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Dear Cabinet Secretary,

### **Station Usage and Demand Forecasts for Newly Opened Railway Lines and Stations**

Thank you for your letter of 5 January 2016 and the useful information contained therein. We were particularly appreciative of the reference to the Transport Scotland / Department of Transport report *Station Usage and Demand Forecasts for Newly Opened Railway Lines and Stations* as published in 2010.

We have now reviewed the report to which you referred. While it concludes that the forecast patronage is within an acceptable 20% of actual outturn, this figure cited in the report does not appear to reflect experience in Scotland.

While the report states "*The comparison of forecast and observed demand showed that there is no systematic under or over-forecasting of demand for new stations.*" (Section 3.70), it then goes on to indicate that "*For a number of stations (Alloa, Edinburgh Park and Newcraighall) there was insufficient information available on how the forecasts had been prepared, and the reason for the under or over-forecast could only be surmised.*" (Section 3.71). This is borne out by the findings reported for Larkhall, Edinburgh Park and Alloa where the outturn passenger numbers exceed those forecast by 21%, 83% and 180% respectively. The TS/DfT report is also now six years old, and hence reports no evidence on subsequent successful Scottish rail reopenings such as the Airdrie-Bathgate Line and Laurencekirk Station. Furthermore, initial experience from the Borders Railway would also support a pattern of substantially under-estimated demand for Scottish reopening schemes, with the actual demand for the stations in the Borders (Stow, Galashiels and Tweedbank) far above that forecasted.<sup>1</sup>

Based on this evidence, we have a fair degree of confidence in the statement made in my letter of 9 December 2015 that the Borders Railway patronage over-performance "is not an isolated instance as other rail re-openings

<sup>1</sup> There seems to be a degree of uncertainty about the exact basis of Borders Railway patronage figures announced by Transport Scotland – and we would be pleased to see directly comparable figures for individual stations, showing the forecasts from the 2012 'Final Business Case' and the actual patronage to date – but there can be no doubt that usage of the Borders stations has been vastly greater than forecast. In the first 20 weeks of service, 28,343 single trips were made to/from Stow station compared to the 5,843 annual return trips forecast in the Final Business Case. For Galashiels, the figures were 150,344 in 20 weeks against the forecast 23,431 for a year, and for Tweedbank 216,916 against 21,621. Also, many passengers have not actually been counted by ScotRail, because of overcrowding and the consequent inability of conductors to get through trains to collect fares, for example, for short hops from Tweedbank to Galashiels.

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have performed well in excess of the projected passenger figures and this must now call into question the methodology being used to assess patronage for new rail schemes.”

The TS/DfT report made the recommendation that demand forecasting could achieve better forecasting results by using the ‘Generic Station Forecasting Model’. We are increasingly of the opinion that new techniques may be required for rural / regional routes. It may be that recent Borders Railway experience renders even the ‘Generic Station Forecasting Model’ redundant. It is therefore crucial that the forthcoming official feasibility study for taking the Borders Railway onwards from Tweedbank to Hawick and Carlisle ditches the flawed methodology used to forecast patronage of the Borders Railway. Traditional modelling techniques for classic commuter routes may not be appropriate for longer rural and regional railways with strong leisure and tourism potential.

We are due to meet with your civil servants at Transport Scotland next month and, amongst other things, we intend to discuss with them what we see as the systematic under-forecasting of passenger numbers for Scottish rail reopening schemes.

Your sincerely,



Colin Howden  
Director, Transform Scotland