

Scotland's railways aren't history, they're the transport of the future

Investment in infrastructure technology and staff is key to extending national rail effectiveness and reducing pollution, writes **Mary Grant**



Scotland's railway has been a success story in recent years, with substantial investment in electrification, infrastructure enhancements and new fleets.

Strategically the Scottish government is right to recognise in its decarbonisation plan that rail is a very low carbon form of transport, which can drive modal shift and deliver a more sustainable transport system in the decades ahead.

The Infrastructure Commission for Scotland recognises the importance of connectivity for the future of the Scottish economy. It's clear that with around 76 per cent of passenger and 45 per cent of freight journeys already on electric traction and future plans to electrify the line to Barrhead and East Kilbride, there is a very real and genuine ambition to go further. Elsewhere the new concourse at Glasgow Queen Street is another impressive recent upgrade.

As the owner and asset manager of around one third of the national passenger fleet, Porterbrook plays an important role in supporting the railway and protecting jobs across the rail supply chain. Every week we invest around £3 million in the many companies who maintain and renew our assets, providing a clear programme of upcoming work and supporting around 7,000 jobs across the UK.

Porterbrook is proud that a third of our workforce are women, compared to a rail industry average of 16 per cent. The company has several schemes for apprentices and graduates, which has allowed us to introduce new talent into the industry who can work closely with and learn from experienced rail engineers. In addition, we recruit apprentices across all areas of the business, including our finance and planning departments.

The business has an established reputation in the field of rail innovation and our contribution to low-carbon technologies is widely recognised. We are keen to help the Scottish government deliver its ambition to decarbonise rail.

Network Rail recognises that

there is a major role for diesel rolling stock in supporting the work to achieve interim emissions targets in advance of 2050. Diesel trains, with significant remaining asset life, can be upgraded cost-effectively to improve its environmental footprint and support further reductions in emissions.

Immediate solutions include a hybrid train, which combines a diesel engine and a battery system to reduce emissions, with improved performance and acceleration. We are also trialling the fitment of exhaust after-treatment technologies to several of our fleets, which can reduce the emission of harmful pollutants from diesel engines such as nitrogen oxide by over 80 per cent and hydrocarbons and carbon monoxide by over 90 per cent.

We joined forces with the University of Birmingham in 2018 to develop and deliver HydroFLEX, the UK's first hydrogen-powered train. The train can significantly extend clean operation on long distance and non-electrified routes. HydroFLEX undertook mainline testing in September and October 2020 and we are exploring options to take the train on to other parts of the network.

We continue to work to ensure the right rolling stock solutions can be found for the future of Scotland's railway. The rail decarbonisation plan shows that alternative traction can help provide communities with cost-effective and reliable rail services – these include routes such as Ayr to Stranraer, Glasgow to Oban and Mallaig and services north, east and west of Inverness.

The role of the railway in Britain's economic and social life has evolved over 180 years. I have no doubt it will do so again amid the current uncertainties and challenges. Rail will be an important enabler of Scotland's post-pandemic economic recovery but also for decarbonising wider transport. It's vital that there is a long-term strategy for rail investment into which the future planning around rolling stock can be considered.

Mary Grant is CEO Porterbrook for CLT Scotland

Don't feel lonely at Christmas time



Vikki and Damian know the crucial role Samaritans Scotland play in helping people through a difficult festive season

Today marks the official beginning of the countdown to Christmas and, like most aspects of 2020, it is likely the festive season will look a bit different this year. As the coronavirus pandemic continues to touch on almost every aspect of our daily lives, many of us may be feeling worried or uncertain as we look ahead to the festive season.

Christmas can be hard – a time when loneliness can really hit home. And this year - when we are all working out how to do the festive season during a pandemic - a quarter of our helpline volunteers have told us they have spoken to callers who were worried about their wellbeing over Christmas and the winter period in the last three months.

One thing that won't change this Christmas is our commitment to be there for anyone who needs us throughout the festive season.

