awards or awards pending in Ayrshire & Arran, 10 lies close to the rail corridor between Ayr and Girvan. However, of 32 GBTS awards or awards pending in Dumfries & Galloway, just one is the Stranraer area – the local tourist information centre (which is awaiting grading).

This could be a significant opportunity for the railway to help South Ayrshire and particularly western Galloway to develop a 'green profile' for this growing tourism sector, with the line acting as a core green corridor providing a more sustainable form of tourism access than car transport. A potential new station at Glenluce Abbey could help the railway to increase its effective penetration of the corridor for cycling and walking opportunities, as well as improving sustainable access direct to an important visitor attraction.

(iii) Galloway & Ayrshire Biosphere

Biosphere status has been awarded by UNESCO under the Man and the Biosphere (MAB) programme. It was originally conferred on South West Scotland because of the important upland habitats found in the National Nature Reserves at Silver Flowe and Cairnmore of Fleet. These areas are also home to nationally important breeding bird and invertebrate populations.

Biospheres form a unique network of special places for people and nature. They are chosen to be representative of their region and to be sites of excellence to explore and demonstrate approaches to conservation and sustainable development.

Biosphere designation can be used to support a wide range of local initiatives, which help sustain rural communities by developing their nature based tourism. In Germany, biospheres have been used to help promote the quality of the environment to tourists, bringing money into the rural economy. In France, the Cévennes Biosphere brand adds value to local food products such as chestnuts and goat's cheese, and regional craft skills such as dry stone walling and basket making that had started to die out have been reinvigorated. Three eco-museums have been established and an annual nature festival is promoted.

An extensive community consultation has taken place on the planned Galloway & Ayrshire Biosphere, but committed funding and leadership has still to be resolved. With its cross-border coverage and sustainability emphasis, there is potentially a strong link with the Ayr-Stranraer rail corridor.

(iv) Stranraer Waterfront development

Dumfries and Galloway Council and its partners are developing an Urban Design Strategy and Framework for Stranraer Waterfront which will consist of the potential for new business, residential, leisure and retail opportunities. Key to these opportunities will be a new Public Transport Interchange (with relocated station) and a Marina Development.

9. TIMETABLE RECAST OPPORTUNITIES

9.1 Introduction

The planned 2009 recast of the Ayr-Stranraer timetable by Transport Scotland, First ScotRail and Network Rail is being driven by changes to the Glasgow-Kilmarnock corridor. However, it does provide an opportunity to secure genuine improvements in Girvan and Stranraer train services as part of a wider development package for the regeneration of the railway.

The initial discussion in this section focuses on the needs of the Stranraer end of the line. There are effectively two distinct geographical markets to the railway, ie south of Girvan and north of Girvan. The latter is explored towards the end of this section. The definition of different markets will of course vary by place, by time of day, by day of week, and by purpose, and these variables are explored in the discussion.

It is acknowledged by Transport Scotland, First ScotRail and Network Rail that the current Stranraer line timetable (dating from the mid-1990s) is essentially 'resource-led', utilising for example off-peak availability of Class 156 trains which are primarily allocated to peak commuter services in south Glasgow. There is an aspiration to adjust the timetable to changed market circumstances (such as the long-withdrawn Seacat ferry service, for which some of the current train services were provided), but there are constraints on the range and extent of improvements which can realistically be achieved on this lightly patronised route corridor.

For the purposes of this study, the basic assumptions that have been made on the principles of a timetable recast in 2009 are that:

- it should not involve increased resources / costs, although a marginal increase might be justified to secure significant improvements in connectivity / market penetration
- routing via Paisley involves some capacity and cost constraints, in the case of the latter because trains must bear all their operating costs as opposed to being a constituent part of the standard Glasgow-Kilmarnock timetable
- the number of trains to/from Stranraer should be maintained, although a modest cut in overall frequency might be justified if this brings a better spread of trains / more standardised timings / faster trains / more through trains than at present
- Stena, if it does move from Stranraer to Cairnryan, will not do so until at least 2010, so ferry connections remain a key driver of the 2009 timetable.

9.2 Timetable opportunities

It is widely agreed that there are significant opportunities to recast a timetable which has remained virtually unchanged for more than 10 years, a period during which markets have changed significantly. Factors which facilitate a recast include:

- spare route capacity south of Ayr, and in particular south of Girvan

- some scope for redistribution to different timings (or saved mileage costs for potential redistribution to more productive times of the day) of some Stranraer trains which perform little or no useful function south of Girvan, for example most of the evening services
- extra rolling stock availability on Saturdays and Sundays to better meet different market needs, which appear to some extent to disaggregate into Monday-Friday / Saturday / Sunday patterns, as opposed to the current Monday-Saturday / Sunday timetable split
- potential extra rolling stock availability at Glasgow Central on Friday afternoons, reflecting the spreading of the peak due to early work finishes and post-work socialising.

9.3 Priorities and key markets

(i) Introduction:

Any timetable recast will inevitably be a compromise between different markets (and between development aspirations and financial constraints), but in practice any one train will typically be catering for a variety of markets (eg ferry and 'domestic'). This can be the ideal scenario, but in some cases it is less desirable, for example when large numbers of football fans are on the move, and the on-train environment can be intimidating to other passengers.

As indicated earlier, in the absence of detailed data on existing and potential market sizes, it is difficult to establish definitively which markets should be prioritised. To an extent prioritisation will depend on the priorities of key stakeholders, wider policy objectives, experience of rail market development elsewhere – and on resource constraints.

The suggestions and recommendations in this section are based on an initial assessment of potential markets, and do not take detailed account of operational or financial considerations, which are for Transport Scotland, First ScotRail and Network Rail to determine over the coming months. However, the broad thrust of these ideas has been explored with all three organisations as part of the consultation for this study.

As a starting point, it is suggested that rail should concentrate on what it can or could do best, ie:

- connecting with the ferry at Stranraer
- providing attractive services from Greater Glasgow and Ayrshire to south Ayrshire and Stranraer, integrated with bus/coach links to key visitor attractions
- providing attractive services from Stranraer / Girvan to Ayr and Glasgow, including the important intermediate stations at Kilmarnock, Paisley and Irvine.

Equally, resources should not be prioritised for what rail does not and could not do well, ie:

- services to Dumfries, Carlisle and Newcastle

- services to Prestwick International Airport.

(ii) Stranraer services Monday-Friday:

Given the impenetrability of the current irregular timetable, an evident priority must be to create more consistent departure times and to fill some of the long gaps between departures. However, this does not necessarily imply that a key objective would be, say, to secure a regular interval 2-hourly train departure pattern (possibly facilitated by running only a shuttle service between Stranraer, Ayr and Kilmarnock). The pattern of ferry arrivals and departures almost certainly precludes pursuing such a pattern, and a rigid 2-hourly pattern might miss key windows for new markets such as day-trip passengers returning late afternoon from Galloway to Glasgow.

Rather than a strictly 2-hourly regular interval, a more appropriate timetable objective (potentially attractive to all markets) would be to secure a **departure pattern of standard minutes past the hour** at Stranraer, with trains running at intervals to specifically suit the key markets available. This may be achievable with only some modest changes to one or two ferry schedules – which may be easier with this summer’s planned move of the Stena berth to the outer reaches of the Port of Belfast.

Resource constraints point realistically to at least a significant minority of Stranraer’s daily departures being shuttles to Ayr and Kilmarnock – serving the main market in the case of the former, and providing connections to Dumfries, Carlisle and Newcastle in the case of the latter, plus connections to Glasgow at both the former and the latter.

There are merits in a shuttle concept – and not just financial – since containing the impact of late-running ferries on trains within the Stranraer-Ayr corridor would limit knock-on delay impacts on the more congested rail network north of Ayr. However, there will be a resultant deterrent impact of slower journey times and/or interchange penalties to Greater Glasgow, which through its population size and range of facilities is likely to have the biggest market development potential for both outbound and inbound Stranraer services.

