

# PE1080: Edinburgh South Suburban Railway

## CRAG/E-Rail, 06 Nov 2007, 1/4

- **The Railway.** The Edinburgh South Suburban Railway (the South Sub) is an existing, operational railway. It does not have a stopping passenger service, despite going through residential, retail, educational and commercial areas of South Edinburgh. The South Sub is double-track and is maintained to full passenger standards. It allows freight trains to avoid Waverley, and is used as a diversionary route for passenger trains - as during the upgrading works at Waverley.
- **The Problem.** Increasing congestion is reducing mobility within the city. Despite bus lanes, bus travel is not immune to congestion. Cars and taxis are also affected. A quick glance at old railway timetables will show journey times around the South Sub far quicker than any comparable journey made by road today. For example, Lothian Buses service 30 from Niddrie to the West End takes some 30 minutes. When there was a passenger service, the train, in 1962, took 19 minutes from Duddingston, via Morningside, to Haymarket, with several intermediate stops.
- **The Demand.** There is a need to tackle congestion in a cost-effective manner. Aside from increased residential development along the route of the South Sub, recent years have also seen major new traffic generators built within its catchment area. Asda at The Jewel and the Fort Kinnaird and Cameron Toll shopping centres lie just yards from the line while the Royal Infirmary and Queen Margaret University are nearby. The University of Edinburgh's campus at King's Buildings, Napier University's campuses at Merchiston, Craighouse and Craiglockhart and George Watson's College must also be mentioned. Moreover, the South Sub runs right through one of Scotland's major regeneration areas - Niddrie/Craigmillar - and the provision of a station there is seen as essential by the regeneration project team.
- **The Solution.** No longer, then, is transport in Edinburgh solely a matter of access to the city centre. The South Sub does that well too - but it also provides for the kinds of orbital journeys now increasingly being made, made overwhelmingly by car and not at all well served by public transport.

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- **Re-opening.** Although various studies into the feasibility of re-opening to local passenger services have been commissioned over the years, by the far the most definitive to date was that undertaken by Atkins in 2004 for the City of Edinburgh Council. This examined various options - many with a good Benefit Cost Ratio (BCR) and most of relatively modest cost. The 2004 study stated, for example, 7725 passengers per day for a capital cost of £18m and a BCR of 1.42 for a service running to and from Newcraighall. This predates several large developments along the route, such as Niddrie/Craigmillar and Queen Margaret University
- **Transport Scotland.** As you are aware, Transport Scotland are now the body with responsibility to progress re-opening of the line and therefore an all-party group of Edinburgh councillors met with the Transport Minister in January of this year to urge him to find the funding to allow this to happen. The Minister requested that the Atkins study be updated and work on this is now underway. Commissioned by Transport Scotland, SEStran and the City of Edinburgh Council, this report from Halcrow should be ready in January 2008.
- **E-Rail. The business case for re-opening is further enhanced by the commitment of up to £8.5m in developer contributions, secured by E-Rail. These are time limited and unless the project is contracted by January 2012 the commitments will lapse.**
- **Options.** There are several options under review by Halcrow. The simplest and cheapest option would be an extension of the present North Berwick/Waverley service to run through Gorgie and Morningside to terminate in the Niddrie/Newcraighall area. Crucially, this would not require any additional train paths between Waverley and Haymarket stations during peak periods. There would also be opportunities for services running West from Haymarket to serve Edinburgh Park and Gogar.
- **The Longer Term.** Reinstatement of a full South Sub circular service - i.e. running back through Portobello to Waverley - would have to await the replacement of rail capacity removed east of Waverley in the last few decades. Already Network Rail have indicated their intention to reinstate double track at Portobello junction. Redoubling of at least one of the Calton tunnels would also be a big help - there should be no problem with the north tunnel which would be best suited in any case to a South Sub service running via a reinstated Abbeyhill loop line. Network Rail are also considering electrification of the South Sub. A full circular service can remain a long-term aspiration but shouldn't hold back achievable progress meantime.

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- **RISK. The South Sub is a low risk project.** There are none of the risks that go with reinstating abandoned railways such as mine workings - and there are no level crossings or road diversions. As an operational railway, there is no requirement for an Act to Parliament to grant the powers to build stations and operate passenger trains.
- **Interchange.** The South Sub offers interchange at Haymarket with trams, buses and the rest of Scotland's railway network. It also of course serves the capital's main station - Waverley. If it runs to Newcraighall it could interchange there with the Borders Railway to Galashiels, as well as the Park and Ride facility at Newcraighall.
- **Benefits.** Reopening of the South Sub will make a worthwhile contribution to a growing network of transport choices in the city.
- **Support.** There is widespread popular and political support for the South Sub. Elected representatives of all parties have declared their support - as have numerous civic and community groups. The petition amassed 2602 signatures - strong support for a transport issue at Holyrood. The Edinburgh Evening News shows lots of support for the South Sub.
- **The Future.** CRAG and E-Rail request that the Scottish Parliament instruct Transport Scotland to make this a priority project. The funding required is very modest, the gains outweigh the costs and the developer commitments will reduce the cost to the public purse. It will provide high-quality socially inclusive transport to a great many people, and can, **and must**, be implemented quickly. .

