

John Lamont MP
Constituency Office
25 High Street
Hawick
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13 June 2019

Dear John,

Galashiels public meeting

Thank you again for facilitating our recent meeting with you and your constituents. It was important for us to hear first-hand from customers, to apologise for recent performance and explain why it happened. We are continuing to work flat out to deliver the service our customers in the Borders expect and deserve.

Please find below responses to the action points raised at the meeting.

Melrose 7s

We were concerned to hear about the difficulties faced by some customers during the Melrose 7s recently and we're sorry for the impact this had on their journeys.

We do plan for this event, keeping the Scottish Borders Council and the event organisers updated on our plans. A strengthened train plan with more carriages for services was created, but unfortunately, operational issues on the day affected these plans. This was due to traincrew shortages meaning some services operated with fewer carriages than planned and others were cancelled. As a result, the enhanced train plan that has served the event well in previous years was impacted at short notice.

At the meeting, concerns were expressed about the situation at the station in the evening. One of our Station Team Managers (STM) was at the station and has advised that staff encountered some challenging behaviour from some customers. This included unsafe behaviour from several individuals, who tried to hold on to a train as it departed the station.

Due to the cancellations and trains with fewer carriages, services were very busy. The STM has said that one service was held for approximately ten minutes to clear some crowds due to a late finish, with everyone able to board.

We're sorry for the inconvenience caused to customers and please be assured we will continue to take the necessary steps to plan for these important events in the future.

Fares collection and passenger numbers

As we set out at the meeting, when trains are busy and unfortunately operating with fewer carriages, it can be difficult for conductors to get through the train. This is a frustration for both ScotRail and for customers with the potential investment in Scotland's railway that is lost.

Due to the commercially sensitive nature, we're unable to provide further information on the level of fares collected on the Borders route. Revenue protection and reducing ticketless travel are a priority for us. That's why we have implemented a number of measures to make it easier for customers to buy before boarding, including ScotRail Smartcards and new self-service ticket machines across the network.

There are two sources of data for passenger demand. We have ticket sales, which gives us the big picture of how many people have bought tickets. We also have passenger count information, either from manual counts or from Automatic Passenger Counting equipment that is fitted to our trains, which tells us how many people are on each individual service.

When planning how best to use our rolling stock, a number of factors have to be taken into consideration, of which passenger demand is key. When we look at passenger demand, we use the passenger count information as ticket sales are not granular enough. We recognise that we have many busy services, including services between Edinburgh and Tweedbank, and we always look to make best use of the trains that we have available for the number of passengers travelling.

We are currently in the process of delivering two fleets of trains - our new electric class 385 trains and our high-speed trains - that will give us over 20% more carriages than at the start of the franchise. The introduction of these trains will enable ScotRail to increase capacity across the whole network, including the Borders route. Unfortunately, the delays to the delivery of these new and refurbished trains has meant that we have been unable to undertake the planned increase in capacity on a number of routes, including the Borders Railway.

The Borders Railway has seen an increase in capacity every year since the railway opened. When all our new trains are in service, we plan to provide 1,400 seats into Edinburgh in the morning peak and the same from Edinburgh in the evening peak, compared to 950 seats in each peak at the opening of the railway.

Three-carriage train at Tweedbank

Between the morning and evening peak, a class 170 diesel train is stationed at Tweedbank between 0921 and 1630. It then ties up with a through-Fife set for a key evening peak service.

This service remains at Tweedbank for several reasons. Firstly, lower patronage means it does not need to be used in the off-peak during the day. Secondly, there are also issues with the use of through platforms at Waverley which inhibits the use of this train. However, our control centre can use the train to replace a broken-down train.

We appreciate that it may seem surprising that the train is not used during the off-peak, but we can reassure you that our train planners consider carefully how our train fleet is utilised.

Information about rail user groups

There are a number of forums on some Scottish rail routes for rail users to be part of to promote the railway locally, to engage with government, the rail industry and other partners, and to hold train operating companies to account.

There is a statutory responsibility for ScotRail to engage with Community Rail Partnerships (CRPs), and we engage regularly with other groups, including RAGES and Campaign for Borders Rail (CBR).

You may wish to speak with the following groups for further information:

- Borders Community Rail Partnership (CRPs) (<http://www.galashiels.bordnet.co.uk/bordersrailway.html>) – CRPs engage communities and help people get the most from their railways, promoting social inclusion and sustainable travel, working alongside train operators to bring about improvements, and bringing stations back to life.
- Rail Action Group East of Scotland (RAGES) (<http://www.rages.org.uk/>) - established in 1999 to campaign for improved rail services between Edinburgh and Dunbar.
- Friends of the West Highland Line (<http://westhighlandline.org.uk/>) and Friends of the Far North Line (<http://www.fofnl.org.uk/>) - both formed to protect their particular routes when faced with potential closure in the 1980s and continue to campaign for more services on these routes.
- There are also a number of reopening campaign groups, including Beattock Station Action Group (<https://sites.google.com/site/beattockactiongroup/>), Levenmouth Rail Campaign (<http://www.lmrc-action.org.uk/>), Newburgh Train Station Group (Fife) (<https://newburghtrainstation.org.uk/>), and St. Andrews Rail Link (<http://www.starlink-campaign.org.uk/>).

Information about compensation available to passengers

We are absolutely committed to providing the best possible service for our customers and our Delay Repay Guarantee is at the heart of that approach. We know how much of an inconvenience it is to customers when things don't go to plan, and it is only right that they are compensated when that happens.

The Delay Repay Guarantee ensures that customers are compensated when their journey is delayed by 30 minutes or more. If anyone misses a connection because of that delay, they can claim for that too.

It is easy to claim, and there are a number of repayment options - including PayPal and cash vouchers. More information is available on our website - www.scotrail.co.uk/delay-repay

We extensively promote Delay Repay on a daily basis across all our external communications channels. Our social media team remind customers to claim when they have been delayed and they post a link to our website with full details.

Rules surrounding charging when a ticket machine is faulty

We operate a 'Buy before you board' policy, as part of the national conditions of carriage, which helps to reduce fare evasion. Further information is available here - <https://www.nationalrail.co.uk/National%20Rail%20Conditions%20of%20Travel.pdf>

We have implemented a number of measures to make it easier for customers to buy before boarding, include ScotRail Smartcards and new self-service ticket machines across the network.

Anyone who boards a train without a valid ticket, when there has been either a ticket office or self-service machine at the station, gives up the right to discounted fares on the train. However, staff are expected to use common sense, when appropriate ticket purchasing facilities aren't available. For example, if the ticket machine is faulty, then the customer can buy on-board the train without any additional cost.

Our facilities team has reviewed the performance of ticket machines on the Borders line. Performance at Galashiels, Stow and Tweedbank has been good since the start of the year, and there have been a few faults at Newcraighall, Gorebridge, Newtongrange and Shawfair.

Our teams receive daily reports on our ticketing assets which detail faults for action. We also receive feedback from staff via our internal reporting app and from customers via social media when there are faults. We can then dispatch staff to fix these as soon as possible.

Station facilities at Tweedbank

At the moment, we have no plans for a change in station facilities at Tweedbank, however our stations team has noted the comment made at the meeting so it can be considered in the future.

I hope this response is helpful. We're continuing to work hard to improve all aspects of our service and we're confident that your constituents will be able see the improvements we're making over the coming weeks and months.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Sue Evans'.

Sue Evans
Communications Director, ScotRail Alliance