It appears important therefore – resources permitting – to incorporate **at least three fast through trains each way between Stranraer and Glasgow via Paisley** in the new timetable. Without these it will be more difficult for rail to retain existing passengers and penetrate key new markets – for example in the case of potential ‘Days Out’ integrated packages to off-rail locations such as Logan Botanic Garden and Portpatrick Village, the additional half-hour each way running via Kilmarnock may be just enough to take the total length of day trip travel time beyond a threshold of acceptability to potential customers in Glasgow. Subject to operational and financial evaluation, potential priorities for fast through train times on Mondays-Fridays would be:

- from Glasgow at 07.XX (ferry connection)
- from Glasgow at 09.XX (day-trip leisure market to South Ayrshire and Galloway)
- from Glasgow at 16.XX (returning day trips from work, shopping, etc in Glasgow)
- from Stranraer at 06.40 (day trips to Glasgow, and onward train connections)

- from Stranraer at 09.40 (ferry connection*, plus 'domestic' day trips to Ayr)
- from Stranraer at 16.40 (returning day-trip leisure market)

* the ferry would need to run around 20m earlier than at present to maintain a connection

In the past it has been mooted that a third electric train every hour could be introduced between Ayr and Glasgow. This would of course reduce the route capacity available for direct Stranraer-Glasgow trains via Paisley, albeit that it could improve interchange opportunities at Ayr between Stranraer/Girvan-Kilmarnock shuttle services and the electric trains. Route capacity will also be affected between Paisley and Glasgow with the reinstatement of a third track in association with the Glasgow Airport Rail Link project.

(iii) Stranraer services Saturdays & Sundays:

As noted earlier, the availability of spare rolling stock on Saturdays and Sundays creates an opportunity to provide bespoke services suited to weekend markets (and the different weekend ferry timetable).

Edinburgh is already – despite the lack of through trains to Stranraer, Girvan (or indeed Ayr) – the fifth biggest source of rail journeys south of Ayr. Given its population size and large tourism base, and the linkage between the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh and Logan Botanic Garden, there is a case for examining the scope for a **summer Saturdays through service from Edinburgh** to Ayr, Girvan and Stranraer.

Running fast from Edinburgh via Shotts to Glasgow Central, a journey time of around 3 hours to Stranraer could be achievable. The outward train could run at 08.XX from Edinburgh, forming a 09.XX departure from Glasgow Central, returning from Stranraer at 16.40 to reach Edinburgh before 20.00. The train could be marketed as the 'Galloway Coast Express' or similar, with through package tickets offered for key visitor attractions such as Culzean Castle and Logan Botanic Garden. Seat reservations could be made available, with passengers given the option to choose the view to one side of the train on the outward journey and the view to the other on the return.

As the train connects with only 5 out of 12 ferries on Sundays, and trains do not currently serve the Glasgow-Galloway or Glasgow-Girvan day trip markets, there is scope for **summer Sunday service enhancement**, perhaps one extra round trip departing Glasgow between 09.00 and 10.00, returning from Stranraer at 15.40 (with ferry connection). A possible option for exploration is for this train to offer through journeys which would otherwise not be available, for example by first running from Glasgow Central round the Cathcart Circle and back to Glasgow Central for the 09.XX departure for Stranraer.

(iv) Girvan services:

The current Girvan-Ayr service totalling 12 trains daily in each direction is comprised of 7 trains to/from Stranraer and 5 trains to/from Girvan. There are five different destinations / route options, namely Ayr, Kilmarnock, Newcastle, Glasgow via Kilmarnock and Glasgow via Paisley. Departures and arrivals are spread irregularly through the day, with gaps of up to 3 hours.

There is wide agreement that the aspiration for Girvan should be to secure an hourly regular-interval service to Ayr, with different views of the priority destinations beyond Ayr. Unfortunately, with the current infrastructure (single-track between Dalrymple Junction and Girvan, with one crossing loop at Kilkerran) a running time of 27 minutes from Ayr to Girvan is just too long to secure an out-and-back service within one hour.

Until such time as infrastructure investment can be justified to reduce the running time, the most realistic aspiration for Girvan may be to fill some of the key gaps in the timetable, notably between 08.01 and 10.52 from Girvan, and between 13.38 and 16.34 from Ayr. Securing such changes will partly be dependent on resources, and partly dependent on the changes made to train arrival and departure times at Stranraer. Current rail patronage is broadly similar at Girvan and Stranraer on Monday-Friday, but significantly higher at Stranraer at weekends.

(v) Other on-train service issues:

As noted earlier, there can be awkward mixing of different rail markets on 'football Saturdays' – the 10.00 ex Stranraer, and on return trains late on Saturdays and on Sundays. **Smoking and alcohol** on such trains can be a problem, and it is understood that alcohol bans are rarely imposed, unlike the situation for example between Glasgow and Edinburgh on big football days. This may come down to an issue of on-train policing and associated costs. First ScotRail calls Dumfries & Galloway Police or Strathclyde Police to the appropriate station if there are problems on the train, but police do not normally travel on the trains. The nearest British Transport Police office is in Kilwinning.

When the 10.00 train is strengthened to 4-car operation, there might be theoretical scope to separate football and non-football passengers in each 2-car unit, but it is not known if this is practical or enforceable.

The other on-train issue which has been raised in the study consultation is the lack of **trolley catering**. A service was provided on four trains daily in each direction for a number of years in the late 1990s. In conjunction with the 2009 timetable recast and wider marketing of the line there may be opportunities to offer such a service again, as part of a line partnership, possibly utilising volunteer input and/or a local company.

(vi) Timing of timetable recast:

It has been assumed that the timetable recast will take place in May 2009, ie in sufficient time for the summer season. Should there be any slippage – say to December 2009 – it is suggested that in order to start developing new markets without undue delay, the scope should be examined for some key freestanding changes to the May 2009 timetable on Saturdays and Sundays. These are key leisure travel days, spare rolling stock is likely to be available, and there are fewer capacity issues eg between Glasgow and Paisley.

10. STATIONS & RAIL-BUS INTEGRATION OPPORTUNITIES

10.1 Stations

There are four stations on the line – at Maybole, Girvan, Barrhill and Stranraer. A number of smaller intermediate stations were closed in 1965, and none has since re-opened – unlike the situation on most of the rural Highland lines. The 26 mile non-stop run between Barrhill and Stranraer is the longest gap between stations on the ScotRail network, other than that from Sanquhar to Dumfries.

Stranraer is staffed full-time by First ScotRail and has a waiting room and toilets, while Girvan is staffed part-time (its shop is opened by SAYLSA on Saturday mornings) and has CCTV. Both Maybole and Barrhill are unstaffed, but the latter 'feels' staffed because there are always Network Rail signallers in attendance.

The character and condition of the stations varies significantly, but they include a range of distinctive and indeed unique features worthy of wider promotion:

- Stranraer is the oldest working harbour station in Britain, but the qualities of its wooden 19th century building are largely obscured by a predominantly plastic 1980s modernisation, which now looks very tired
- Barrhill has a pleasant rural setting, a traditional station building and signal box, and could be a visitor-attracting gem – however it has been in part spoilt by an unsympathetic 1990s refurbishment, with standard bus shelters; upvc plastic windows and advertising poster boards; no less than four different types of fencing along the platforms; and some unsightly cabling hanging between the station building and the signal box
- Girvan is Scotland's only art deco style station building and looks impressive, albeit that its paint work is in need of freshening up – and most of its rooms are unoccupied
- while Maybole's setting is potentially attractive, the station currently is not a pleasant place to wait for the train – with a crude waiting shelter enclosed on only two sides, boarded up doors and windows and a major litter problem on and beside the track.

A number of station improvements have taken place recently or are imminent. ScotRail's 'Adopt A Station' policy has seen the provision of planters at Maybole and Girvan through respectively May-Tag Ltd⁹ and Daldorch House School and the reopening of the shop at Girvan by SAYLSA, who are also facilitating the provision of planters at Barrhill by the school, with the Network Rail signallers tending the plants. Recent discussions between Barrhill Community Council, Network Rail and SAYLSA may lead to additional car parking spaces at Barrhill.

CCTV is to be installed at Maybole by First ScotRail later this year, and in association with the visit of a special train (thought to be the Royal Train) in June hanging baskets and additional planting troughs were due to be installed.

⁹ Founded in 1986 by Maybole Community Council as a training company to combat local unemployment.



