



## ScotRail Fit for the Future Consultation – SPT response

**Committee** Strategy and Programmes

**Date of meeting** 26 November 2021

**Date of report** 1 November 2021

### Report by Acting Chief Executive

#### 1. Object of report

The object of this report is to recommend approval of SPT's draft response to ScotRail's "Fit for the Future" May 2022 timetable consultation. The draft response is attached at Appendix 1 and was submitted within deadline subject to approval by this Committee.

#### 2. Background

- 2.1 As members are aware, the Covid-19 pandemic has had a seismic effect on public transport in terms of reducing patronage, and rail has been particularly badly affected, with passenger numbers dropping by over 90% at the worst points of the crisis. Recognising the importance of rail to key workers and wider economic, social and environmental aspirations, the Scottish Government supported the rail sector throughout the pandemic, contributing in the process over £400 million to ensure its survival. Further, and while the long-term impacts of the pandemic on travel patterns and demand remains to be seen, the emerging consensus is that how, why and where we travel in future could be significantly different to pre-Covid.
- 2.2 The cumulative effects of the above set the context in which ScotRail put forward its proposals for the May 2022 timetable under the name "Fit for the Future". ScotRail highlight that the proposals, which are the most significant change to the operation of the rail network for many years, seek to set a foundation to build-on in attracting people back to rail post-Covid. It is also worth emphasising that in announcing the consultation, ScotRail acknowledged that pre-Covid levels of service appeared unsustainable in future; the starkest example given being that across the ScotRail network, on a typical weekday, just 23% of the available number of seats were occupied, meaning seats were empty for 77% of the distance travelled.
- 2.3 In seeking to address the above issues, ScotRail has emphasised that reducing costs and improving punctuality and reliability have been key drivers in the development of the new timetable, they note that many rail services would not be affected by the proposals. ScotRail made great efforts to publicise the "Fit for the Future" consultation and members will be aware of the presentation and discussion at a recent meeting of the Operations Committee in that regard. In addition to the consultation response, SPT officers have also been involved in ongoing discussions with ScotRail colleagues in relation to the timetable.

### 3. Outline of proposals

Summarised below are ScotRail's "Fit for the Future" proposals as they affect services within the SPT area. Note that references to the 'current timetable' refer to the timetable in operation since November 2021 and ending May 2022:

- **Ayr Line** - No significant changes between Glasgow and Ayr from the current timetable. The May 2022 timetable will continue to provide four trains per hour during peak periods, with two or three trains per hour in off-peak periods and one train per hour in the evenings.
- **Ardrossan and Largs** - No significant changes between Glasgow, Ardrossan and Largs from the current timetable. The May 2022 timetable will continue to provide two trains per hour during the day with one train per hour to Largs in the evening and services to Ardrossan to connect with ferries.
- **Inverclyde** - No significant changes between Glasgow and Inverclyde from the current timetable. The May 2022 timetable will provide 4 trains per hour between Gourock and Glasgow during peak, 2 or 3 trains per hour between the peaks and one train per hour in the evening. The timetable will also provide one train per hour between Glasgow and Wemyss Bay all day with an additional peak train in each direction.
- **Paisley Canal** - No significant changes between Glasgow and Paisley Canal from the current timetable. The May 2022 timetable will continue to provide 2 trains per hour during the day with 1 train per hour in the evening.
- **Barrhead/Kilmarnock** - No significant changes between Glasgow, Barrhead and Kilmarnock from the current timetable. The May 2022 timetable will continue to provide two trains per hour between Glasgow and Kilmarnock with one train per hour calling at all stations and one train per hour calling at limited stations, and additional services between Glasgow and Barrhead during peak hours.
- **East Kilbride** - No significant changes between Glasgow and East Kilbride from the current timetable. The May 2022 timetable will continue to provide two trains per hour during the day with up to four trains per hour during peak periods and one train per hour in the evening.
- **South Electrics** - No significant changes on the Glasgow South Electric route from the current timetable. The May 2022 timetable will continue to provide two trains per hour between Glasgow and Neilston with one train per hour in the evening, two trains per hour between Glasgow and Newton with one train per hour in the evening with a limited Cathcart Circle service. During peak hours additional services will be provided to or from Neilston and Newton and on the Cathcart Circle.
- **Argyle Line** - No significant changes on the majority of the Argyle Line from the current timetable. The May 2022 timetable will continue to provide 2 trains per hour on each route via Glasgow Central Low Level for most of the day with additional peak capacity of one train in each direction between Carstairs and Glasgow. Improvements between Lanark and Glasgow Central will provide the route with 2 trains per hour during the day and one train per hour in the evening. The majority of services are planned via Bellshill however a small number will be direct between Motherwell and Uddingston due to capacity constraints.
- **North Electrics** - No significant changes on the Glasgow North Electrics from the current timetable. The May 2022 will provide 2 trains per hour during the day between Edinburgh and Helensburgh, Springburn and Milngavie and Airdrie and

Balloch with peak services between Edinburgh and Milngavie. In the evening, the service is reduced to 2 trains per hour between Edinburgh and Helensburgh and between Springburn and Balloch with Milngavie served via Argyle Line services.

