

# **railfuture**

SCOTLAND | ALBA



## ***Teachdail Rèile na h-Alba***

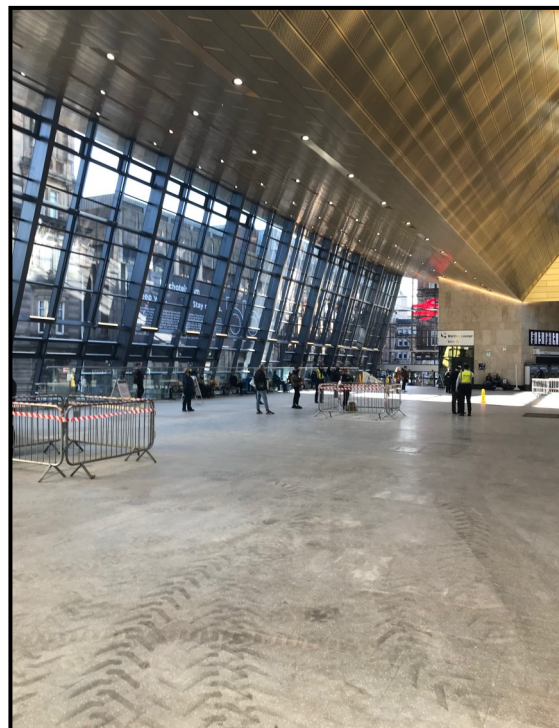
### **Scottish Railways under COVID-19**

Railfuture Scotland is sometimes critical of the attitude to our railways by Westminster and Scottish Governments but we must be grateful that both governments intervened very quickly with EMA, Emergency Measures Agreements. These have been expensive but have kept essential passenger trains running, have kept rail workers in employment and prevented the damage to assets which would have happened if the train operators had just walked away from their franchises. Train services are now generally at 90% of normal timetable with all stations having some level of service. Limitations on services have been mainly due to crew shortages with limited driver training to cover new trains on new routes, cover for crews off for Covid related causes and natural retirements. The reductions in service are still mainly the reduced frequency between morning and evening peaks where previously a good frequency had been run between the peaks. So a half hourly frequency has become hourly or a quarter hourly service becomes half hourly. There are some unexpected changes such as Lanark services which normally ran via Bellshill now running main line into Glasgow. The advice must be to check before relying on a particular service. Long distance services are also running most of normal services. LNER (East Coast Main Line) services are reservation only and it could just be that this continues even after Covid 19 is overcome. The Caledonian Sleeper service is running but with a series of strikes (at time of writing) resulting in cancellations. This is a pity because it is very difficult to run a sleeper service reliably on the modern railway. How long will Scottish Government provide financial support under these circumstances? Even more a pity because across Europe overnight sleeper services are being re-instated.

Passenger use of trains remains low but slowly increasing. While the orders not to use trains have been rescinded and social distancing reduced to one metre there is still a reluctance to use trains. Passenger usage is more even throughout the day with little increase at the former peak hours. More use is being made of shorter intermediate journeys perhaps encouraged by a lack of ticket checks. On train staff seem advised not to speak to passengers except where passengers ask for help. Train users generally comply with masks and distancing guidance. There is little report of crowding of trains in Scotland and Railfuture welcomes any feedback on overcrowding. It is annoying that the media and some politicians regard all train users as "commuters". Train usage must be affected by the restrictions on not being able to visit, see or meet many places, events or friends and relatives. However, tourist trains are popular and seem to be just viable despite social distancing and mask requirements.

Considering the extent of the damage caused by the bursting of the canal the Edinburgh and Glasgow main line has been brought back into service relatively quickly. Re-opening the Airdrie to Bathgate Line as a through route has helped again. There is the tragedy of the fatal derailment on 12<sup>th</sup> August on the line to Aberdeen. Work is under way to repair the line while investigations continue. Some trains are running between Stonehaven and Aberdeen and between Dundee and Montrose but through passengers are advised to take the replacement road coaches between Dundee and Aberdeen.

### **The new Queen Street Station – photos by Lawrence Marshall and Ralph Barker**



### **“.....and now for some good news.....”**

During this pandemic it seems as if there is no good news on the railways, but that is far from the case. Work is progressing on a number of projects: the re-opening of Kintore Station after an absence of rail services of more than 60 years; initial work at Levenmouth; the planning application for Reston Station submitted to Scottish Borders Council, with East Linton to follow; and of course the works at Glasgow Queen Street which have made such a radical difference to the look and feel of what was quite a dark station. Once commuting returns to Queen Street, it will be to much brighter surroundings.

## Two of our committee members' travels during COVID

**Jane Ann Liston: St Andrews to Blackwaterfoot, Arran, 9.09.20**

I was committed to catching the 13:50 at Ardrossan, allowing time to collect my tickets at the ferry terminal. This meant I would have to catch the 12:18 train from Glasgow Central to Ardrossan Harbour.