Stranraer:
station from the pier end



Stranraer:
Public Transport Interchange site



Dunragit – crossing loop



Glenluce Abbey – potential station site



Barrhill – potential rural rail gem (copyright AJ Kirkham)



Barrhill – rural rail employment



Girvan – Scotland’s last ‘art deco’ style station building



Girvan – platform planters

Girvan – bus interchange



Maybole – opportunities for a clean-up and a new platform garden

The major planned station change is of course at **Stranraer**, where Dumfries & Galloway Council obtained Public Transport Fund funding from the then Scottish Executive towards the cost of a new Public Transport Interchange. At the time, this was predicated on the departure of Stena to a shared terminal with P&O at Cairnryan, as the footprint of the planned PTI encompasses operational Stena land.

The PTI and associated park-and-ride facilities are long overdue – there is no road-rail integration and the current station is a long, windswept and traffic-dominated walk from the town centre. The PTI will offer modern facilities and will occupy a prominent public site adjacent to Cairnryan Road, helping to raise the profile of rail services. Bringing scheduled train and bus services together for the first time will open up a range of traffic development opportunities, not least because there is already a relatively frequent local bus service to key locations such as:

- Castle Kennedy / Dunragit / Glenluce – 20 per day (Monday-Saturday)
- Portpatrick – 15 per day (M-S)
- Logan Botanic Garden – 7 per day (M-S).

Two issues arise from the current uncertainty over Stena plans:

- 1) If Stena does move to a dedicated pier at Cairnryan, but not until 2010 /11, can their operational arrangements at Stranraer be modified to permit the construction and opening of the PTI at an earlier date? The PTI should be a key element of a re-launch of the railway, and the current blight does not help to raise awareness of what rail can offer.
- 2) If Stena decides to remain at Stranraer, what can be done to accommodate both the PTI and convenient interchange between train and ferry? Currently, those making ferry connections have a walk of around 100 metres (partly covered and partly open to the elements) from the train to the ferry departure lounge.

From the PTI a walk of around 300m would be involved, but this could be acceptable if foot travellers are prioritised over vehicles and the walkway is covered throughout. A partial alternative for passengers with luggage could be for Stena to deploy the courtesy mini-bus which currently runs frequently between the passenger terminal opposite the North West Castle Hotel and the ferry departure lounge.

Work has been undertaken recently on the detailed design of the PTI. Rail facilities will include a station building with waiting room, a single platform long enough to accommodate a 2-car plus a 4-car Class 156 train, with the platform track and associated rounding loop long enough for a 10-coach loco-hauled charter train. SWestrans is keen that the station should be of some character, and in light of the potential 'gardens' theme for the line explored earlier, it may be that the design can incorporate some eye-catching platform planting beds. Logan Botanic Garden might be able to partner First ScotRail and SWestrans for such an initiative.

Given (a) a wish to raise the profile of the railway at Stranraer as an access point to visitor attractions in the surrounding countryside up to 25 miles distant, and (b) Stranraer's reputation as purely a transit port en route to Northern Ireland, consideration should be given to the best name for the new station / PTI. Might it

convey more of its role by a title along the lines of 'Galloway Gateway' or 'West Galloway Gateway'?

The case for a new station at **Dunragit** crossing loop has been examined on a number of occasions. Estimated capital costs have varied between £0.7m and £1.5m – with a significant element of the cost being attributable to the need for two platforms. The most recent study forecast an average of just 5 passengers daily, reflecting the low immediate population (300), the short distance (6 miles) to Stranraer, and the frequent existing bus service to Stranraer (20 per day).

As and when Stena move to Cairnryan it has been suggested that a connecting coach from the ferry might link with the train at a new Dunragit station. This seems very unlikely to succeed in practice. The quickest integrated travel option would be bus from Cairnryan north to Girvan station, linking into its more frequent train service. Travelling via Dunragit would be circuitous and the station – unlike Girvan, which is staffed – would only have rudimentary facilities.

An alternative option to serve the wider Dunragit / Glenluce area and beyond would be to create a station directly serving **Glenluce Abbey**, which lies just a third of a mile from the railway. The Abbey is a 4-star rated Historic Scotland attraction which draws 3,000 visitors annually, the majority between June and August – however, the Abbey has recently been closed in winter as it is perceived as being off the beaten track. A new single-platform station could be less than 10 minutes walk from the abbey, and would offer significant promotional and sustainable transport access opportunities.

Historic Scotland is part of the Sustainable Tourism Partnership. One of the objectives of the Tourism Framework For Change is to make Scotland the most sustainable tourism destination in Europe by 2015. Providing visitors with more opportunities to access tourism destinations by public transport fits with this policy, and a station for the abbey might for example use solar power for its lighting, as a demonstration of best practice in sustainability.

A station at Glenluce Abbey could also serve the village of Glenluce (population 600) and potentially could provide a small park-and-ride facility for passengers from the Machars area, including Whithorn.

The planned extension of the National Cycle Route 73 from Newton Stewart to Cairnryan will pass under the railway near Glenluce Abbey, and will also link to a leisure cycle network in the Machars, and northwards by minor road to Barrhill. The Southern Uplands Way crosses the railway two miles north of Glenluce Abbey.

The costs, benefits and viability of such a station would need to be examined in some detail before conclusions could be reached on whether it should be taken forward. On the supply side there are issues in relation to track curvature and gradient and whether a short (2-car) platform operation (as at Barrhill) could secure the appropriate safety case for calls by trains up to 4-car length. Currently only Sunday trains (throughout the year), and the 10.00 from Stranraer in the summer season are normally 4-car operation, and as or when Stena leaves Stranraer all trains would be likely to revert to 2-car operation south of Girvan.

As the Ayr-Stranraer railway is TEN-T (Trans European Network-Transport) designated there may be issues associated with theoretical 'inter-operability' of trains from mainland Europe. TENS designation is also discussed in Section 12.

Barrhill, as the last traditional staffed rural station in Scotland, has the potential to attract more visitors, including a potential return of the Royal Scotsman luxury train. Suitably restored, it could also provide a commercial location for filming railway scenes for historical dramas for television and screen.

A partnership approach involving rail industry, local government, local business (including timber and stone workers), SAYLSA and community organisations would be ideal to fully restore the rural charm of the location and provide improved passenger facilities. A start is being made with the planters provided by Daldorch House School, and a range of possible further measures include:

- replacement of the Glasgow-bound platform bus shelter with a brick, stone or timber structure
- replacement of the bus shelter outside the station (served by around six buses weekly) with a brick or timber structure
- provision of a small car parking facility for park-and-ride traffic
- replacement of the plastic windows in the station building with double-glazed timber frames
- burying or ducting at ground level the cabling currently hanging between the station building and signal box
- replacement of the current four types of platform fencing with a single traditional timber design
- provision of interpretative boards and signposts leading to the Carrick Way
- creation of a small railway history museum within the station, particularly associated with the Victorian 'tablet' signalling machines and semaphore signals which control the line between Girvan and Stranraer.

Girvan is already an impressive station, but there is scope to make more of it, including:

- further planting work – including shrubs and small trees (such as palm species) – along both Platform 1 and Platform 2
- utilisation of empty rooms for business / community activities
- external repainting of the main building.

A start to the improvement of **Maybole** station has been made with platform planters, and the major litter problem may be resolved by SAYLSA's suggested sponsored regular clean-up by a railway maintenance company and the planned installation of CCTV by First ScotRail. However, more could be done to raise the station to a level of attraction commensurate with the opportunities identified for other stations on the line.

Photos from the 1970s – before the second track was lifted – show a riot of vegetation and colour on the embankment leading down to the then Glasgow-bound

platform. Many of these large shrubs are still in situ and with some judicious infill with small trees, shrubs, plants and flowers which suit an unstaffed railway environment – ie which are low-maintenance and/or prickly to the touch – the embankment and redundant platform immediately opposite could be transformed into an eye-catching feature.

