



Nestrans
Archibald Simpson House
27-29 King Street
Aberdeen AB24 5AA

25 March 2011

Tel 01224 625524
Fax 01224 626596

Norman Baker MP
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Dear Mr Baker

We are writing to you in our capacity as the Chairs of the statutory Regional Transport Partnerships for the area of Scotland north of the central belt, Nestrans, Tactran, Hitrans and ZetTrans. Our combined area covers over 60% of Scotland and is home to over a quarter of the nation's population, including a number of key economic centres and the most peripheral parts of the UK.

We would like to thank you for taking the time to visit The Lighthouse in Glasgow on 17 March to discuss the current consultation on High Speed Rail. This discussion seminar was attended by a number of our Directors.

You outlined the case for High Speed Rail and explained the UK Government's proposals regarding possible extension to Scotland. You also highlighted the need for those who were supportive of this project to make their voices heard during the consultation period. Unfortunately, as is often the case at these events, there was not enough time for all those with a viewpoint to be heard so we are writing to you to submit a North of Scotland viewpoint on the proposals. Our individual Boards will be considering their responses to the consultation separately over the next few weeks.

Your presentation on 17 March promoted the Y shaped HSR proposal as a UK Government scheme designed to support sustainable economic recovery and growth throughout the whole of the UK. From our viewpoint the present HSR strategy and proposals will predominantly benefit the bottom 2/3rds of the UK and risk excluding the most northerly 1/3rd of the country from sharing in the economic potential HSR offers. We must stress that our Partnerships are fully supportive of HSR and the very strong case for the HSR network extending to both Edinburgh and Glasgow and for HSR to be built from both ends, given the very strong business case Scotland adds to the national system.

We understand the lower population density in the northern part of the UK means that it is most likely that HSR will not be economically viable north of the central belt of Scotland. We are though mindful of the arguments being presented by other UK regions north of Birmingham that the regions must not be economically disadvantaged by having HSR stop short of their area putting them at a disadvantage to areas where the benefits highlighted by Alison Munro will be achieved. These arguments and concerns equally apply to the northern parts of Scotland even with HSR extending to the Central Belt but given our geography within the United Kingdom we have to find some other way to ensure that this UK project benefits the whole of the UK.

As stated above, we are fully supportive of the case for the High Speed Rail network including Edinburgh and Glasgow, but it is essential that rail connections from northern Scotland into a UK HSR network via the Central Belt must also see a step-change, and we will be pressing the new Scottish Government to ensure that development of HSR is accompanied and preceded by journey time reductions and capacity enhancements on the wider ScotRail network. Access to London from our area, even with HSR all the way, would still be beyond the tipping point of around 3 ½ hours to make transfer from air to rail a reality. Therefore access to London, and onward global markets and destinations from our area is most likely to be by air. This is particularly so for the key economic sectors of our business communities which are increasingly globally based and likely to be even more so in the future.

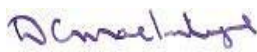
Our air access to the London airports is under ever increasing threat with limited capacity at the hub airports and increasing charges and taxes making it ever more attractive to airlines to look to maximise profits by flying to long haul emerging global destinations with larger planes than currently supply access from our area to these economically vital airports. The trends over the years show that this transfer from regional access to worldwide flights is not a fear but is actually happening.

We believe the High Speed Rail proposals offer a lifeline for us in both maintaining existing, or providing new access to London and its global destinations, and making the UK investment in HSR work for us as well as those regions more directly benefiting.

This lifeline comes in the figures provided by Alison Munro at the meeting where she indicated that HS2 were conservatively assuming an increase in rail passengers from 20% of the central belt (and presumably Manchester & Newcastle) to London market to 50% of the market. The consequence of this should be a reduction in the numbers of flights between these destinations and the key UK hub of London Heathrow. If a way could be found for a proportion of these cleared landing slots to be reserved for access for peripheral UK regions that will not benefit from the new HSR network as a viable alternative to air then this would help us benefit from this substantial UK investment. This could be included in the current EU review of landing slots.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter.

Yours sincerely



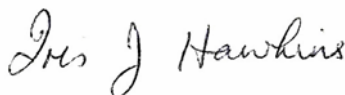
Cllr Duncan MacIntyre
Chair of HITRANS



Cllr Kevin Stewart
Chair of Nestrans



Cllr Will Dawson
Chair of Tactran



Cllr Iris Hawkins
Chair of ZetTrans

Copies to:

Keith Brown, Minister for Transport, Scottish Government
Michael Moore, Secretary of State for Scotland
David Middleton, Chief Executive, Transport Scotland
Frances Duffy, Transport Scotland
Alison Munro, Chief Executive of HS2
Other RTP Chairs
Chief Executives of Edinburgh and Glasgow