

Newburgh Train Station Group

Convener's Report 2015-2016

Introduction

The campaign continues to meet monthly at the Tayside Institute and Community Centre and manages on average a core attendance of around seven, most of whom represent the working group. The working group still requires a campaign supporter prepared to take a lead on fund-raising. All meetings are advertised on Facebook and on the website and in the Fife Herald, together with posters in shops along the High Street. An agenda for meetings and minutes of the previous meeting are sent out by email to all those campaign supporters on email, just over 300 in number, all of whom live in Newburgh or close to. Whilst it is fair to say the meetings are all about a focus on a work in progress, - the campaign effort to reopen the station at Newburgh - and introduce much that has policy and planning detail framed by current political and administrative dimensions, anyone can turn up, uninitiated at first but soon enough able to get the gist of the way things work and move. Everyone is made welcome and this year, as some volunteers have retired or moved away from the area, new faces have appeared and stepped in.

The year's activity

NEW MP

A new member for the UK parliament after the general election of 2015, Stephen Gethins MP met with the campaign at his constituency office to discuss its progress and also came to visit Newburgh in September to meet supporters of the campaign and get a feel of things on the ground. 50 campaign supporters turned out on a tea-time to meet him at the site of the old station where he pledged his support and was extremely impressed with the number of folk who had come along.

SYSTRA TRANSPORT CONSULTANTS REPORT (NEWBURGH & OUDENARDE: INITIAL RAIL DEMAND FEASIBILITY STUDY)

In December, 18 months after its scheduled publication, the SYSTRA report commissioned by Fife Council, Perth and Kinross Council, SESTRAN (South-East Of Scotland Transport Partnership) and TACTRAN (Tayside And Central Scotland Transport Partnership), finally saw the light of day. In July, previously, the campaign had sight of a draft copy and met with the Leader of Fife Council, Councillor David Ross to discuss this. The report, although tying Newburgh to the proposed development at Oudenarde in Perth and Kinross, made a more favourable feasibility case for a

station at Newburgh. The campaign's subsequent press release led to a good news item in The Courier during January this year. The SYSTRA report is now currently being considered by Transport Scotland and the next steps, favoured by Fife Council and the campaign, is that a full transport appraisal gets done for Newburgh and area alone that will look at all the transport options before a solution is reached as is required by the Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance (STAG), the framework expected by the Scottish Government and its administrative, civil service department, Transport Scotland.

ABERNETHY COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Abernethy Community Council have also expressed an interest in the campaign to reopen the station in Newburgh and the progress of obtaining a full STAG transport appraisal for Newburgh and its area, including Abernethy. At a campaign meeting earlier in 2016, when they formally noted their interest, they emphasised that a cycle track between Newburgh and Abernethy would help make their community's use of any future station in Newburgh a real option.

THE SCOTTISH TRANSPORT APPRAISAL GUIDANCE (STAG)

1. Working Towards A STAG Transport Appraisal For Newburgh And Area

The campaign, working with the previous MSP for North East Fife, Roderick Campbell, who also visited Newburgh in February to meet campaign supporters, with an article later appearing in the Fife Herald, met with Transport Scotland officials to ask about the way they viewed the SYSTRA study report and the case for taking forward a STAG transport appraisal proper for Newburgh. At this stage in February, before the report was forwarded to them by the commissioning parties, which actually occurred later on in May this year, they were, in his words, cagey. This was an impression reinforced when the campaign attended a large-scale day meeting in Glasgow organised by Transport Scotland to discuss in a series of seminars led by transport consultants and planners and their own officials, the whole business of what a STAG is about. Around seventy or more transport officials, planners and consultants from Scotland attended this day event. It was noted that there was no real sense of any consensus about what a STAG process was and not a little unease, or even caginess, about where it was all leading to.