A partnership initiative could involve Network Rail (which owns the land), First ScotRail, South Ayrshire Council, SAYLSA, Culzean Castle, a local garden centre and community organisations. A feature of the embankment which has survived despite vandalism and no maintenance for perhaps 20 years or more, is the name 'Maybole' picked out in white stones – this could also be restored to its former glory

The case for a station near **Ayr Hospital**, two miles south of Ayr has been examined on a number of occasions. Key issues relate to:

- the availability of a site which satisfies safety requirements for new stations not to be located on steep gradients
- the difficulty of a relatively low-frequency (12 trains daily) diesel service being insufficiently attractive to secure significant patronage.

An alternative to the latter which has been considered is to extend the existing electrification around 1½ miles south of its current limit to a new station serving the hospital and potential housing developments in the area. This could offer an hourly (or even half-hourly frequency), all through trains to Glasgow.

10.2 Rail-bus integration

The line's best example of rail-bus integration is at Girvan, linking to the regular Girvan-Newton Stewart bus service. This will see exceptional use by Golfink services during the 2009 Open Golf Championship at Turnberry.

Barrhill offers integrated services only on Fridays and Sundays, partly because the station is at the end of a dead-end road a mile from the village, and is not directly on line-of-route for the Newton Stewart-Girvan service. There is a bus stop outside Maybole station, but there are no formal connections between train and bus, eg for Culzean Castle.

As and when the Public Transport Interchange at Stranraer is completed, this will transform the opportunities for integration, both using scheduled services and some selected bespoke services for Days Out packages. Some initial pump-priming may be required to establish such services, for example on Sundays when there are very few scheduled buses (but, as a result, plenty of spare bus and driver capacity), and to destinations which currently have no scheduled bus services, such as the Mull of Galloway Visitor Centre, which is 5 miles beyond the existing bus terminus at the village of Drummore.

If the opening of the PTI is delayed beyond the timetable recast in 2009, it may be feasible to establish some targeted train-bus integration at the existing station location, eg meeting a late morning arrival from Glasgow / Edinburgh on summer Saturdays / Sundays to take package travellers on to Logan Botanic Garden and the Mull of Galloway.

11. DEVELOPING A PARTNERSHIP

Partnership in its widest sense is a long-established aspect of railway development, with the rail industry, the public sector, local businesses and community organisations coming together in various combinations to facilitate new stations, additional services, publicity, etc. In recent years, First ScotRail has launched an 'Adopt a Station' initiative nationally, and locally has worked with SAYLSA to facilitate station enhancements at Girvan and Barrhill.

Community Rail Partnerships (CRPs) – which have been widely developed in England and Wales – are essentially a means by which the various stakeholders and interested parties along a rail corridor can play an active role in the development of a responsive and good quality rail service. Partnerships are not-for-profit organisations including local authorities, community groups, rail user groups, Train Operating Companies and often (but not always) Network Rail. Some include other bodies such as national park authorities, parish or community councils and businesses. They are established by mutual agreement and are typically staffed by a paid officer supported by a committee of stakeholders.

Many CRPs have been very effective in working with local partners to raise awareness of their lines and have secured external funding for projects, including station improvements and extra train services, allowing services to better meet local needs. CRPs have achieved very significant increases in passenger numbers and revenues (including both local and visitor traffic) on some lines. However, they go beyond a simple 'transport' agenda and link into wider strategies for accessibility, rural regeneration, social inclusion and sustainable tourism. Their work includes:

- improving bus links to stations
- developing walking and cycling routes
- bringing station buildings back to life
- art and education projects
- providing guided walks from stations
- organising special events which promote the railway and its relevance to the community.

The term 'Community Railways' was coined for the Community Rail Development Strategy, published by the now defunct Strategic Rail Authority, and later adopted by the Department for Transport for routes in England and Wales. The strategy is aimed at increasing income and reducing costs on the rural and regional rail network, and proposes the separate designation of Community Railways. They would form a third distinct category of lines, alongside the high-speed and conventional main line networks, to facilitate proper specification, promotion and community involvement.

The new strategy includes seven demonstration projects (all in England), and those projects will provide practical experience of the best ways of achieving the goals set out by the strategy, namely:

- sensible cost reduction through application of fit-for-purpose engineering and operating standards
- increased patronage and revenue through greater local involvement in the specification and marketing of rail services and stations

- through both of the above, an increase in the social and economic value of local railways supported by the national taxpayer.

The routes involved in the pilot projects range from short branch lines in Devon and Cornwall to the 55-mile inter-regional route from Grantham to Skegness.

The SRA consultation paper – which led to the adoption of the community rail policy by the Department for Transport – did not specifically cover routes in Scotland, since services within Scotland were specified and funded by the Scottish Executive, but it noted that “the principles could be applicable to some of them” and that “close contact has been maintained with the Executive in the development of this paper to ensure that the ideas it contains can be considered for the future in a Scottish context”.

The only formal rail partnership in Scotland has been the Highland Rail Partnership, whose function is about to become part of HITRANS, the regional transport partnership. HRP and its Development Officer, Frank Roach, have secured many valuable improvements to the Highland rail system and the role it plays in wider economic, social and environmental policy objectives in the Highlands. There are lessons to be learnt from the Highland experience, but the scale of the network it covers (665 route miles) does limit some of the potential parallels with the 59-mile Ayr-Stranraer line.

In the case of the Stranraer line, there appear to be broadly two options in terms of the model which might be developed to bring key stakeholders together, with the objective of regenerating the railway and its wider role in the South Ayrshire and Western Galloway corridor, namely either:

- 1) SAYLSA forms the partnership body, with commercial and statutory agencies (and cross-boundary sustainability projects) joining its Executive Committee to develop a programme of initiatives for the line, or
- 2) A separately constituted rail partnership is established, potentially led by one or both of the regional transport partnerships, and encompassing all the key stakeholders, including representation from SAYLSA.

There are strengths and weaknesses to both options and these need to be considered and discussed by the stakeholders before reaching a decision on the preferred model. Option 1 would build directly on the good works already achieved by SAYLSA, while Option 2 might provide more comfort for the statutory and commercial agencies, while also allowing SAYLSA to retain an independent role.

The Association of Community Rail Partnerships (‘ACORP’) – which is happy to provide advice – has suggested that either model can work in the right circumstances. The key issues are what kind of outputs will be sought from the partnership, and how the particular parties involved can best work together in practice to achieve these objectives.

ACORP also feels that the question of whether or not the Stranraer line is designated as a ‘community railway’ is academic. What counts is the improvement in the line’s fortunes and its wider role in the region, achieving practical innovations which raise awareness and patronage of the railway. The partnership needs to be rooted in the local community, as this helps to generate new journeys without major investment beyond the immediate existing rail catchment.

Ideally, a part-time (perhaps one or two days per week) Development Officer would be funded by a range of parties, possibly someone from a voluntary or community sector background working within the structure of the regional transport partnerships and based in either Girvan or Stranraer.

As this would be the first line-specific rail partnership in Scotland, the model chosen for Ayr-Stranraer could be used as a pilot project to test the strengths and weaknesses of the approach in practice, with potential lessons to be learnt for other routes across the country.

12. DEVELOPING NEW FREIGHT BUSINESS

12.1 Introduction

Other than coal traffic north of Dalrymple Junction, there has been no regular freight traffic on the Stranraer line since 1993. However, with the wider national resurgence of rail freight (including its penetration of supermarket supply chains), rising oil prices and growing concerns about climate change, there has been a revival of interest in prospects for new rail freight business between Ayr and Stranraer.

Fortuitously, Network Rail's recent 'Network Change' proposal has refocused interest on the strategic freight potential of the Stranraer line, including five specific traffic prospects:

- an Ireland-Galloway-Forth Estuary-Mainland Europe 'rail landbridge'
- supermarket traffic from Regional Distribution Centres ('RDCs') in Central Scotland to Northern Ireland stores
- 'domestic' traffic from Stranraer area food producers to Central England RDCs
- timber from a purpose-built railhead near Barrhill, supplying mills in Scotland, England and Wales
- a small intermodal railhead at Girvan, handling grain from Yorkshire for the Grants distillery, and chocolate crumb from the local Nestle factory to York.

