

EDINBURGH, FIFE AND THE TAY CITIES TIMETABLE

Response to ScotRail consultation

23 October 2023

1. Introduction.

We welcome the opportunity to respond to this consultation as we have long advocated for the re-opening of the line to Leven and have been pleased to support the local campaign group, Levenmouth Rail Campaign, who are one of our member organisations. Additionally we wish to see rail carrying a greater modal share of the transport market in support of the Scottish Government's welcome objective of reducing car mileage by 20% by the year 2030. To help achieve this, rail needs to offer an attractive and competitive alternative to the private car.

2. Proposed Timetables for Leven.

Our preference would be to see the full half-hourly timetable introduced from year one – offering alternate trains to Edinburgh via Kirkcaldy and Dunfermline. However, we understand that there are issues relating to the transfer of diesel trains from the West of Scotland and associated crew training which prevents this option.

Interim Timetable A

We note the option in Interim Timetable A of offering two trains per hour via Dunfermline. Our calculations indicate that this would offer 31 daily trains from Leven to Edinburgh with an average journey time of 76 minutes. In the reverse direction there would be 32 daily trains from Edinburgh to Leven with an average journey time of 77 minutes. In our view the majority of passengers from Leven and Cameron Bridge will wish to travel to Edinburgh by the most direct route. The journey times proposed via Dunfermline are not attractive and consequently not a suitable way to launch and market the new services.

Interim Timetable B

Our calculations indicate that this would offer 19 daily trains from Leven to Edinburgh with an average journey time of 69 minutes via Kirkcaldy. Whilst this is a more direct route we would wish to see an improved journey time and note that 4 trains have extended journey times of 77, 77, 78 and 81 minutes – apparently the result of being held to allow other trains to pass. In the reverse direction from Edinburgh to Leven 18 trains per day offer an average journey time of 65 minutes. As stated above, we believe that the majority of passengers will prefer a more direct route and so would favour Timetable B for the launch of the new services. However, whilst supporting this option we would wish to see some improvement on the journey time – preferably to 1 hour.

Planned Timetable

We note this this offers alternate services via Kirkcaldy and Dunfermline so providing a half-hourly link between Leven and Edinburgh. We believe that this is the correct longer-term option giving both direct trains via Kirkcaldy and offering greater connectivity within Fife via Dunfermline. However, as stated under Timetable B above, we would wish to see improved journey times for the direct services.

Marketing and Developing the New Services

The area to be served by the new stations at Leven and Methil has a combined population of around 37,000 and so offers great potential to develop the rail market. Given the levels of poverty in the area, direct connectivity to the jobs and education facilities in Edinburgh will be welcomed. The decision to stable trains overnight at Leven and provide a crew depot is a wise choice as it reduces unnecessary train mileage and provides high quality employment opportunities locally.

To maximise the patronage of the new services it is our view that a concerted marketing campaign is required – akin to that accompanying the launch of the Borders Railway. Similarly, there is the potential to attract some of the large number of residents and visitors in the capital to visit Leven and the Fife Coast in addition to the expected flows from Fife to Edinburgh. The Fife Coastal Path north from Leven offers very attractive walks linking the communities towards St Andrews and is served by a good local bus service. There is a clear opportunity here to market a combine public transport offering given the location of the bus station in Leven close to the new railway station.

3. Serving the Tay Cities.

Dundee is well served by trains from Edinburgh – both the semi-fast ones and those to Aberdeen. As with the Leven services we would wish to see journey times offered being seen as attractive to encourage the growth of the rail market.

Perth however suffers from very poor journey times to and from Edinburgh both via Ladybank and Stirling. This impacts not only on the potential market between Edinburgh and Perth but also journeys to and from Inverness. We understand that the Scottish Association for Public Transport, another of our members, intends to offer more detailed comments on specific timetables and we would flag these up as worthy of serious consideration.

4. Summary.

We believe that most passengers from Leven will travel to Edinburgh and therefore support Interim Timetable B as it provides direct trains via Kirkcaldy.

We agree that the planned timetable for year two and onwards is the correct option as it provides direct services to and from Edinburgh via Kirkcaldy plus local connectivity within Fife via Dunfermline.

We would wish to see the average journey time of the direct services closer to 1 hour to maximise marketing opportunities both to and from Leven and so build passenger numbers.

The Tay Cities offer a direct contrast in journey times and frequency with Dundee being well served and Perth suffering from seriously extended journey times. Dundee services should continue to offer competitive journey times but there is a need for much improved journey times to Perth via Ladybank and Stirling. If rail is to offer serious competition to road transport on this corridor and beyond to Inverness then there is a need for significant improvements to the rail offering either by timetable or infrastructure enhancements or a combination of the two.

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We campaign for walking, cycling and public transport to be the easiest and most affordable options for everyone. Our diverse membership brings together public, private and third sector organisations from across Scotland. We are a registered Scottish charity (SC041516).