2. Difficulties With The STAG Process

As an appraisal process it is largely dependent on the particular place it is done in and no one STAG can be rolled out and replicated as an appraisal in another area like a template. It is also as much a policy, and hence political process, as it is a planning and technocratically administrative process. So geographic, social and economic factors, indeed very particular, local area factors,

political support through local authority and central government, mediated again through the many various levels of planning policy reviews and previous decisions, all contribute in varying degrees to getting any kind of STAG transport appraisal underway, on its way and into a stage where new decisions are made on the best scenario outcomes before any material, concrete actions are taken. All in all the whole business is convoluted, slow, opaque, not user friendly, not community friendly, poorly, or with difficulty, grasped by officials and experts in the field, never mind politicians or their constituents.

3. The Degree To Which Transport Is A Devolved Or A Reserved Matter

Time and resources are used running complex computer modelling projections extrapolating from mostly past and largely out of date data sets, during transport appraisals whereas very little is spent on on-the-ground field-work and gathering currently relevant data. It produces, from a restricted grouping of selected variables under-scored by abstracted and filtered generalisations, assumptions that are themselves not unbiased, a resultant set of modelled scenario permutations that no one involved finds easy to interpret or have reliable confidence in to make an appraisal of transport needs in a particular case. Meanwhile, Transport Scotland, assumed to be the over-arching choreographer in transport infrastructure development, plays things, to quote one of its officials, “close to the shoulder”, cannot write things into a STAG that are separate from Department for Transport guidelines and do not really make any decisions. “Devolution is a moveable feast”, to quote a member of the Scottish Parliament. Not everything concerned with transport is devolved to the Scottish Government and clarity on this was attempted in a House of Commons research briefing paper, Transport In Scotland (number SN031920) of the 3rd November 2015, which spells out in some detail what are reserved and what are devolved matters and also the varying shaded degrees between.

4. SYSTRA Transport Consultants

More positively, SYSTRA who undertook the study which was favourable to Newburgh’s station reopening case, undertook work in Greater Dublin which had to focus on people not models, from the basis of observations on real life situations and localities to establish an economic case for action, and which recognised the importance of research into cycling and walking patterns, rather than relying on forecasting that merely reflects policy assumptions, back-casting and reinforcing those assumptions. The campaign has also spoken directly with the director from SYSTRA who signed off the Newburgh-Oudenarde study and who advised that Newburgh should de-couple itself from Oudenarde in any future appraisal process. This has also been the opinion of SESTRAN and Fife Council.

REINSTATE BONNYBRIDGE RAILWAY STATION GROUP

Before the Scottish Parliament elections in May 2016, the campaign established contact with a campaign to reopen the station at Bonnybridge, sharing and exchanging a number of useful insights as well as agreeing to maintain this in future as our two campaigns develop. Representatives from Newburgh Train Station Group attended a meeting of theirs after representatives from their group visited Newburgh and attended one of our sessions. In Bonnybridge text and image materials were displayed by the Newburgh campaign and a summary of our campaign and its current concerns was also given as an address. At the Bonnybridge meeting the campaign also met and exchanged contact details with Alison Cosgrove, board member of Rail Futures and secretary of Rail Futures Scotland, who has also been a key member of the successful campaign to reopen East Linton and Reston stations in East Lothian. The campaign display has been further used at a TICC open day and at a fundraising event.

THE SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT ELECTIONS MAY 2016

The Scottish Parliament elections in May saw Roderick Campbell MSP lose his seat to Willie Rennie MSP who now represents North East Fife. Rod was thanked for his continuous hands-on support. He has now passed his case notes to Stephen Gethins MP and in correspondence Stephen has indicated that he has been in preliminary touch with Humza Yousaf MSP, the newly appointed Transport Minister, and will follow this up once the minister has had a chance to get his feet under the table and the EU referendum is out of the way. Stephen also asked for the campaign's thoughts on the next approach to the minister and has been supplied with some pointers. Further to this and the election of Willie Rennie MSP, a meeting was held with Willie in his constituency office in Cupar to brief him as fully as possible on the background and development of the campaign and the current aims to have a full transport appraisal done for Newburgh. He intends to ask some questions of the new minister for transport in the Scottish Parliament and has been supplied with reference material to help him along. The campaign will keep in close touch with our new constituency representative through meetings and correspondence to establish a meaningful, working relationship. The campaign will also be approaching MSPs elected on the list who represent Fife and mid-Scotland.

