

## Infrastructure strategy gives some positive news for the rail freight sector

Private sector investment and alignment with Government policy is instrumental in building confidence for the future, says **Maggie Simpson**



There is no shortage of strategic documents on infrastructure development published by Scottish Government. Alongside the Infrastructure Investment Plan which appeared in February sits the Capital Spending Review, and the National Transport Strategy with its associated Delivery Plan published last year. The National Planning Framework 4 is currently under development and Phase 1 of the second Strategic Transport Projects Review (STPR2) was published last month, with Phase 2 promised later this year.

Horribly confusing or horribly joined up? You can take your own view, there is certainly value in setting out intention to the market and outlining a framework and pipeline however multifaceted. By that metric, there does appear to be cohesion between the documents, and some positive news for the rail freight sector.

STPR2 is perhaps the most digestible version and includes a series of specific 'interventions' for delivery. Of those, three are important for rail freight.

Firstly there are specific commitments on infrastructure to encourage rail freight. Although this is welcome, the promised work is relatively minor, allowing the Glasgow and South Western line to become a diversionary route to the West Coast Main Line for container trains.

With weather related incidents increasing, having an alternative route is essential, so this will help reliability of current trains, even if it does little to make space for more. Further analysis of other routes is also promised although there is no promise of delivery.

There is also a renewed commitment to the rail decarbonisation programme. This is good news for rail freight, and Government's commitment progressing electrification is hugely significant. There is however little clarity in the document on the specific plans over and above those already announced so there is more to do on confirming what the next projects will be.

Finally there are plans outlined for enhancing facilities at major stations. This may not seem as relevant to moving goods, but the text sets out a commitment to ensuring that appropriate provision for light-weight freight on passenger trains or converted passenger rolling stock can be handled on platforms. This raises an exciting potential for higher value and smaller consignments of freight, and in particular looks promising for moving parcels and online retail.

Carrying freight on passenger trains is not new – the Caledonian Sleeper has been conveying shellfish for many years, and across the UK, logistics company InterCity Rail freight have been moving small parcels into London from the East Midlands and elsewhere for over a decade in collaboration with passenger train operators. They have recently expanded to use the Cross-Country Trains network bringing the opportunity to add stations in the Central Belt into their network.

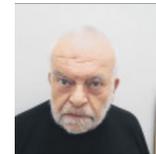
For larger consignments, all eyes are on the recently announced service launch from Rail Operations UK who plan to start services between Birmingham and Mossend in April. This will use a repurposed passenger unit, which has been modified by rolling stock company Porterbrook to remove seats and equip the unit for handling roll cages full of supermarket products, parcels or indeed any other product that businesses need to move.

Such units can operate into freight terminals and also into passenger stations where they are suitable. And that does not need much, simply enough time at the platform to unload, the ability to move a roll cage out to a waiting vehicle, and preferably a place to charge the electric vans that undertake the final mile to the customer.

It is really rewarding to see the private sector stepping up to invest in new products and services, and the alignment with Government policy is instrumental in building confidence to invest in more. **Maggie Simpson OBE, Director General, Rail Freight Group**



## 50 years of Clyde's



A 660m box girder bridge, Erskine was, when built, the longest bridge of its type in the world, writes **John Yellowlees**

The Sixties were the post-war decade most associated with modernisation, so it is appropriate that they saw completion of Scotland's greatest estuarial crossings the Forth and Tay Road Bridges, along with the M8 Kingston Bridge across the Clyde.

It would be in the last two decades of the twentieth century that attention turned to completing the road network north of the Great Glen by provision of the Kessock, Cromarty, Dornoch and Kylesku crossings and the Skye Bridge.

The 1970s were a less productive time as befitted the national mood of those troubled days, with the main achievement being the Ballachulish Bridge which together with conversion of former railway crossings at Connel Ferry and much later at Creagan would complete the modern A828 up the west coast.

At the beginning of that decade came perhaps the most understated of them all, the Erskine Bridge, the 50th anniversary of whose opening by the Princess Royal will be reached on 2 July this year.

A 15-span cable-stayed box girder bridge 660 metres in length that carries the A898 at a height of 45 metres across the Clyde, Erskine was at the time of building the longest bridge of its type in the world, and it remains the only one in Scotland with single cables over central main supports. Steel was used to construct the deck and pylons, and the piers were made from concrete.

The ferry crossing that the bridge replaced from Erskine to Old Kilpatrick was reputedly the oldest on the Clyde, and had become necessary when the river was dredged

for navigation. The Clyde Navigation Trust acquired the service in 1907 and introduced a vehicle ferry-boat.

Three vessels latterly operated the five-minute crossing, charging a florin for a car and driver which became 10p at decimalisation just before closure.

The bridge had to be strengthened in accordance with new standards brought in after the 1970 collapse of another cable-stayed structure, the West Gate Bridge in Melbourne, which cost 35 lives.

It was struck by an oil rig, the Texaco Captain, in August 1996, resulting in a closure which lasted four months for HGVs.

Though a proposed Glasgow Outer Orbital route using it was never built, this great crossing of the Clyde links Glasgow Airport to its full hinterland by offering direct access towards Dunbartonshire and Argyll.

