



COMHAIKLE COIMHEARSNACHD CILL MHÀLAIDH KILMALLIE COMMUNITY COUNCIL

20th February 2012

Response of Kilmallie Community Council to Rail 2014 Public Consultation

Kilmallie Community Council represents an area to the north and west of Fort William including Banavie and Corpach. Our residents use stations at Banavie, Corpach, Locheil Outward Bound and Locheilside on the West Highland Line as well as sleeper services from Fort William.

Train services along the West Highland line are important for local transport, tourism and business. The sleeper service in particular provides a vital link for residents who work locally but need to travel to the south for business, and for the local tourist industry. The sleeper provides a very practicable way for staff at local businesses to attend meetings in London for one day and for visitors from London coming for a short break such as a weekend.

The current daytime service is a basic minimum and there is considerable room for improvement in schedules and rolling stock. In particular the service relies on old rolling stock and there are often complaints about the comfort, temperature and cleanliness of toilet facilities. While fixing these problems would require investment, there are several things a train operator could consider which would improve the service for residents and visitors at minimal cost.

1. Sleeper booking system

The system for booking sleeper berths has been a contentious issue for many years with no effort by the operator to improve the internet or telephone systems. For many potential travellers, the lack of functionality of booking is sufficient to make them give up and go elsewhere. This is a major issue affecting the use of the sleeper and could easily be resolved. Trying to make an internet booking frequently fails with no information as to what the problem is e.g. is the train full, or is there just some temporary issue? Telephone bookings for seated overnight services from Fort William require the assistant to fill in an internal form, pass it to a manager who then phones the customer some time later about the booking. There is simply no need for such convoluted systems and a new operator should be encouraged to provide the booking functionality of competitors such as budget airlines, who all manage efficient internet booking services.

2. Long wait at Fort William before departing for Glasgow

The early morning train to Glasgow from stations in our area sits at Fort William for 17 minutes before continuing. The train is already much slower than road transport and this is an additional delay that will deter potential travellers. If the Mallaig train ran 15 minutes later it could still service stations south of Fort William at the same time, but would be a slightly better option for people travelling to Fort William for work.

3. Enhanced on-board information

The West Highland Line is recognised as one of the most scenic train journeys in the world and yet the current operator does nothing to enhance the experience for visitors. Very simple additional information such as screens displaying a map (similar to car navigation systems) or views from a forward pointing video camera would create more of a feeling of being on a special train journey. Power sockets at the seats would also improve facilities for business travellers.

4. More space allocated for bicycles

The Fort William area is an important destination for cycling enthusiasts with the mountain bike tracks and events at Nevis Range, but also a wide range of off-road cycling opportunities including the Great Glen Way. Rail travellers with bicycles frequently have problems due to the limited space allocated on the trains.

We believe the new franchise should specify maintenance of the current level of daytime and sleeper services as an absolute minimum and that the small improvements we suggest would also result in increased use and customer satisfaction. The current West Highland Railcard provides makes train travel much more affordable for people within our area and should be maintained. If there was scope for more major changes we would suggest additional trains along the Mallaig line to allow people from our area to commute by train into Fort William and better co-ordination of trains and ferry times.

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