

Executive Summary

In February 2013 SEStran and Falkirk Council appointed MVA Consultancy to (i) complete an outline feasibility study of potential new railway station openings at Bonnybridge and Grangemouth in the Falkirk Council area and (ii) undertake an audit of facilities at existing railway stations in the Falkirk Council area – both in relation to Transport Scotland's £30 million 'Scottish Stations Fund'.

Feasibility study

The feasibility study provides an update to the various previous studies into the opening of Grangemouth and Bonnybridge stations in the Falkirk Council area taking into consideration major infrastructure projects such as Edinburgh Glasgow Improvement Programme (EGIP), High Speed Rail and the Greenhill junction improvements. Socio-economic data has been updated, where appropriate, as has the rail 'Reference Case' (following input from Transport Scotland and Network Rail), and infrastructure costs.

Grangemouth is a key economic driver in the Falkirk area even though current population estimates and projections show that Grangemouth's population is not growing and *low* growth is forecast in the Local Development Plan. The maintenance of the freight line and the accommodation of all of the movements required by the Grangemouth industries is of key importance and could prove too restrictive for the reintroduction of passenger services. In addition the current proposed station location has technical issues relating to line gradient. Costs associated with the construction of a new station at Grangemouth are calculated to be £6.5 million (+/- 50% optimism bias). These costs do not take into account potential electrification of the Grangemouth line or the addressing of any substandard gradient.

Bonnybridge and the surrounding areas have steadily growing populations and a growth potential identified as *medium* in the Local Development Plan which could potentially provide the increased population required to support a new rail station at Bonnybridge. Similar to Grangemouth, the proposed station location is on a critical section of the rail network shared by three sets of passenger services as well as freight services, and the introduction of a stopping service at Bonnybridge could also have a knock on impact on the fast running Edinburgh to Glasgow services. Costs associated with the construction of a new station at Bonnybridge are calculated to be £3.8 million (+/- 50% optimism bias). These costs do not take into account the addressing of any substandard gradient or the potential impact of the introduction of a bi-directional loop at Greenhill.

Accession (accessibility) analysis of the proposed station locations has identified that out of all five existing stations in the Falkirk Council area the proposed station locations at Bonnybridge and Grangemouth would provide the lowest walk in population (15 minute) and drive in population (5km) catchments which suggests the locations may not be ideal for maximising rail patronage. However the Accession modelling did suggest that a new station at Bonnybridge in particular would bring about significant accessibility benefits in terms of access to employment for local residents.

Of the two new station sites considered in this report, Bonnybridge would appear to offer the greater potential for generating revenue, economic benefits and accessibility improvements in the medium term. There are however a number of operational issues associated with locating a station on this busy section of line in proximity to a key junction, in addition to technical issues related to the line gradient. However, the programmed improvements in infrastructure in this area appear to provide an opportunity to potentially tackle these operational issues.

Although this study has been an update of previous studies and no new forecast patronage figures have been produced, it should be taken into account that recent rail patronage forecasts in Scotland for both existing and new rail stations and lines have shown a tendency to underestimate demand. As such, neither station should be discounted from future appraisal, especially given the potential impacts of EGIP and High Speed Rail (HSR) on the operational viability of each station.

In order to take any proposal forward in relation to the New Stations Fund, a more detailed STAG-based exercise would have to be undertaken, with respect to one or both of these stations. At the heart of this would be a modelling exercise where detailed patronage and benefits estimates could be undertaken in line with STAG which would also form the basis for the business case. Transport Scotland's emerging 'Central Scotland Transport Model 12' would appear to be the best tool to undertake this type of assessment. However, as: (i) there is not an existing overwhelming case for these stations; (ii) there are significant costs associated with developing detailed patronage and benefits estimates; and (iii) there is considerable uncertainty with respect to new rail infrastructure regarding the extent and timescales of EGIP and HSR (and the significant impact these programmes would have on the viability of the stations), it may be prudent not to proceed with further analysis until the EGIP and HSR programmes are clarified further.

Station audit

The station audit of facilities of existing railway stations involved site visits to the five railway stations in the Falkirk Council area – Falkirk High, Falkirk Grahamston, Camelon, Larbert and Polmont. The audit covered the relevant regulatory requirements in terms of station access as well as the station facilities. The audit recommended a number of minor improvements within station boundaries (such as additional tactile paving and ramp access), which would be the responsibility of the rail companies. In addition the report recommends improvements to adjacent bus stops, access and car parks which the Council can consider further.