12.2 Ireland-Galloway-Forth Estuary- Mainland Europe 'rail landbridge'

The Scottish Government's recent consultation on the draft National Planning Framework (planning for major infrastructure projects) highlights the potential for a rail 'landbridge' between Galloway and the east coast ports of Grangemouth and Rosyth:

"The European Union is promoting the development of a well-functioning and sustainable Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) comprising roads, railways and shipping routes. The Ireland - United Kingdom - Benelux road link follows the A77 and A75 trunk roads via Cairnryan, Stranraer and Dumfries. In addition, Ireland's National Spatial Strategy recognises the potential for moving freight through Scotland to avoid congestion on routes to England's East Coast ports and the matter is being pursued by the British - Irish Council.

At present, Irish freight traffic through Central Scotland must rely on the road links between the South West ports and Rosyth. The new road bridge over the Forth at Kincardine will help to strengthen this strategically important new route between Ireland and the Continent.

However, moving freight by rail would be a more sustainable approach to developing Scotland's potential as a land bridge. Strengthening the rail link to Grangemouth, the creation of a new container terminal at Rosyth and the

reopening of the Kincardine - Alloa - Stirling railway are important steps in that direction.”¹⁰

While the imminent demise of the Rosyth-Zeebrugge freight & passenger roll-on roll-off ferry might have some impact on realisation of such a landbridge concept, Grangemouth is an established container ‘feeder’ port with a wide range of regular shipping services to mainland Europe.

At this stage it is not clear who would lead a landbridge project. Some infrastructure works would be required – both to upgrade a number of weak underbridges and potentially to raise the clearance for 9’6” high and other tall containers to be conveyed on standard wagons through tunnels and overbridges. As the Stranraer line is TEN-T designated, upgrading work might attract EU funding, and the growing dialogue between the Scottish Government and the Northern Ireland Assembly appears to strengthen the case for Government taking a lead.

12.3 Supermarket traffic from Central Scotland RDCs to N Ireland stores

From time to time in recent years the major logistics company WH Malcolm and its rail haulage partner, Direct Rail Services, has investigated the potential to move supermarket traffic from Central Scotland to Northern Ireland stores on-rail via Stranraer then roll-on roll-off ferry. While the distance is relatively short by rail standards, Malcolm and DRS have demonstrated that in the right circumstances short rail hauls can be viable – they operate twice-daily container trains over the 40 miles between Malcolm’s rail-connected Elderslie and Grangemouth depots. The partners also operate a 7 days a week container service from Grangemouth to Aberdeen, primarily on behalf of Asda.

While there are currently no specific plans to take a Stranraer project forward, both parties are keeping a watching brief on the situation.

12.4 Traffic from Stranraer area food producers to Central England RDCs

While the Stranraer domestic catchment area is not an obvious source of traditional rail traffics, the Caledonian Cheese factory in Stranraer has grown significantly in recent years and is understood to have a supply chain stretching over long hauls to supermarkets in many parts of Britain.

The factory is located in an industrial estate which is potentially (see Section 12.7 below) just half a mile by road from a potential Stranraer railhead, and therefore could take advantage of some of various tax, licensing and regulatory exemptions which HM Revenue & Customs and the Department for Transport applies where ‘works trucks’ are used on short stretches of public road. A works truck – sometimes called a tugmaster, shunting tractor or internal movement vehicle – is a goods vehicle which is designed for use in private premises rather than on public roads.

¹⁰ ‘National Planning Framework for Scotland 2: Discussion Draft’. Scottish Government: 2008

12.5 Timber from a purpose-built railhead at Barrhill

In 2006 the then Scottish Executive awarded £5m Freight Facilities Grant towards the £7m cost of a timber railhead south of Barrhill, fed by private forest roads from a wide surrounding forest catchment. Unfortunately, protracted and ultimately unsuccessful negotiations between Network Rail and Forest Enterprise over the 'wayleave' for a new forestry road bridge across the railway led to unexpected delays to the project timescale.

In the intervening period a substantial portion of the 100,000 tonnes of annual timber harvest guaranteed by FE as baseload for the new railhead in each of the first two years of operation began to suffer 'wind blow' and had to be clear felled and sold to market. This reduced the committed traffic to 50,000 tonnes annually, and the preferred railhead operator (JST Transport of Ayr) then pulled out of the project due to the increased financial risk associated with lower guaranteed throughput for the railhead and the timber trains. The offer of grant has been withdrawn.

The railhead site had been cleared of trees ready for construction, new local forest roads built to maximise connectivity to the railhead, and bridge spans brought on site (where they remain) for the proposed rail crossing. The basic concept of the Barrhill railhead looks commercially, economically and environmentally sound – conveying timber over forest roads on specialised low ground pressure lorries, with payloads of up to 50 tonnes – and there are prospects for reviving the project with an alternative railhead operator.

The railhead might however benefit from modifications to the original rail specification, which relied entirely on a new generation of Freight Multiple Units ('FMUs'). A key feature of the prototype FMU is driving control cabs at each end of the train, reducing shunting movements and turn-round times, and avoiding the need for run-round loops. Engine power is spread beneath both cabs, thereby minimising axleloads and allowing the FMU to operate over rural routes barred to modern freight locomotives.

Due to relatively modest gross weight (typically up to 300 tonnes) and a high power-to-weight ratio, the FMU has performance characteristics similar to rural passenger trains and can therefore make maximum use of available train paths, without being shunted into sidings to let passenger trains overtake. The 'short and frequent' pattern of FMU operation – with train lengths typically 120 metres or less – avoids the crossing loop length constraints which can limit loco-hauled operation of conventional freight trains on single-track routes, and was intended to open up short-haul markets such as Barrhill to the rail-connected Caledonian Paper mill at Irvine.

The railhead at Barrhill was designed only to accommodate low-capacity FMUs, as opposed to conventional trainload operation which could in fact provide sufficient flexibility to serve both short-haul and long-haul markets. The current rail haulier of timber elsewhere in Scotland (Colas Rail) has suggested 'top-and-tail' operation, with a low-to-medium powered locomotive at each end of a relatively short train for 'little and often' short hauls to relatively close mill destinations, but with big trains (of 500t payload and more) serving longer hauls to, for example, the rail-connected Kronospan mill at Chirk in north-east Wales.

The Scottish Government's freight grants branch has indicated it would welcome a new application for FFG in respect of Barrhill. Others have suggested that in the event of the Network Rail wayleave issue continuing to be a barrier to project

progress, then the relevant rail haulier should take the issue to the Office of the Rail Regulator for resolution.

The Barrhill railhead had been a key part in a Forestry Commission Scotland, Local Authorities and private forest owners/managers bid into the Strategic Timber Transport Fund. This bid has been re-written following the initial failure to secure a modal shift of timber, but options have been kept open for adding a future rail-based modal shift to the scheme. This would see approximately 21,100 tonnes of timber taken from the roads and put onto the rail system.

A scheme budget of £2.687 million has been approved, and work has now started, with Forestry Commission Scotland being the project leader. An upgraded system of internal forest roads will gather timber from 4,124 hectares of forestry. It will be channeled away from weak Local Authority roads and out onto the A714. The forest industry still hopes that a modal shift will eventually occur and be added to this project.

12.6 Intermodal railhead at Girvan

Since 2006 consultants have been examining the case for a small intermodal railhead at Girvan's Grangestone Industrial Estate, serving baseload business of grain from Yorkshire for the Grants distillery, and chocolate crumb from the local Nestle factory to York. The project has been led by the local development agency, Girvan Horizons (which is part of South Ayrshire Council), and it hopes to raise sufficient funding in the forthcoming months to take the project forward to implementation, supported by a FFG application to the Scottish Government.

12.7 A railhead at Stranraer or Cairnryan?

During the latter years of rail freight operation on the Stranraer line, most traffic was handled at the rail-connected Stockton Haulage depot (near the old Stranraer Town station and yard) which had facilities to transfer containers, pallets and bulk traffics from rail to road. Traffic was placed on road trailers and shunted around half a mile over public roads to the Stena ferry terminal for onwards movement to Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

The depot was abandoned and fell into complete disuse more than 5 years ago, but within the last two years has been taken over by a local coach company, presumably under a short-term lease arrangement with Network Rail. Surprisingly – as the site has been considered to be a potentially strategic freight location by Network Rail – the two rail sidings have been lifted and the overhead crane dismantled. The track connection to the main line remains in situ however, and Network Rail has recently confirmed that if the depot is required again for rail freight purposes then it will reinstate the sidings.