Last year, our helpline answered more than a quarter of a million calls for help from December 1 to January 1, including over 10,000 on Christmas day alone from people struggling across the UK & Republic of Ireland. This year, that lifeline will be even more vital.

Two people who know the importance of having someone be there to listen are Damien, who called Samaritans during a difficult time in his life, and listening volunteer Vikki. Here they share how a simple phone call can help change someone's story at Christmas.

Damien picked up the phone to Samaritans when he couldn't see a way through the difficulties he was facing.

He says: "When I saw something

online suggesting I call Samaritans I thought 'what do I have to lose'? That phone call helped me to see that these feelings would pass and to find my way through; I really believe it's a big part of why I'm here to enjoy Christmas with my loved ones, even if that looks a little different this year.

"I know that even during normal times, many people can find the festive season difficult and the worries and uncertainty around the coronavirus pandemic are likely to make this Christmas harder. So it's even more important we do what we can to be there for one another and be open with one another if we're finding things tough.

"Whatever your mind might be telling you, you don't have to face difficult times alone. Whether it's reaching out to family or friends or calling Samaritans - there's always someone there to listen."

Vikki, a listening volunteer at Samaritans branch in Falkirk, knows what it's like to be that listening ear. Having volunteered for Samaritans for 14 years, she has done many festive shifts over that time.

She says: "Being there to listen is vital all year round, but it always feels especially meaningful at Christmas when we know loneliness can really hit home for people and other services that people may rely on are closed or on reduced hours.

"We're here to listen on Christmas Eve, Christmas Day and every day, 24/7.

"The Christmas season can be difficult even under normal circumstances, but we know this year may be particularly challenging for people. We are already hearing from callers who are worried about being separated

from family over the festive season and how they'll cope with loneliness.

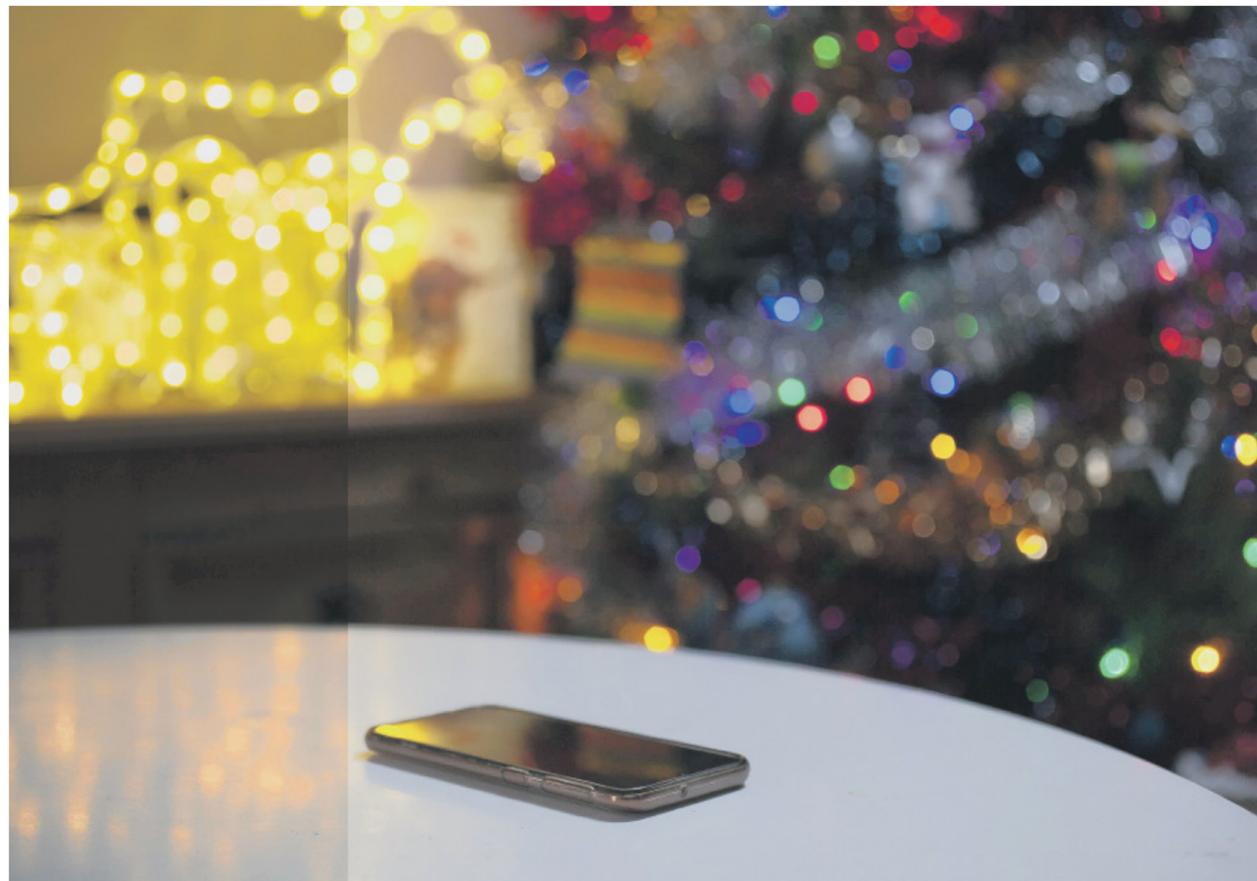
"Others are worried about the wellbeing of loved ones or struggling with financial pressures and worried about how they'll pay bills and afford presents.

