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Our Reference: 202400432396  
Your Reference: Issues with Fife Train Services

8 October 2024

Dear Alex,

Thank you for your letter of 16 September 2024 highlighting issues with train services in Fife.

I appreciate that short-forming of some trains is having a negative impact on commuters in Fife and also, that this has been an issue now for some time. Like yourself and other Members representing Fife region, I am very keen to see these services improve as soon as possible and my officials, through Scottish Rail Holdings, have been pressing ScotRail for that to happen.

I have recently spoken to ScotRail management staff at an internal event, where amongst other topics discussed, I made my view clear that the situation in Fife must improve as quickly as possible.

Seeing your engagement with ScotRail management team, specifically Jo Maguire, you may know that short-forming of trains in Fife region is mostly caused by issues with diesel trains' availability.

You may also know that the poor performance of ScotRail's diesel fleet is caused by legacy issues mainly around fleet choices made by previous franchisees. My officials at Transport Scotland are working closely with Scottish Rail Holdings and ScotRail Trains Ltd. to ensure that train performance on the Fife Circle improves significantly. To that effect, the ScotRail Fleet Improvement Plan is in place, which requires ScotRail to make necessary improvements to its diesel rolling stock reliability.

The additional train maintenance staff already recruited as part of this plan has been making a difference to the availability of ScotRail diesel trains for Fife. ScotRail is also recruiting for more engineers to help keep the existing rolling stock in a good state of repair and thus increase reliability.

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Tha Ministearanna h-Alba, an luchd-comhairleachaidh sònraichte agus Rùnaire Maireannach fo chumhachan Achd Coiteachaidh (Alba) 2016. Faicibh [www.lobbying.scot](http://www.lobbying.scot)



ScotRail continuously monitors all services and considered and implemented some further improvements in Fife, for example, by adding services with the opening of the Levenmouth line or where possible, adding carriages or stops to existing services, depending on forecasted passenger demand. These may be the improvements the results of you had observed earlier in the year.

Unfortunately, these improvements were negatively affected by the reduced timetable which ScotRail had been forced to introduce because fewer Train Drivers than normal were making themselves available to work overtime or rest days due to a dispute with ScotRail about pay.

ScotRail recognises the difficulties faced by Fife commuters and for that reason, Fife services had been protected throughout the temporary timetable, as much as possible. The temporary timetable retained 75% of the full timetable on the Edinburgh to Fife and Perth routes, with strengthening of services, for example by adding carriages where possible, which enabled ScotRail to provide 90% of the normal seating capacity.

As the reduced timetable has now been removed, ScotRail will continue to monitor and evaluate how the new Levenmouth service and the timetable are impacting on the wider Fife network and will continue its work on improvements required to provide a more reliable service for Fife commuters.

I appreciate that, while return of peak fares is unwelcome for some passengers across Scotland, for commuters in Fife it may be even harder to accept this, as their service does not yet meet standards required from ScotRail.

The Scottish Government provided significant additional subsidy to fund the temporary removal of ScotRail peak fares for nearly twelve months. However the evaluation report of the pilot shows that whilst there was a limited increase in the number of passengers during the pilot, it did not achieve the pilot's aim of leading to a sustained and significant modal shift from car to rail during peak times. The report shows that the estimated cost of subsidising the pilot for a full year was up to £40 million. Whilst the pilot has been a welcome incentive for passengers for nearly 12 months, it simply isn't financially sustainable to continue to subsidise the removal of peak fares in the longer term.

The Scottish Government would be open to consider future subsidy to remove peak fares, should UK budget allocations to the Scottish Government improve in future years. In the meantime, I asked ScotRail to introduce a 20% discount to all Season tickets for twelve months. ScotRail has also been asked to permanently improve the value of Flexipass tickets by providing 6 return journeys for the price of 5 and re-introduce Super off-peak tickets, all of which offer discounts to passengers depending on their needs.

For example if someone travels between Leven and Edinburgh at least 4 days a week, the equivalent of the daily return with an annual season pass would be £11.69 and £9.35, if they commute 5 days a week, which in both cases is lower than the off peak fare of £13.60 or £20.40 - the new all day return fare. If they travel less regularly, a flexipass could be an option to consider, with this pass an equivalent of a return journey would cost £14.45.

Monthly and weekly passes are also available at discounted prices and may offer savings over buying daily tickets.

Similar savings can be made on various routes with these discounted products.

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I fully appreciate that there is still much to be done in terms of improving service in Fife and I will continue to push for the progress to ensure that ScotRail in public ownership is considered a success by the people of Fife and wider in Scotland.

Yours sincerely



**FIONA HYSLOP**  
**Cabinet Secretary for Transport**

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