The depot remains potentially a good site for a freight railhead – it could accommodate reasonable train lengths and for shunting movements could take advantage of the rounding loop at the nearby former Stranraer Town station, without interfering with 'main line' passenger train movements.

Road access is at present not ideal, being over mothballed rail sidings in the old Town Yard and then along residential streets, but since the site last handled rail traffic a new link road has been built connecting the A77 south of Stranraer with the

A75 east of Stranraer. This would be well suited for rail traffic destined for Cairnryan, as it passes within half a mile of the depot, and a connected industrial estate access road now terminates just 50 metres from the depot boundary.

As and when Stena move to Cairnryan, the question arises as to whether rail freight would be best served by a 6-mile road shunt from a Stranraer railhead, or by reinstatement of the former Cairnryan Military Railway.

Given that such a railway would be unlikely, as discussed earlier, to offer any real passenger benefits, there could be scope to build a line to the lower (and cheaper) standards and simpler planning and approval procedures applicable to a slow-speed freight-only railway. This has been demonstrated in recent years by the re-opening of the Greenburn coal branch line in Ayrshire, with the 100-year old Light Railway Act obviating need for Parliamentary approval.

This option should be tested for cost and viability against the alternative of a road lorry shuttle between a Stranraer railhead and the ferry terminals at Cairnryan. While a one-off road movement between the two could easily cost £100 or more, an established logistics operator has advised that with a critical mass of containers to be moved through the day between the two locations, the cost per trip could drop to around £65.

A final issue arising, should Stena remain in Stranraer, is whether a freight railhead might best be located in the harbour area – potentially between the Public Transport Interchange and the old station. This would obviate any public road movements and would help the economics of rail-based intermodal movement, but its footprint might not be capable of accommodation within the continuing Stena road operations layout. It might also be incompatible with retaining the old station for heritage use.

12.8 TENS designation

During the 1990s, political lobbying across Scotland led to virtually all the longer distance rail routes, including Ayr-Stranraer, being TENS (Trans European Network) designated. The expectation was that this would increase the prospect of EU funding for infrastructure improvements, but in practice this has largely not been the case, with the notable exception of the West Coast Main Line, which was designated as part of the 'Essen 14' projects.

With the emergence of the 'Community Railway' concept / designation south of the Border in recent years, concern has been expressed that TENS designation (which with its theoretical 'inter-operability' requirements is regarded by the Department for Transport as incompatible with a community rail approach) might actually be more of a constraint than an opportunity for rural TENS routes such as Ayr-Stranraer.

In practice, there appear to be few aspects of the line's engineering and operating standards which would either (a) benefit from a more fit-for-purpose approach consistent with community rail designation, or (b) might be constrained by ongoing TENS designation. A possible exception would be a short platform at a new Glenluce Abbey station, but as a safety case could be built around the long accident-free track record of similar arrangements at Barrhill, this may not be an issue in practice.

As the line has significant freight potential – and unlike the TENS-designated rural Highland routes forms part of a genuine trans-national transport corridor - it would

appear to be sensible to try to use TENS designation as a vehicle for promotion and potential funding of infrastructure and other improvements to achieve significant mode switch from road haulage to rail freight between Central Scotland and Stranraer.

12.9 Development of a strategic freight partnership

There are valuable lessons to be learned from the experience of the North East Scotland Rail Freight Development Group ('NESRFDG') which was set up to enhance rail freight capability to and from the Grampian region. NESRFDG comprises regional transport partnerships, local authorities and the rail freight industry.

NESRFDG's key achievement has been to successfully make the business case to Government for the £4m upgrade of rail infrastructure to enable the modern generation of tall containers to pass through arched bridges and tunnels between Central Scotland, Aberdeen and Elgin.

NESRFDG's experience highlights the merit of creating a dedicated and bespoke freight partnership which can focus specifically on the key issues in the logistics market, as opposed to a wider partnership trying to address both freight and passenger markets.

13. DEVELOPING A STRATEGY FOR THE LINE

13.1 Experience elsewhere

The development of a strategy for the line should be a key early task for a new line partnership. As potentially the first route-specific partnership in Scotland, there will be lessons to be learned from a variety of sources, notably:

- route-specific rail partnerships in England and Wales
- the multi-route Highland Rail Partnership.

While the Ayr-Stranraer line shares some of the characteristics of the rural Highland network, it has also has some quite distinctive operational and market features which justify bespoke solutions. Unlike HRP, which will be fully integrated within a single regional transport partnership HITRANS from April 2008, a partnership for the Ayr-Stranraer line will have to be a cross-boundary arrangement, as it straddles both the SPT and SWestrans areas.

However, until March 2008, HRP was a cross-boundary organisation extending into the NESTRANS and TACTRAN areas, so past experience in the north can help to inform the structure of a new partnership and an associated development strategy for the line. HRP membership has been wide and diverse, in part reflecting the 600+ mile network it has promoted. It has been funded by

- 4 Local Authorities
- 3 line 'Friends' groups
- 2 passenger train operating companies
- 2 freight train operating companies
- 2 private 'heritage' railways
- HITRANS
- Highlands & Island Enterprise
- Forest Enterprise Scotland.

Partnership working in the Highlands has produced in excess of £3m funding for the region's rail network over the last 3 years.

ACORP (the Association of Community Rail Partnerships, based in Huddersfield) would be happy to provide advice both on structuring a partnership and on the associated development of a route regeneration strategy.

14.2 Key requirements of a strategy

It will be for the partners in a future line partnership to determine the detailed strategy needed to regenerate the Ayr-Stranraer railway, but some of the key requirements are likely to be:

- a 'vision' and agreed and prioritised goals (short, medium and long term) which should be both measurable and achievable
- roles and responsibilities in achieving these goals

- an understanding of the resources currently and potentially available to the partners
- an understanding of the processes by which funding and other support can be unlocked for specific projects, some of which will be cross-sectoral and cross-boundary
- clear linkage to local, regional and national policy objectives, not just transport-specific, but also embracing wider economic, social and environmental objectives which the railway can support
- policies on community engagement and consultation.

15. CONCLUSIONS

15.1 Principal conclusions

- 6) The Ayr-Stranraer line has been neglected in the past, due to (a) its physical isolation from other rural Scottish rail routes, (b) the traditional focus on only its ferry market, and (c) the lack of a cross-boundary and cross-sector line partnership to promote its regeneration.
- 7) The case for the regeneration of the railway is supported by the rail development policies and strategic transport objectives of the Scottish Government and by the regional transport strategies of SPT and SWestrans.
- 8) Given that passenger and freight trains (when well loaded) are much more energy-efficient than competing modes of overland transport, future market and policy responses to climate change and oil supply challenges are likely to contribute to a potentially bigger and more strategic role for the railway in a future low-carbon economy.
- 9) The line has a number of strengths in markets currently served, including:
 - the relative speed of through trains from Stranraer to Glasgow via Paisley
 - generally good timetabled ferry connections
 - on-train and station staff are seen as friendly and attentive.
- 10) It has additional strengths which can assist in the development of new markets:
 - the Class 156 trains have large picture windows and generous bike capacity
 - the SAYLSA support group is raising local and wider awareness of the line
 - the line traverses attractive countryside and provides potential access to leisure walking & cycling markets and a variety of visitor attractions.
- 11) The line also has some significant weaknesses:
 - the timetable to/from Stranraer is the most complex and irregular in Scotland
 - there is practical uncertainty about rail-ferry connections when either mode is running late
 - the timetable does not adequately cater for the (domestic) Stranraer area to Glasgow day trip market
 - the timetable does not cater at all for the Glasgow to western Galloway day trip leisure market
 - fares from Stranraer are perceived as expensive (and free bus travel for Senior Citizens limits the attraction of rail)
 - Girvan has an irregular and relatively infrequent train service
 - the line has not enjoyed the benefits of the 'partnership' approach for stations, services and fares applied to the rural Highland rail network,

where partnership working has produced in excess of £3m funding over the last 3 years.