"To anyone who is struggling this festive season, please know we're here to talk and to listen.

"Pick up the phone and someone like me will be waiting, ready to listen this Christmas." By donating as little as £5, you can help volunteers like Vikki be there to listen whenever someone needs us. Visit <https://www.samaritans.org/donate-christmas/>

Anyone can contact Samaritans for free, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year by calling 116 123 or emailing jo@samaritans.org

Damien and Vikki, Samaritans Scotland



from family over the festive season and how they'll cope with loneliness.

"Others are worried about the wellbeing of loved ones or struggling with financial pressures and worried about how they'll pay bills and afford presents.

"To anyone who is struggling this festive season, please know we're here to talk and to listen.

"Pick up the phone and someone like me will be waiting, ready to listen this Christmas."

Christmas time

↑ Last year Samaritans volunteers received 250,000 calls throughout December with 10,000 on Christmas Day alone



The Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport

Discovering it's good to talk can help landlords and tenants resolve problems

Early intervention means issues don't have to get out of hand, says **John Blackwood**

We deal with a variety of questions, worries and concerns from our member landlords and letting agents. They range from ensuring a contract is compliant with the law, which electrical tests need to be done after a refurbishment or when an energy performance certificate should be renewed.

But the calls that cause me the most concern are the ones that make me think, "it didn't have to be this way." Where early intervention and often just common sense could have nipped a problem in the bud.

Sadly, this happens most often when a member asks what to do when a tenant has run up large rent arrears. My sadness comes from knowing that it will be a harder problem to solve in order to keep the tenant in their home,

especially when a simple conversation months before would likely have resulted in a simple solution.

For example, when a tenant is having financial difficulties, we advise our members on how best to support tenants through these difficult times with a view to getting them back on track with their rental payments.

It is normally no-one's fault that these situations spiral out of control. A lot of people find talking about financial matters very difficult, even embarrassing. A landlord might not want to pry about a private matter, a tenant's home is theirs after all and it is not the role of a landlord to intrude. Meanwhile a tenant might be scared that their landlord will ultimately end their tenancy.

It doesn't have to be this way.

It is in the best interests of landlords and tenants to continue a tenancy

wherever possible. A tenant wants to stay in a good quality home and a landlord wants a tenant who looks after the property.

Both tenants and landlords must feel able to talk to each other. There is nothing wrong with a landlord asking how a tenant is getting on and nothing wrong with a tenant telling their landlord things are tough.

