

BRINGING SCOTTISH STATIONS BACK TO LIFE : THE STATIONS COMMUNITY REGENERATION FUND

Paper for the 10th annual STAR Conference by John Yellowlees, ScotRail External Relations Manager

ABSTRACT

Station buildings that are surplus to operational requirements provide opportunities to meet passenger or community needs. Since 2008 the Stations Community Regeneration Fund has helped deliver 15 projects for a wide range of purposes.



Former BR chairman Sir Bob Reid opening the new home of Cupar Heritage – the onetime stationmaster’s house – in April 2012

INTRODUCTION

ScotRail operates 347 stations, of which 138 are staffed. Two-thirds have online CCTV, and together they constitute a diverse network of suburban routes round Glasgow and Edinburgh, interurban ones linking the seven cities and rural ones in the South-West and the West and North Highlands, with 40 stations served also by the overnight Caledonian Sleepers to and from London. The last train operator to be privatised, the ScotRail franchise was held initially by National Express during 1997-2004 and by First since then and managed since 2006 by Transport Scotland, who introduced their own brand in 2008. Now daytime and Sleeper services are to be separately franchised from April 2015.

Network Rail lease to ScotRail all stations in Scotland except Glasgow Central High Level, Edinburgh Waverley, Dunbar and Prestwick International Airport. These include several iconic stations – notably Wemyss Bay, Queen Street, Stirling and Cupar – and some problem locations such as Perth. Aberdeen and Gourock are noteworthy recent refurbishments, and Dundee is being rebuilt at street level. At Haymarket the new concourse brought into public use a week before Christmas 2013 offers a tenfold increase in circulating area, and Glasgow Queen Street will also be modernised for the Edinburgh Glasgow Improvement Programme which will electrify the main route between Scotland’s principal pair of cities.

Historic survivals are distributed across the west, north and Fife but with very little in for example the Lothians. The portfolio is surprisingly dynamic: 69 stations have opened since 1984, initially on existing routes but with an increasing emphasis in the last decade on reviving disused ones.



The new-look Aberdeen



Laurencekirk reopened in 2009, reusing the historic building

The 12 Grade A-listed stations in Scotland are Aviemore, Wemyss Bay, Dunkeld & Birnam, Dumbarton Central, Broughty Ferry, Haymarket, Edinburgh Waverley, Glasgow Central, Glasgow Queen Street, Ladybank, Pitlochry and Stirling.



Wonderful Wemyss Bay

According to Alexander and Hamilton (1), the Friends of Wemyss Bay Station's aim "is to celebrate having this grade A-listed structure in our midst, to become a local resource and a place of interest to visit. To the residents it is more of a community ... for some their interest is in the actual trains, but others it is the flowers, it is the shop it is amazing some of the people you meet".

STATION TENANCIES

ScotRail stations have over 220 tenants ranging from transport catering specialist Select Service Partner and WH Smith in big cities to local station cafés, small newsagents and other

services eg hairdressers. In many outlying areas such tenants provide a great service to our customers over and above their wares, particularly where stations are unmanned or only partly manned, as well as provide us with much-appreciated income.



Dingwall Station Café

"For the Victorian traveller the presence of 1st, 2nd class and ladies waiting rooms was essential to their highly segregated travelling habits. In the modern post-Beeching Report era, these features are often vacant or simply used for storage. This makes them prime targets for community use and ripe for regeneration and alternative-use projects." (1)

AN EVOLVING POLICY BACKGROUND

Policy has steadily evolved over the last two decades. In a portent of things to come, after 1997 West Highland stations were converted to bunkhouses and other uses under Railtrack's Station Regeneration Programme, but National Express seemed unincited at that time to carry out any wider initiative. First ScotRail launched their Adopt A Station policy, a franchise commitment, at Rannoch in September 2005, and then increased their commitment to community involvement by supporting the £1M Stations Community Regeneration Fund through the 2008 franchise extension agreement. The SCRF was launched at Dunblane's Ironing Station in June 2008, one of the first initiatives of the franchise extension to be implemented, and having stimulated expectations in their consultation on the future of ScotRail services, Transport Scotland launched their Community Rail policy in February 2013, engaging the Association of Community Rail Partnerships to deliver Scotland's first Community Rail Partnerships.

Chris Austin recalls (2) that the transport minister told attendees that this was "a genuine grassroots initiative, stemming from the consultation carried out by Transport Scotland into its Rail 2014 policy paper, which showed that people wanted to have a greater say in what happened to their railway".



Glenfinnan Station Museum – a classic achievement on the West Highland Line

THE SKILLS ON OFFER

SCRF offers the knowledge and assistance of property professionals (at no cost) to guide promoters through planning and building issues. They can provide the legal documentation in respect of leases for the current franchise duration, but in recognition that funding partners often need assurance stretching into the future the ScotRail estate management team has also resolved the application of a tri-partite lease by producing a more simplified model which has now been issued at a number of locations



Many partners at Pollokshaws West

There the Railway Heritage Trust believed (3) that the "Glasgow Buildings Preservation Trust was to be congratulated on its considerable efforts to raise the finance for this project, with a multitude of sponsors necessitating careful coordination of the (often contradictory) requirements of all the grant-giving bodies. The project was also a first in the development of a tripartite lease between GBPT, Network Rail and First ScotRail, and we hope that the legal work on this will be available for reuse in future Scottish projects.

