



# The Shotts Line and Breich Station – Options and Opportunities

## Transform Scotland briefing

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### 1. Electrification and the Opportunities

- 1.1. The Shotts Line has for many years been something of a Cinderella route. Until the introduction of the semi-fast services, end-to-end passengers joined a Shotts line train at their peril – and often vowed never to repeat the experience at the culmination of their 1 hour 30 minute journey. That reputation has been hard to shake off.
- 1.2. Looking forward, the electrification of the route combined with new three-car trains offers the chance to truly transform the route. Better acceleration will produce improved journey times and the new trains will offer a much improved travel experience. This is all to be welcomed as the route has significant opportunities for growth but new timetables and new stopping patterns are required. The current all-stations service does no-one any favours – stations with real potential for growth are burdened with the same service as those serving a mere handful of houses. Additionally there is real potential for growth on end-to-end journeys as many passengers travelling from Edinburgh would find Glasgow Central to be a more convenient location in the city and for interchange with other services.
- 1.3. In Edinburgh, the suburban stations cannot compete with a very regular bus service and the hourly frequency compares very poorly with that offered in Strathclyde. Curriehill could be developed as a major park and ride site for services to both Edinburgh and Glasgow and, with high quality walking and cycling routes, could also serve the nearby Heriot Watt University campus. Kirknewton similarly could provide park and ride for a wide catchment as well as serving the nearby village. Addiewell station is poorly sited for the village it serves and Fauldhouse has the potential to be a true transport interchange as a number of bus services already start at the station.

### 2. An Integrated Approach

- 2.1. To ensure that the newly electrified route reaches its true potential, a joined-up approach is required. Three trains per hour would allow for stations to be much better served and new timetables would allow trains via the Carstairs route to be included in the overall service pattern. Station developments need to be part of the equation – in some cases this will mean developing or enhancing park and ride facilities; at others, high quality active travel routes; and, in all cases, the public realm around stations should be improved to ensure that they offer an appropriate gateway to the community.
- 2.2. All of this requires close and co-ordinated working between Network Rail, Transport Scotland, ScotRail and the local authorities along the route, as well as major traffic generators such as Heriot Watt University. It is not clear that this approach has been adopted to date and the new proposal to close Breich station appears to highlight this point.

### 3. Network Rail and Best Value Options

- 3.1. There is widespread concern that Network Rail has been guilty of 'gold plating' schemes making many worthy proposals seem unaffordable. The 40 security cameras provided at Stow station on the Borders Railway is but one example of profligate expenditure.

- 3.2. On the existing Shotts Line, the approach ramp at Shotts on the Edinburgh-bound platform is constructed to monumental proportions when a re-profiling of the existing ramp could surely have been achieved for far less cost. This raises concerns that other aspects of station improvements planned for the route may be similarly over-specified.

## 4. Breich Station

- 4.1. The proposal to close Breich station seems bound to raise opposition from locals not wanting to lose the facility and from others who fear that it may create a dangerous precedent. Inspection of the station site reveals that a new road over-bridge has been provided immediately to the west of the station – this has a wide footpath and access for a ramp down to the eastbound station platform. This would replicate the existing ramped access to the westbound platform. It is not clear why, additionally, the platforms need to be re-located to the east nor why a ‘Harrington Hump’ solution has not been considered.
- 4.2. However, the current station is ¼ mile from the village, accessed by a narrow footpath on a busy road and has no car or bike parking. As recently as 1972 Breich enjoyed a regular service but the current one train per day to and from Edinburgh is of little use and partly serves to explain the low patronage. Of the options for the retention outlined in the ‘Network Rail Appraisal Report’ the only sensible one appears to be to relocate the station adjacent to bridge number 102, hence making it convenient for the village. There is however no point in this level of expenditure without restoring a reasonable level of train service.

## 5. Addiewell Station

- 5.1. The current Addiewell station lies some two miles east of Breich. It is not convenient for the village of Addiewell, has very limited car parking and has poor walk-in access. There is a footpath from the station to the village but it is not signed, not surfaced and not lit. The main purpose of the current station appears to be to serve the prison. The best option here would seem to be to re-locate the station into the village which would significantly improve patronage. This might then be able to be presented as part of a package of measures that would allow the closure of the station at Breich.

## 6. Conclusions

- 6.1. The electrification of the route and provision of new trains presents a real opportunity to transform the route and significantly boost patronage. To deliver on these opportunities an integrated approach is required which must include station enhancements and new service patterns alongside electrification and new trains. This will require all stakeholders to work together to showcase and deliver an overall package of improvements for the Shotts and Carstairs routes. Failing this, isolated proposals such as the closure of Breich station risk raising considerable opposition and thus detracting from the real gains that are possible.



Transform Scotland is the national sustainable transport alliance, campaigning for a more sustainable and socially-just transport system. Our membership includes bus, rail and shipping operators; local authorities; national environment and conservation groups; consultancies; and local transport campaigns. Transform Scotland Limited is a registered Scottish charity (SC041516).

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