- 12) There are three key reasons why it is important to develop new passenger markets for the railway:
 - the line and its train services are substantially underutilised, with patronage averaging around 20 passengers per train
 - it has unrealised potential to fulfil a bigger economic, social and environmental role, in line with regional and national policy objectives
 - the anticipated Stena departure to Cairnryan will remove a significant number of the line's passengers, at least south of Girvan.
- 13) The scale of the task of ferry passenger replacement is not however overwhelming on Monday-Friday, with the number of ferry connectors averaging single figures per train (spread over all trains). The task is greater at weekends, but as this is the key time of the week for leisure travel then the opportunities are likely to be greater.
- 14) There is no single panacea for the regeneration of the railway, instead there is a wide range of possible national, regional, route corridor and location-specific measures which could help secure increased patronage & net revenue and improved economic, social and environmental value. These can be usefully grouped under three broad headings:
 - new markets, marketing & branding opportunities
 - timetable recast opportunities
 - stations and rail-bus integration opportunities.
- 15) The line has a range of genuine freight prospects, and both Network Rail and the public sector have a key role to play in realising these, for example through strategic route investment and/or the Scottish Government's Freight Facilities Grant scheme to achieve wider strategic policy objectives.

15.2 Supporting conclusions

- 1) From an inbound leisure market perspective, the Ayr-Stranraer line offers a journey of great variety through attractive scenery, traversing virtually roadless country south of Barrhill to the Luce Valley. The railway itself offers interest, and not just for enthusiasts, with three unique stations.
- 2) The railway also provides current or potential access to a variety of leisure markets / visitor attractions, either directly or by means of integrated rail-bus connections (with associated rail-bus-entrance integrated tickets), including:
 - Glenluce Abbey
 - the Southern Upland Way and the Carrick Way
 - National Cycle Route 73
 - Culzean Castle & Country Park
 - Logan Botanic Gardens

- Mull of Galloway Lighthouse & Visitor Centre
 - Wigtown, Scotland's National Book Town.
- 3) Travel between Stranraer line stations and Ayr is currently by far the dominant market for the railway, accounting for 65% of journeys. In terms of northbound travel on the line, this destination and Glasgow are likely to offer the greatest market opportunities.
 - 4) Charter trains represent a potentially useful niche market, but have hitherto been limited by the lack of profile of (a) the Stranraer line as a scenic route, and (b) western Galloway as an attractive destination, as opposed to the current perception of Stranraer as purely a transit point en route to Northern Ireland. The ban on loco-hauled trains using the 'Down' crossing loop line at Girvan is also a deterrent.
 - 5) Steam-hauled trains between Girvan and Stranraer – as proposed by the Wigtownshire Tourist Trains Project – could have an important role to play in bringing additional visitors to the area, but there are major resourcing and market issues.
 - 6) There is an opportunity to promote the railway as providing a green transport corridor linking a variety of a cross-boundary and cross-sectoral initiatives which are being driven by sustainability and environmental imperatives – including the Sustainable Tourism Partnership, Climate Change Scotland, and the Galloway & Ayrshire Biosphere.
 - 7) The railway could also play a bigger role in the success of the planned Stranraer waterfront development, and could help the economies of South Ayrshire and particularly western Galloway by providing a more sustainable form of tourism access than car transport. Of 32 Green Business Tourism Scheme awards or awards pending in Dumfries & Galloway, just one is the Stranraer area.
 - 8) Because of the circuitous route via Ayr and Kilmarnock, Stranraer line trains are not well placed to compete for business to Dumfries, Carlisle and Newcastle, but if the through trains are withdrawn in 2009 an integrated package of bus-rail connections at Dumfries and through bus-rail fares could offer a price and frequency *improvement* on current rail arrangements.
 - 9) The argument for a new station near Ayr Hospital appears to hinge on building a business case for extending the frequent electric service southwards from Ayr, rather than being an opportunity for the much less frequent Girvan / Stranraer diesel trains.
 - 10) Freight prospects, in particular the scope to develop Scotland-Northern Ireland traffic, point to the possibility of the line's Trans European Network designation being of considerably more use in the future than it has been in the past. The growing dialogue between the Scottish Government and the Northern Ireland Assembly should strengthen the prospects.

16. RECOMMENDATIONS

16.1 Principal recommendations

- 1) The planned 2009 timetable recast creates a major opportunity to re-launch the Ayr-Stranraer line. It is recommended that rail should concentrate on what it can or could do best, ie:
 - providing good connections with the ferry at Stranraer
 - providing attractive services from Greater Glasgow and Ayrshire to south Ayrshire and Stranraer, integrated with bus/coach links to key visitor attractions
 - providing attractive services from Stranraer / Girvan to Ayr and Glasgow, including the important intermediate stations at Kilmarnock, Paisley and Irvine.
- 2) Transport Scotland, First ScotRail and Network Rail should assess the operational, resourcing and market implications of a number of possible timetable changes geared to regenerating the Stranraer line, including:
 - the scope for different Monday-Thursday / Friday, Saturday and Sunday timetables (as opposed to the current Monday-Saturday and Sunday split), reflecting different market patterns and the availability of extra rolling stock at weekends
 - departure pattern of standard minutes past the hour at Stranraer, with trains running at intervals to specifically suit the key markets available
 - at least three fast through trains each way daily between Stranraer and Glasgow via Paisley, with Monday-Friday departures from Glasgow at 07.XX, 09.XX and 16.XX, and from Stranraer at 06.40, 09.40 and 16.40
 - a summer Saturdays through service from Edinburgh to Ayr, Girvan and Stranraer, and return
 - summer Sunday service enhancement, with one extra round trip between Glasgow, Girvan and Stranraer
 - filling in some of the major gaps in the timetable at Girvan, with a long-term aspiration to secure an hourly regular-interval service.
- 3) If there is slippage in the timetable recast from May 2009 to say December 2009, the scope should be considered for key free-standing changes to Saturday / Sunday services for the May timetable in order to start developing new markets without undue delay.
- 4) With regard to stations, clarification is needed on two questions arising from the current uncertainty over Stena plans:
 - (iii) If Stena does move to a dedicated pier at Cairnryan, but not until 2010 /11, can their operational arrangements at Stranraer be modified to permit the opening of the much-needed Public Transport Interchange at an earlier date?

- (iv) If Stena decides to remain at Stranraer, what can be done to accommodate both the PTI and convenient interchange between train and ferry?
- 5) Research should be undertaken by First ScotRail, SWestrans and SPT into the opportunities for integrated train-bus services providing access to key visitor attractions – including scheduled bus services on Mondays-Saturdays, and bespoke bus services on Sundays or to destinations which currently have no scheduled services, such as the Mull of Galloway Visitor Centre.
- 6) If the through Stranraer/Girvan-Newcastle trains are to be withdrawn in 2009, First ScotRail, Stagecoach Western and SWestrans should explore the scope for an integrated package of bus-rail connections at Dumfries and through bus-rail fares.
- 7) Other important fares initiatives which should be investigated by First ScotRail and others are integrated rail-bus-entrance packages for 'Days Out' to visitor attractions, and the possible introduction of an Ayrshire & Galloway Rover card, similar to the existing Highland Rover and Central Scotland Rover.
- 8) Passenger Focus and Transform Scotland – as independent 'honest brokers' – should facilitate the establishment of cross-sector and cross-boundary rail regeneration partnership, incorporating a wide range of potential funders, facilitators and delivery agents for specific improvement measures.
- 9) The strengths and weaknesses of broadly two organisational options for a partnership should be considered by key stakeholders before reaching a decision on the preferred model:
 - (i) SAYLSA forms the partnership body, with commercial and statutory agencies (and cross-boundary sustainability projects) joining its Executive Committee to develop a programme of initiatives for the line.
 - (ii) A separately constituted rail partnership is established, potentially led by one or both of the regional transport partnerships, encompassing all the key stakeholders, including representation from SAYLSA.
- 10) Amongst a number of freight prospects for the line, the concept of a strategic rail 'landbridge' has potentially the greatest public funding implications. It is recommended that Transport Scotland should take the lead in bringing interested parties together to discuss possible ways forward, including the development of a bespoke freight partnership for the line.