- **Anniesland via Maryhill** - No significant changes between Glasgow and Anniesland from the current timetable. The May 2022 timetable will continue to provide an hourly service all day with additional services during peak hours.
- **Cumbernauld, Bishopbriggs, Lenzie and Croy** - ScotRail is proposing changes to the service on this corridor. The timetable will provide one train per hour between Glasgow and Falkirk Grahamston via Stepps all day with an additional one train per hour between Glasgow and Cumbernauld via Stepps until approximately 19:30. Passengers travelling between stations such as Cumbernauld and Edinburgh will be able to change trains at Falkirk Grahamston. Additional peak capacity for Bishopbriggs, Lenzie and Croy will be provided through Edinburgh to Glasgow via Falkirk High services initially and if demand outstrips capacity, options to increase capacity will be explored in future timetables.

#### 4. Conclusions

The challenges facing the public transport network of the west of Scotland are significant and ScotRail's proposals are an attempt to address those in the short term. While acknowledging that many of the services in the SPT area are unaffected by the proposals, SPT's response seeks to ensure that services are maintained and improved. The response also emphasises the need to remain flexible in terms of service provision, as the emerging needs of customers, communities and businesses evolve post-pandemic. We have requested further detail on how ScotRail intend to consult and engage with stakeholders, including SPT, as part of any process of review.

Further, and while appreciating the operational and cost imperatives which helped determine the proposed timetable, our response highlights concerns that these issues are being given priority ahead of an assessment of any wider economic, community and passenger impacts and needs. As such, SPT has suggested that appropriate assessment should be undertaken on the impact of the proposals on communities and passengers in line with the form of assessment undertaken through Equality Impact Assessment and Fairer Scotland duties, as would be the case per the statutory requirements for any public policy changes.

It is worth emphasising however that, should passenger numbers not recover and improve on pre-Covid levels, this could have a significant effect on wider economic and environmental aspirations and indeed, may necessitate further, more significant changes in the medium to longer term. SPT will continue to work with ScotRail and wider public transport industry stakeholders in seeking to avoid this by stimulating growth in patronage, and will keep the Committee updated on this and other matters as progress is made.

#### 5. Committee action

The Committee is recommended to approve the draft SPT response at Appendix 1.

#### 6. Consequences

Policy consequences	<i>In line with the current and developing Regional Transport Strategy.</i>
Legal consequences	<i>None at present.</i>
Financial consequences	<i>None at present.</i>

Personnel consequences	<i>None at present.</i>
Equalities consequences	<i>Impact on equalities groups will need to be considered in advance of timetable changes coming into effect in May 2022.</i>
Risk consequences	<i>None at present.</i>

**Name** Neil Wylie  
**Title** Director of Finance

**Name** Valerie Davidson  
**Title** Acting Chief Executive

For further information, please contact *Bruce Kiloh, Head of Policy and Planning* at [bruce.kiloh@spt.co.uk](mailto:bruce.kiloh@spt.co.uk) or Allan Comrie, Senior Transport Planner at [allan.comrie@spt.co.uk](mailto:allan.comrie@spt.co.uk).

## APPENDIX 1

ScotRail Fit for the Future Consultation  
SPT Response  
1 October 2021

SPT welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Fit For The Future consultation, and we particularly welcome ScotRail's efforts to engage with SPT, our Partnership members and partner Local Authorities in advance of the May 2022 proposals taking effect.

SPT recognises that given the current hugely challenging context of pandemic, de-carbonisation, transfer to public control, changed and changing travel behaviours and financial pressures, it is necessary and desirable that a robust review of services operated by ScotRail is undertaken.

