

VISITSCOTLAND RESPONSE TO PETITION PE1115 Campaign to Open Blackford Railway-station Again

VisitScotland welcomes the opportunity to comment on the petition by Caroline Moore on behalf of the Campaign to Open Blackford Railway-station Again, calling for the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to ensure that national and regional transport strategies consider and focus on public transport solutions such as the reopening of Blackford railway station.

As requested, our response focuses on the points raised by Dr Richard Simpson MSP during discussion of the petition on 26 October 2010. From this discussion, it is our understanding that the points raised by Dr Simpson generally compare Gleneagles railway station and Blackford railway station with regard to the 2014 Ryder Cup, specifically:

- With regard to disabled access.
- Road access and lack of foot access from Gleneagles Railway Station.
- The view that current costings for opening Blackford Station have been overestimated and the suggestion that potential passenger numbers for the station have been underestimated.
- The potential for Blackford Station to allow workers from Highland Spring to travel by rail rather than car.
- Refurbishment of Gleneagles Station and suggested impact on disabled access.

We have commented as fully as possible, although it is our view that some points are more for Transport Scotland to comment on.

INTRODUCTION

VisitScotland operates from over 100 locations throughout the country and we have a considerable array of local expertise throughout our network.

As an organisation, our overall remit is to maximise the economic benefit of tourism to Scotland. This covers three key areas with related corporate objectives:

- Market Scotland to all parts of the world to attract visitors.
- Provide information and inspiration to visitors and potential visitors so they get the best out of a visit to Scotland.
- Provide quality assurance to visitors and quality advice to industry partners to help the industry meet - and strive to exceed - visitors' expectations.

As the national tourism agency we have two customers – visitors and the tourism industry itself. We have a strategic role as the lead public sector agency for tourism to provide leadership and direction for the development of Scottish tourism to ensure we leverage the maximum possible economic benefit for Scotland.

EventScotland, the national events agency, is a key part of VisitScotland and it exists to strengthen and promote Scotland's events industry. EventScotland does this by attracting, generating and sustaining a portfolio of world class events in Scotland.

PE1115/Q

GENERAL VIEW AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION

VisitScotland is supportive of sustainable transport developments that provide a better service for visitors, including those attending the 2014 Ryder Cup.

EventScotland has asked Transport Scotland to develop a transport plan for the 2014 Ryder Cup, in conjunction with Perth and Kinross Council and other relevant organisations. The initial stages of this plan were carried out in 2010. More detailed work is now underway, with Transport Scotland leading on the transport plan.

It is planned that rail will be a key part of the transport plan for the 2014 Ryder Cup, which attracts 45,000 spectators, many of whom will wish to arrive at the venue each day as early as possible.

In order to accommodate this, whilst keeping other road traffic moving, it is likely a number of forms of transport will be incorporated into the final transport plan. These are likely to include rail and bus-based park and ride.

Early indications are that most of the spectators will have to make use of road-based park and ride due to capacity and specifically signalling constraints on the rail network. Preliminary work suggests that only 8,000 spectators per day can be accommodated on the Perth to Stirling line. While transport planning will seek to maximise that number, it is likely that rail will only deliver a small proportion of the total 45,000 spectators expected, with the balance being transported by park and ride.

SPECIFIC QUESTIONS

Disabled access

With regard to disability access, the current transport plan for the 2014 Ryder Cup will consider a number of strategies to transport spectators into the Ryder Cup. Access via Gleneagles Station will be one of those strategies considered. The plan will also evaluate access to the event for mobility impaired spectators, although at this stage it is too early to say what the detail of those arrangements may be.

Road access and lack of foot access from Gleneagles Railway Station

With regard to road access, the transport plan for the 2014 Ryder Cup will include an evaluation of road links serving Gleneagles station, along with all other relevant local and strategic links in the area.

With regard to Blackford station, Transport Scotland has already considered a proposal to re-open Blackford Railway Station earlier this year as part of their assessment of AECOM's independent review published in April on behalf of the Campaign to Open Blackford Railway station Again (COBRA). We understand that this information has already been provided to the committee.

With regard to foot access at Gleneagles, proposals for walk-in facilities such as a temporary footbridge over the A9 are being considered as part of an overall package for the Ryder Cup.

Blackford Station costings and likely passenger numbers

This point is more relevant for Transport Scotland, although with regard to the Ryder Cup 2014, we would reiterate the fact that in order to accommodate the expected number of visitors attending the event, a number of forms of transport will likely need to be incorporated into the final transport plan, not just rail.

Potential for Blackford to attract more rail travel and less commuting by car

Again, Transport Scotland may be best placed to comment on this point. In terms of potential tourism benefit from the line, however, it is likely that the primary beneficiaries of a re-opened Blackford station would be the local community rather than visitors.

Refurbishment of Gleneagles and suggested impact on disability access

Dr Simpson notes suggests the cost of refurbishing Gleneagles Station could impact upon funds available for improving facilities for disabled individuals. At this stage in the planning process, it is too early to comment on this in any detail. While it is likely that some work will be required to refurbish Gleneagles station as part of the transport plan for Ryder Cup 2014, these works have yet to be identified. However it is fair to say that given the relatively small contribution that rail will make to the overall transport plan for Ryder Cup 2014, there may not be any significant structural changes to the station or approach roads. The station is not currently DDA compliant but the travel plan allows spectators to state their needs in advance and alternative bus provision/tailored travel plans will be made for those who require it.

SUMMARY

- VisitScotland is supportive of sustainable transport developments that provide a better service for visitors, including those attending the 2014 Ryder Cup.
- Rail is a key part of the transport plans for Ryder Cup 2014. Due to the volume of traffic likely during the event, however, a number of transport options will be required and are likely to include both rail and bus-based park and ride.
- The transport plan will evaluate access to the event for mobility impaired spectators, as well as an evaluation of road links serving Gleneagles station, along with all other relevant local and strategic links in the area.
- Proposals for walk-in facilities are also being considered, with a temporary footbridge over the A9 suggested as part of an overall transport plans for the Ryder Cup.
- Transport Scotland is leading on the transport planning process for Ryder Cup 2014 and it has considered AECOM's report on proposals to re-open Blackford station, as outlined in Transport Scotland's letters to the Committee (18 May and 1 September 2010).

We hope these comments are useful.

Should you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours sincerely



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VisitScotland