

# **Borders Railway model can put recovery on right lines - John Yellowlees**

**When stand-up Nathan Cassidy entertained an audience of 38 at the Three Sisters on 24 August, it was for a moment as though Covid-19 had all been a nightmare and this could not possibly be the only surviving live event of the Edinburgh Festival Fringe.**

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People like Nathan and the brave souls of the hospitality industry deserve our admiration for their portrayal of the old normal as a spirit that continues to be with us, and Chancellor Rishi Sunak should share such recognition for his Eat Out to Help Out initiative.

However much we may relish the novelty of remote working, the reality is that gathering on Zoom or Teams succeeds only because the participants already know each other. So with the onset of autumn, pointers are needed as to how we can build back together towards an improved version of the world that we previously knew.

Thus whatever the controversy about its environmental impact, the HS2 project has come to be seen as the Keynesian touchstone of the belief that investing in infrastructure will yield the wealth and skills needed to carry us forward. Whereas detractors would have us believe it is a vanity project about speed, those in the know appreciate that it delivers much-needed capacity, not least for intermediate connectivity and for freight.

And more locally we have a striking demonstration of how investment in infrastructure can pay off. In present circumstances physical celebration of the Borders Railway's fifth anniversary was necessarily modest: a message on ScotRail customer screens, film footage broadcast at Edinburgh Waverley Station, and an invitation for pupils from local primaries to create posters highlighting what makes their area special. However a visit to the three stations in the Scottish Borders Council area told a more dramatic story.

At Stow a local contractor is busy converting the vacant station building with funding from Borders Railway Blueprint Fund, the Regeneration Capital Grant Fund, Railway Heritage Trust, ScotRail Stations Community Regeneration Fund, BCCF Environmental Landfill Trust, SSE Toddleburn Community Fund and EDF Longpark Community Fund into a bar and kitchen, a cycling hub and community room for the Stow Community Trust.

At Tweedbank work has started on the £29M Borders Innovation Park funded by Scottish Borders Council, Scottish Enterprise, Borders Railway Blueprint programme and the Edinburgh and South East Region City Deal to deliver high-quality business space, stimulate business growth and improve inward investment. Nearby there will be the

Borders Gateway development creating up to 80 jobs in a new hotel, food kiosk, drive-through coffee shop and petrol station.

And when it opens next year, the home in Galashiels of the Great Tapestry of Scotland created by writer Alexander McCall Smith, historian Alistair Moffat and artist Andrew Crummy will tell our story from 8500 BC to the present day in 160 panels hand-stitched by over 1.000 people. In addition to interactive displays and audio guides, there will also be changing exhibitions and educational activities. The new centre will create 16 jobs, and the hoarding round the new building declares that the Railway has been one of the driving-forces behind the project.

The Borders Railway Blueprint has ensured that this was not just a transport project but is maximising opportunities for employment, business, tourism and leisure. The lesson has been learned for the reopening of the line to Levenmouth, now being taken forward by Transport Scotland with Fife Council, where the Levenmouth Reconnected Task Group has had its first meeting. The Scottish experience deserves to be in the forefront of best practice as the UK seeks to build back better from the pandemic.

**John Yellowlees, Scottish Chair, CILT**