In this context, SPT would make the following observations at this time:

- We recognise that the proposed May 2022 timetable reflects the challenges outlined above and will go some way to promoting the resilience of the rail network for an interim period. We also note that ScotRail view the May 2022 timetable as a new starting point for future timetable development. However, it is SPT's view that the proposed timetable should be viewed as a temporary arrangement reflecting uniquely challenging circumstances. We trust that over time ScotRail's aspiration will see its replacement by an enhanced timetable that best reflects priorities including modal shift, reduced inequality, de-carbonisation and post-Covid green recovery.
- We note and welcome ScotRail's intention to be fleet of foot and vary train services or the number of carriages to better match passenger demand. This will be important to ensure that changes can be made as the emerging needs of customers, communities and businesses evolve. We would welcome further detail on how ScotRail intend to consult and engage with stakeholders, including SPT, as part of this process of review.
- SPT would also request clarification with regard to the intended process for handling and responding to feedback received through the consultation including the timescales for this. In addition, we would welcome confirmation that the high level of involvement of SPT and partners in development of the timetable to date will continue before final decisions are taken.
- Given the wide ranging current challenges faced by the transport industry, we appreciate the need for operational and cost imperatives to be the key drivers in determining the proposed timetable. However, we are concerned that these are being given too much priority ahead of an assessment of wider community and passenger impacts and needs. As an example, Inverclyde Council's aspiration for re-population and regeneration could be negatively impacted by a reduction in the number of trains operating and the loss of some faster trains serving the area. Similarly access to health care facilities on the south-side of Glasgow (specifically but not exclusively, the New Victoria ACAD), will be compromised by the loss of Cathcart Circle service during the main part of the day. As such, appropriate assessment should be undertaken of the impact of proposals on communities and passengers in line with the form of assessment undertaken through Equality Impact Assessment and Fairer Scotland duties as would be the case per the statutory requirements for any public policy changes.
- Related to this is the need to consider the potential impacts of the timetable proposals on the wider transport network and in particular efforts to promote modal shift from private car in line with national targets for carbon reduction.

- While welcome, the retention of most peak-hour services is predicated on a return to a pre-Covid commuting pattern into and out of Scotland's cities. Whilst this is a sensible approach in terms of on-train and line capacities at commuting times, it should be closely monitored to ensure that such services are delivering commuters to the places they require to be and when they require to be there. The move to more flexible working patterns including working from home will impact on these commuter services particularly across urban and suburban routes. Furthermore, the reduction of some off-peak services will perhaps impact on workers and commuters being able to fully utilise the rail network should they wish to work more flexibly in the future.
- The retention of the majority of the more rural and regional services is welcome and SPT would emphasise the importance of these services for residents, visitors and the economies of these areas is paramount.
- SPT would make specific comment as regards a number of the timetabling proposals in the west of Scotland as follows:
  - **Capacities** - SPT would hope that as many services, particularly services on lines where frequencies have been reduced will operate with sufficient train capacities available to accommodate demand, as well as ensuring on-going levels of confidence as passengers return to the railway. To this end, multiple unit combinations should be used where appropriate and/or available.
  - **Inverclyde (and Argyll and Bute via connection)** - The loss of a number of semi-fast services to/from Gourock in the off peak is regrettable particularly given connections to ferry services to/from the Cowal and Rosneath Peninsulas. It is also noted that certain retained semi-fast services run very close to similar services operating to Wemyss Bay as far as Port Glasgow therefore the benefit of the semi-fast Gourock services is not fully realised.
  - **Ayr** - The loss of at least one of the express services per hour in the off-peak is also unfortunate although the retention of 2 and 3 trains per hour as well as the Ardrossan and Largs services is acknowledged. South of Ayr it is hoped that services to this more rural area can be restored to a pre-Covid (or better) level as soon as demand returns.
  - **Kilmarnock-Dumfries** - It is to be hoped that the long-term aspiration for improvements south of Kilmarnock can be realised in the future and that the reduction in service level will be subject to on-going scrutiny based on demand levels.
  - **Central Scotland** - EGIP improvements have brought huge benefits to the corridors between Glasgow and Edinburgh serving the towns and communities across central Scotland. We are however, concerned that the proposed timetable changes may serve to undermine the benefits of such investment. Service levels on the approach to Glasgow specifically at Croy (with its significant strategic Park and Ride facility), Lenzie and Bishopbriggs should be subject to on-going scrutiny to ensure demand is being effectively met.
  - **West Highland Line** - the retention of the pre-Covid service level is welcomed as is the possibility of improved capacities and rolling stock.

- **Glasgow Suburban** – We are concerned about proposed service reductions, particularly the loss of Cathcart Circle services serving schools, colleges and, pertinently, hospitals along the line. The loss of connectivity is regrettable, particularly in areas where limited public transport alternatives are readily available. SPT would hope that this service is subject to ongoing review and timetable changes can be made quickly where essential journeys are negatively impacted.
- **Evening service levels** – The proposal to reduce service levels in the evening should take into account demand patterns that can occur on Fridays and at weekends, particularly on urban and suburban services, as the night-time and weekend economies try to return to pre-Covid levels. Multiple unit combinations should be used to ensure that both demand and safety levels can be met.

SPT would of course be happy to meet to discuss our response in more detail.