These kinds of steps, taken early, can prevent a major problem from ever arising and can build the kind of relationship needed to sustain tenancies.

Landlords can also be a source of information for tenants and help them access support. They can proactively signpost tenants to free, confidential and independent advice.

If someone doesn't feel able to initiate this kind of conversation themselves, there are an increasing number

of free resolution services available to broker a reasonable solution. We are working with SafeDeposits Scotland (SDS), one of the independent bodies responsible for holding and mediating disputes over tenants' deposits, to promote their free service, SDS Resolution (<https://www.sdsresolution.com/>). They are able to help reach agreements on reducing arrears or long-term payment plans which allows a tenancy to continue.

It will take a long time to begin to

SAL SCOTTISH ASSOCIATION OF LANDLORDS

Colleges put heads together to help people back into jobs

A comprehensive skills programme can help overcome the looming coronavirus legacy of growing unemployment, writes **Hugh Hall**



Never has there been a more important time for us to work together in Scotland. The issues being thrown up by the coronavirus pandemic are many and difficult, but by working collaboratively to come up with solutions we can ensure we're in the best place to deal with the challenges that lie ahead.

In the college sector, our focus has been on dealing with the predicted rise in unemployment. Even the most optimistic economic indicators show that the number of people out of work is expected to rise in the coming months, so we've set to work on what we can do to help people back into employment when this happens.

It was with this in mind that Fife College recently teamed up with Edinburgh College, Forth Valley College and West Lothian College to form the East Central Scotland Colleges Collaboration - a group designed to look into how colleges throughout Scotland can best to deliver the skills and opportunities needed to support the economic recovery in Scotland.

Working with Skills Development Scotland and the Scottish Funding Council, our group used our regional knowledge, labour market information, unemployment rates, levels of furlough and data on Scottish growth sectors to produce a comprehensive skills programme.

Called the 'Our Futures Programme', it contains eight distinct reskilling and upskilling products that could provide much needed support to individuals and employers who are set to be hit by the economic downturn caused by the pandemic.

They include proposals such as the creation of Skills Boost Academies in key areas such as digital and industry, and the development of Accelerator

Programmes, which would see colleges across Scotland able to introduce accelerated versions of existing qualifications that are already on offer, such as engineering, computing and care.

Other recommendations made in the report include supplementing the "Adopt an Intern programme" with additional on the job training, guaranteeing a place at college for January school leavers, and providing pathways to enable students to prepare for a Modern Apprenticeship.

Each of the colleges involved in this Collaboration believe that these proposals could make a huge difference to the lives of individuals in Scotland, and provide them with the knowledge and qualifications they need to secure work going forward. In setting out our proposals, we hope we can start a conversation about how best we can provide the short-term upskilling and reskilling we are likely to need in the coming months.

We've already started discussions with the Scottish Government about these proposals. They appreciate the important role colleges will play over the coming years, and share our ambition for doing all we can to help people through this period. The provisions they announced when they launched the Young Person's Guarantee last month are an important step towards this ambition, but colleges can do so much more.

Whatever lies ahead for Scotland, we stand ready to help in whatever way we can. Along with colleges throughout the country, we're looking forward to continuing the conversation about our hopes and ambitions for what we can achieve by working together.

Dr Hugh Hall is Principal of Fife College

Fife College

HOW TO BECOME A FRIEND

On these pages we present articles written by our Friends, with them setting their own agenda, using their own words. Being a Friend of The Scotsman is open to institutions, trade associations, professional bodies, societies, interest groups, charities and others. Individuals are not eligible nor, generally, are individual companies or political parties. The Friends of The Scotsman pages are a forum for discussion and debate and for the transfer of information rather than a marketplace. In return, the Friends sign up to a subscription package that ensures a supply of The Scotsman at a discount rate to the people in the organisation who require it. For more information, e-mail kerry.black@scotsman.com or visit www.scotsman.com