Shoppers can make way straight for Braehead, while tourists can head straight for Loch Lomond and the West Highlands. Design was by Dr William Brown (1928–2005) of Freeman Fox & Partners, a structural engineer and designer who specialised in suspension bridges.

The bridge is now part of the trunk road network of Scotland, and is the responsibility of Transport Scotland.

There is a human cost to progress: suicides have led to the Samaritans placing signs at each path leading onto the bridge and also within four public telephone boxes situated on the twin footpaths running adjacent to the roadway on either side. A 60p toll was scrapped from April



1, 2006 to relieve congestion on the Kingston Bridge and Clyde Tunnel.

Announcing the listing of the Erskine Bridge in 2018, Historic Environment Scotland said that it was a state-of-the-art infrastructure landmark for its time, recognised for its structural simplicity, economy of materials and slender appearance.

The minimalistic single-cable design, which was exception-

## great crossing

ally rare for a large-scale road bridge, combined with a largely unchanged appearance had made it one of the country's most innovative bridges of the twentieth century, whose national importance was recognised by awarding it Category A status. Happy Birthday, Erskine Bridge!

**John Yellowlees, Scottish Chair, Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport**

↑ The minimalistic single-cable design of the Erskine Bridge was exceptionally rare for a large-scale road bridge.



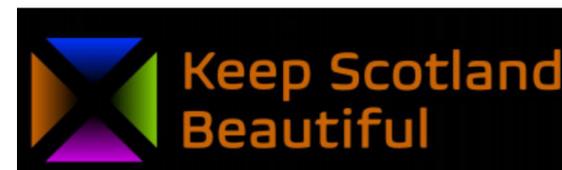
potential impact and reach with a consistency not seen before.

In mid-March we jointly hosted a Litter Summit, with Zero Waste Scotland and the Scottish Government providing an opportunity to reflect on the current situation, including the impact of Covid-19, and to discuss how to restart the development of a new national strategy for tackling litter and identify some immediate priorities and actions.

As I write this the second Lockdown is due to end in April. The weather is improving. We're expecting people to start spending more time outside. This is likely to lead to more shocking images flooding social media as the national parks, beaches and mountains which are so important to our economy and personal health and wellbeing are trashed by some of those visiting. Despite this, we are looking forward

positively. We are preparing to reset, to harness the power of the angry citizens and turn that into action. We have had to postpone our normal spring clean activity this year, but instead will be encouraging people to collect data about the standard of their neighbourhoods, and to carry out litter picks this summer in household groups locally and most importantly to share the messaging to encourage people to do the right thing, making leaving litter socially unacceptable as well as illegal.

We can support you to turn your anger into action. To make litter a focus of conversations in your community, to reinforce correct behaviours and stimulate action. But we also need you to turn your tweets into litter picks. Your Facebook posts into surveys. All of Scotland can be beautiful. Help us reset your community's relationship with litter. **Barry Fisher, CEO, Keep Scotland Beautiful**



## Harnessing our energies to build a better Scotland

Going back to poverty and unemployment is not the normal we want, says **Duncan Thorp**



As Scotland moves on from lockdown the focus will start to shift to recovery and adaptation.

This is a recovery for individuals, families, businesses and indeed the whole country but it also means seeking to do things differently going forward.

Our economy and society have gone through huge upheaval and we need to decide exactly how we do 'build back better'. What needs to change in our economy? How can people be better supported in order to thrive? Over the past year social enterprises and voluntary and community groups have certainly stepped up to support the most vulnerable and maintain local economies.

This has included many services, like community food provision, social housing, mental health support, digital services and much more.

We need to learn from what has happened over the course of the year, about what worked and what didn't and how we can harness this energy to take us forward.

In a Holyrood election year we also need to ramp up awareness-raising about the many new and creative policy opportunities and possibilities.

Social Enterprise Scotland is keen to work with all political parties and politicians at both local and national level, in order to achieve common aims. This includes evidencing the strong social and economic impacts of our diverse social enterprise community and continuing to demonstrate social enterprise value to policy-makers.

While we have the national Social Enterprise Strategy and Action Plan to drive forward social enterprise development on different levels, what else can government and social enterprises do in addition to

this? Learning from the data from the upcoming Social Enterprise Census, from evidence gathered by Social Enterprise Scotland and others, plus the ideas highlighted at our social enterprise policy group in the Scottish Parliament, we can build a more complete picture.

We must ensure that ordinary people and politicians learn about some of the most credible economic solutions like social enterprise, community land ownership and community wealth building.

This election is also an ideal time to consider things that may not have been politically possible before. What about Universal Basic Income, a true circular economy, a shorter working week and boosting the real living wage in every sector and community?

As we look towards a post-lockdown, post-election recovery we need to consider these approaches instead of returning to business-as-usual.

There's been a big upheaval for all of us and, understandably, there's now a desire to go back to "normal". However, supporting the re-opening of businesses is one thing but going back to poverty and unemployment is not the normal we want.

We understand there's a need to work in close partnership with other sectors to achieve the better society we want, with the mainstream business community, with public sector bodies and with third sector organisations.

Whichever kind of parliament exists after the election on 6 May we're ready to champion social enterprise solutions to our most pressing social problems, to help build a better Scotland for everyone.

**Duncan Thorp, Social Enterprise Scotland**



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