PURPOSE OF THE FUND

SCRF aims to make use of disused station buildings as a business, meeting passenger or community needs or else a project which contributes to the local community. The Fund creates conditions where passengers will benefit from improved facilities at stations, redundant facilities will be brought back into use and new opportunities for job creation and community involvement will be opened up. It can be used to carry out structural repairs to buildings not covered under the ScotRail lease agreement or to meet up to 50% of fit-out costs of the building for its intended use.

The total budget is capped at £1M, with a minimum spend of £5k - but there is no upper limit for individual schemes. Any application seeking funding for £75k or more must be supported by a feasibility study which will be assessed for its strengths and weaknesses but will not be included in the evaluation. The assessment criteria are :

- proposal details, ensuring a fit between project and building
- local fit, giving assurance that the proposal works in partnership with or complements other local organisations
- the market, showing that an evidence base exists and there is a need or market ; and
- the projected outcome, showing the targets and benefits expected.



Gap in the market – Inverurie Station previously had no café

ACHIEVEMENTS

SCRF schemes thus far delivered are the Cupar Heritage Centre, Kinghorn Station Studios and Gallery, Ladybank's Off The Rails Arthouse, at Fort Matilda the Greenock & District Model Railway Club's clubroom, at Dumbarton Central the Coffee Station, at Inverurie the Coco Works Coffee House, at Pollokshaws West the new home of South West Community Cycles, at Stirling the Cycle Hub, at Dundee a studio for New Scottish Arts and at Helmsdale holiday accommodation in the Station House.



Stirling Cycle-Hub

Jane Cullingworth executive director of Forth Environment Hub said "We are thrilled to be opening the Cycle Hub. The hub will be a key community resource - not just for those already cycling but also for the many people out there who have bikes gathering dust or who have never thought of getting on a bike and we hope the hub will inspire people to get cycling." (4)

Schemes on site or soon to be delivered are a heritage centre and café for the North Queensferry Heritage Trust, a community centre at New Cumnock for Monthraw Prospects, at Tain a restaurant for hotelier Graham Rooney's restaurant, at Ladybank a community meeting-room in the former Laird's Waiting Room, and at Kilmarnock a café and bookshop for Addaction South Ayrshire's Recovery Support Service.



Awaiting attention – the Laird's Waiting Room at Ladybank

LESSONS

The process works best when the Railway Heritage Trust (who since 1985 have been offering up to 40% of the cost of bringing surplus listed accommodation into productive use) take a leading role by holding brainstorming site-meetings and promptly issuing offers of funding to boost confidence. SCRF then provides follow-up to help deliver match funding. Some tenants have taken exemplary ownership – for example the Friends of Wemyss Bay Station, the Pitlochry Station Bookshop, Von Jackson at New Cumnock – while courage and tenacity are also exemplified by Lynette Gray at Kinghorn and George & Jenny Lawson at Inverurie. Pollokshaws West is a case where refusal to compromise paid off in the end, and only the lower floor of Kilmarnock Station and the buildings at Saltcoats, Garelochhead and Brora have so far defied best efforts. It is sometimes better where possible for promoters to "get in and get on" since waiting for the tripartite leases demanded by some funders can run up against pressure on resources at Network Rail. With the concentration of signalling into regional management centres now firmly on the horizon, finding new uses for a representative range of signal-boxes whether within or outwith the station lease presents a future challenge.



Lynette Gray creator of the Kinghorn Station Studios and Gallery describes her involvement as "a whole new life, a dream fulfilled" (1)



Taynuilt Signalbox has a new operational use, but others are not so fortunate

Historic Scotland have suggested (5) that “when you start to examine the history of the signalbox, it becomes clear that every box has its own story. They not only evoke a bygone age of rail travel but also contribute to our understanding of the railway and its place in Scotland's rich heritage”.

CONCLUSION

SCRF ends with this franchise, but a measure of its impact is that in the invitations to tender for the next ScotRail franchise Transport Scotland envisages the holder providing £0.5M in each of the next ten years for the support of Community Rail initiatives, including continuance of SCRF-type activities. The new Borders Railway due to open in September 2015 will provide opportunities for community or other use of buildings surviving from the days of the old Waverley Line at Gorebridge and Stow.



A community meeting room is one of several features at Pollokshaws West : the National Railway Heritage Awards noted (6) that “a favourite new use for rooms within stations in recent years has been as coffee shops or bars, so that this year we have seen these installed at **Crystal Palace** Waiting Room, **Dumbarton**, **Inverurie** and **Pollokshaws**, where cycle hire is also possible”.



But who wants Saltcoats?



And what use might be made of Stow when the trains return in September 2015?

REFERENCES

- (1) Alexander and Hamilton, "Celebrating local community involvement in Adopt A Station", (University of Strathclyde, 2013)
- (2) Train Times, the ACoRP magazine's Summer 2013 issue.
- (3) Railway Heritage Trust 2012/3 annual report and accounts
- (4) "Stirling Railway Station, a History of Service to the Community", by Faye McPherson and Jim MacIntosh (Caledonian Railway Association and Stirling Guildry, 2013)
- (5) Historic Scotland magazine, winter 2012
- (6) National Railway Heritage Awards 2013 press release