TAY PLAN 2016

The Tayplan was submitted to Scottish Ministers on 7 June 2016 for examination. The Newburgh Train Station Group had previously made a representation to TAYplan regarding this plan during the consultation period last summer and Scottish Ministers have been made aware by TAYplan that

the campaign's representation has not been resolved. Our representation will be considered by the reporter appointed by Scottish Ministers to carry out the examination. The authority has provided the reporter with a summary of the issues that the authority considers should be assessed at the examination, and a copy of our full representation.

FUND RAISING

To maintain running costs of the campaign, largely but not exclusively incurred by the monthly hire of a meeting room in the TICC, a fund raising coffee morning was recently held in the TICC and raised just under £500. This will be a great help to keep the campaign going into the future. All the voluntary effort made by campaign supporters, members of the working group and the formidable Newburgh stalwarts who run coffee mornings from week to week for all variety of community activity and causes, is greatly appreciated. However ways to achieve fund raising on a large enough scale to help commission a STAG appraisal have not been sufficiently tackled and remains something the campaign should take more seriously.

The way ahead

1. Lobbying

After five years of pressing and lobbying, making written representations and entering into extensive correspondence, the campaign to reopen Newburgh railway station for passenger trains, has slowly edged its way to a point where a full transport appraisal for Newburgh is almost at a point of being put into place. The patience and determination that this has involved entirely on a voluntary basis, because it has all been pushed for tirelessly, is an achievement the campaign should be proud of. The campaign has reached this crest and needs to sustain the momentum to ensure the STAG appraisal is undertaken and takes seriously Newburgh and area's transport needs. The discussion, following after this report is given to the AGM of Newburgh Train Station Group and directly after the AGM election of Newburgh Train Station Group post holders, should address and agree on if possible the means by which these immediate aims of the campaign should be carried forward.

2. What The Campaign Faces

It is therefore salutary to be reminded again of what the way ahead means if left entirely in the hands of local government and government transport officials. who, to be fair, themselves work in pressurised and changing circumstances. From correspondence seen by the campaign from a Fife Council transport official to a Fife Council executive committee member we know *that the Newburgh and Oudenarde Passenger Feasibility Study has been submitted to Transport Scotland by*

SESTRAN on behalf of the working group and a response is awaited. Trond Haugen from SESTRAN is pressing them. Fife Council as part of the submission on the Network Rail, Scotland Route Study Consultation has added Newburgh Rail Halt as one of their future proposals for Fife. Should funding from Transport Scotland be required then a STAG would need to be carried out. There is currently no funding within Fife Council or any other members of the working group to undertake a STAG at this time, which would develop an action plan of proposals to meet the transport needs of Newburgh and the surrounding area. There are also studies currently being carried out by Abellio ScotRail, Network Rail and Transport Scotland to improve timetabling for both passenger and freight services as well as route line improvements to speed up rail services. The findings from these studies would also inform and assist the consultants with the STAG for Newburgh and therefore until the studies are finalised a STAG would not be commissioned until 2017.

3. Timescales And Influence: What Will The Campaign Do?

From this official assessment above, as of the 18th May 2016, it is therefore apparent that another two years could pass before a full transport appraisal is begun and thereafter another period of time before it is completed, whilst it can be expected that yet another period of time elapses before a decision is reached and more time again for whatever action is deemed necessary to unfold from this decision. The campaign has to decide what role it wants to have in these proceedings in terms of involvement and being able to effectively exert some influence on the process and even control of and acceleration of time-scales. This is offered up for discussion to the campaign from this convener's report.

Nigel Mullan, Convener, Newburgh Train Station Group, 18th June 2016