Normally the 09:22 LNER from Leuchars would have been my first train, having the double advantage of being relatively fast and qualifying for an off-peak ticket. However, due to the dreadful derailment at Carmont, the Aberdeen-King's Cross services were starting from Edinburgh.

Although the Scotrail trains were able to run south from Montrose, the LNER (and CrossCountry) services could not even start from Dundee, due to lack of 'stabling' room; I believe the former marshalling yards and sidings are now under Tesco. Therefore, I took a taxi just after 08:00 to Leuchars, negotiated the long ramped access bridge with all my essential holiday luggage (Brompton folding bike, front pannier, back-pack and golf-bag) and caught the 08:42, which also necessitated a more expensive ticket.

Then on to the 10:21 'semi-fast' train due to arrive 11:42 at Glasgow Central via Shotts. I reckoned that as the 10:21 would arrive at Central half an hour before the 'boat train', I would be able to take my time changing trains, and might even have time to grab a coffee, there being no refreshments on any of the trains.

Then there was an ominous announcement that the train's departure was delayed because they were waiting for a crew member and eventually, the train was cancelled. Passengers were advised to transfer to a train for Queen Street Low Level - due to the flood damage to the main Edinburgh Glasgow line, the Airdrie-Glasgow trains were starting from Waverley. This I could have done without. I would still arrive in Glasgow at 11:42, but at Queen Street and the low-level station to boot.

The prospect of not only cycling with all my accoutrements from Queen Street to Central was bad enough, but if I missed the 12:18, to have the slightest chance of getting the boat I would have to take the Largs train, get off at Ardrossan South Beach just 20 minutes before the ferry left, and pedal speedily along the front to the terminal; one is supposed to be in board 10 minutes before sailing. The problem with multi-leg journeys is that if just one leg fails there is a 'knock-on' effect on all further stages.

A friendly Scotrail man assured me that I'd make it all right. So, on to the Edinburgh-Glasgow Queen Street LL train for a scenic journey of well over an hour via Bathgate and Airdrie. I unfolded the Brompton, clipped the pannier to the front, got back-pack and golf-bag on to my back and was standing at the door finger poised over the door button before we stopped at the low-level platform at Queen Street. Off the train, then moved very smartly to the lift up to the main concourse, looking very different from my last visit, out the exit and mounted the bike after pushing it along the pavement on the one-way street. I arrived at Central just after 12:00, having done the third of a mile journey in just over 5 minutes, according to the GPS, and moved swiftly to the platform where the Ardrossan Harbour train was waiting, with only a slight pause needed to show my ticket at the barrier, the first such check on the journey. The 12:18 slid out of the station and so on to Ardrossan.

That was the end of the rail component of the journey. I got off at Ardrossan so-called Harbour at 13:04, made my laden way to the ferry terminal to collect my ticket, then went outside to stand at the front of the queue ready to board the 13:50 bus to Blackwaterfoot, my first bus ride since lockdown. I think there might have been one other passenger.

### Perth Model Rail Show

Perth Model Rail Show 2021 will be on 26 and 27 June next year if shows are allowed to resume. We very much hope you will be able to join us, as it would be good to see you all again!

**Ron Mclean: Moffat to Edinburgh return, 30.9.20**

Using public transport for the first time since lockdown, I was glad to get back on the train. I headed on the local bus to Lockerbie as that is our nearest station at the moment until Beattock station reopens: the 11.20 bus left on time with three passengers including myself onboard. Sadly I noticed 8 buses have been removed from the timetable reducing the opportunities for rail users wanting to have access to the rail network (bus takes 2hrs 20 mins, the train takes 60 mins from Lockerbie). The Station was quiet, just myself and another passenger, the train running 11 mins late and at 12.15 the information board announced the train was cancelled due to an on board fault. There have been issues with TPE since October last year, trains cancelled at short notice, withdrawn the day before etc.

We need a Scotrail local services in the future to operate on this line so I had to face 2hr 40mins journey by taxi with another three people not very happy about this! Arrived in Edinburgh, and afterwards caught the 16.30 to Glasgow Queen street via Falkirk High. About 20 people waiting on the platform to board the train, and passengers were following social guidance rules when leaving and boarding the train, and wearing face masks. Arrived on time at Glasgow Queen Street what a difference the station looks now!! so much day light coming into the station with the new station front and large concourse and cleaner air with electric trains. The next day used the Glasgow local rail network Charing Cross to Hyndland service and once again plenty of room on the trains (running as six car sets on most services).

I would say that network in Glasgow is being used well with passengers coming back, the only thing I noticed was the rush hour traffic is missing, although day trippers seem to be coming back again. I was glad to be back on the train it was safe and clean.

We need to get the message across to the public with a slogan "We welcome you back on our trains which are clean and safe to use with plenty of room for social distance - let the train take the strain."



### Annual General Meeting – PS Maid of the Loch

The Committee are very sorry that the planned AGM on the PS Waverley did not happen. We still hope to have this next year.