16.2 Supporting recommendations

- 1) On-train issues which should be addressed include the scope for trolley catering on selected trains, possibly utilising volunteer input and/or a local company, and the 'policing' of trains on busy football days.
- 2) Greater transparency is needed from both Stena and First ScotRail on agreed guidelines and practical implementation of connections when trains or ferries run late.

- 3) Consideration should be given to the best name for the new station / PTI, in order to convey more of the wider role of the railway in the western Galloway sub-region.
- 4) The costs, benefits and viability of a single-platform Glenluce Abbey station should be examined in some detail, based on potential markets among residents in Glenluce / Dunragit / the Machars (park-and-ride), abbey visitors and leisure walking / cycling.
- 5) A partnership initiative should be explored for the sympathetic upgrading and restoration of the character of Barrhill station, which as the last traditional staffed rural station in Scotland has the potential to attract more visitors, including a possible return of the Royal Scotsman luxury train.
- 6) Girvan is already an impressive station; First ScotRail and SAYLSA should explore further planting work, utilisation of empty rooms for business / community activities, and external repainting of the main building.
- 7) To complement initiatives already being planned to tackle the major litter problem at Maybole, the opportunity to develop a partnership planting scheme on the redundant platform should be investigated by Network Rail, First ScotRail, SAYLSA and the local community.
- 8) Network Rail should return the damaged underbridge at Girvan station to its former condition and capability, to facilitate the attraction of passenger charter (and freight) trains to the line.
- 9) The Scottish Government should consider the scope for funding free rail travel for senior citizens on a trial basis on the Stranraer line.
- 10) First ScotRail should raise public awareness of the competitiveness of current fares, and there will also be a major opportunity to highlight fares (including possible short-term promotions) as part of a re-launch of the Stranraer line to coincide with the 2009 timetable recast.
- 11) First ScotRail should be encouraged to extend to the Stranraer line their growing market for coach tours travelling on scenic lines, aided by the production of a 'windowgazer' guide in conjunction with SAYLSA.
- 12) First ScotRail and SAYLSA should explore branding the line with a 'gardens' theme, reflecting the mild climate and associated garden attractions of south west Scotland, the current initiatives to develop station gardens at Girvan and Barrhill, and the 'green' credentials of rail travel.
- 13) Detailed analysis should be undertaken into:
 - the potential viability and wider economic contribution of steam trains
 - the future of the existing Stranraer station (the oldest working harbour station in Britain) and its potential to form a heritage element of the planned waterfront development.
- 14) The development of a strategy for the line should be a key early task for a new line partnership, and lessons should be learned from the experience of

others, notably route-specific rail partnerships in England and Wales and the multi-route Highland Rail Partnership

- 15) In order to protect future railhead possibilities, the status of the former Stockton Haulage rail-connected depot should be clarified, and the alternative option – if Stena remain – of locating a freight railhead in the harbour area should be evaluated.
- 16) As and when Stena move to Cairnryan, the question arises as to whether rail freight would be best served by a 6-mile road shunt from a Stranraer railhead, or by reinstatement of the former Cairnryan Military Railway as a lower-cost freight-only operation. This should be examined, but in light of costs, complexity and the circuitous route, it is not recommended that re-opening the line to passengers be pursued.
- 17) As the line has significant freight potential over a potentially trans-national corridor, the current TENS designation should be explored as a vehicle for promotion and potential funding of infrastructure and other improvements to achieve significant mode switch from road haulage to rail freight between Central Scotland and Stranraer.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 – RAIL TIMETABLE

MONDAY-SATURDAY											SUNDAY		
Glasgow	07.13	08.28	09.03	11.42	12.30	15.30	16.00	17.13	18.30	20.00	22.03	11.42	16.25
Paisley	07.24			11.53								11.53	16.39
Newcastle						12.39				17.13			
Carlisle						14.22				18.51			
Kilmarnock			09.55		13.10	16.09	16.31			20.37	22.44		
Prestwick Air	07.43	09.10	10.12	-	13.27	-	16.49			-	23.01		
Ayr	08.00	09.43	10.23	12.30	13.38	16.34	17.00	18.10	19.31	21.01	23.11	12.35	17.19
Maybole	06.11	09.54	10.34	12.41	13.49	16.45	17.11	18.21	19.42	21.12	23.22	12.46	17.30
Girvan	06.27	08.26	10.09	13.01	14.05	17.00	17.27	18.37	19.57	21.27	23.37	13.01	17.45
Barrhill	08.45	10.35		13.20	17.19			20.16	21.46	22.24	00.01	13.19	18.04
Stranraer a	09.21	11.11		13.56	17.55			20.52	22.24	00.37		13.56	18.40
Stranraer d	09.55			14.50	19.50					23.59so		14.50	19.50
Belfast	11.40			16.35	21.35					03.14so		16.35	21.35
GL-STR TIME	2h.8m	2h.43m		2h.14m		2h.25m			2h.22m	2h.24m	2h.34m	2h.14m	2h.15m
AV'GE SPEED	47mph	37mph		45mph		42mph			43mph	42mph	42mph	45mph	45mph

MONDAY-SATURDAY											SUNDAY		
Belfast		03.15so	07.35						17.20			07.35	12.20
Stranraer a		06.30so	09.20						19.05		(SX)	09.20	14.05
Stranraer d		07.09	10.00	11.48		14.37			19.40	21.10	23.25	10.40	14.40
Barrhill		07.43	10.34	12.22		15.11			20.19	21.50	23.59	11.14	15.14
Girvan	06.40	08.01	10.52	12.40	14.40	15.29	17.32	18.42	20.37	22.08	00.19	11.32	15.32
Maybole	06.56	08.25	11.08	12.56	14.56	15.45	17.48	18.58	20.53	22.24	00.35	11.48	15.48
Ayr	07.08	08.35	11.20	13.08	15.08	15.58	18.00	19.08	21.05	22.37	00.47	12.01	16.01
Prestwick Air	-	08.43	-	12.16	13.16	-	15.24	19.16	-	-	-	-	-
Kilmarnock	07.41	09.03	11.50	13.37	15.42			19.40					
Carlisle	09.28		13.35										
Newcastle	10.51		14.55										
Paisley						16.33			21.44	23.14		12.36	16.37
Glasgow	08.09	09.50	12.34	13.07	14.27	16.45		20.07	21.55	23.26		12.51	16.49
STR-GL TIME		2h.41m	2h.34m		2h.39m	2h.8m			2h.15m	2h.16m		2h.11m	2h.9m
AV'GE SPEED		37mph	39mph		38mph	47mph			45mph	45mph		46mph	47mph

Glasgow-Stranraer through train routed via Paisley

Glasgow-Stranraer through train routed via Kilmarnock

Italicised times indicate connecting services

APPENDIX 2 – STRANRAER RAIL-FERRY CONNECTIONS

MONDAY-SATURDAY				SUNDAY					
	SO		SO		SO		SO		
Glasgow	-	07.13	11.42	15.30	20.00	11.42	-	16.25	-
Stranraer a	-	09.21	13.56	17.55	22.24	13.56	-	18.40	-
<i>Stranraer d</i>	04.55	09.55	14.50	19.50	23.50	14.50	04.55	19.50	23.50
<i>Belfast</i>	06.40	11.40	16.35	21.35	03.05	16.35	06.40	21.35	03.05
FERRY CONNECTION TIME	-	34 m	54 m	145 m	82 m	54 m	-	70 m	-

MONDAY-SATURDAY				SUNDAY								
	SO		SO		SO		SO					
<i>Belfast</i>	03.15	07.35	12.20	17.20	20.00	22.10	07.35	12.20	11.50	17.20	20.00	22.10
<i>Stranraer a</i>	06.30	09.20	14.05	19.05	23.15	23.55	09.20	14.05	15.05	19.05	23.15	23.55
Stranraer d	07.09	10.00	14.37	19.40	-	-	10.40	14.40	-	19.40	-	-
Glasgow	09.50	12.34	16.45	21.55	-	-	12.51	16.49	-	21.48	-	-
FERRY CONNECTION TIME	39 m	40 m	32 m	35 m	-	-	80 m	35 m	-	35 m	-	-

Italicised times indicate connecting services

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