



31 May 2023

Ms Clare Haughey MSP
Convener, Health, Social Care and Sport Committee
The Scottish Parliament
EDINBURGH
EH99 1SP

Dear Convenor, thank you for your email.

I'm sorry you felt that the previous letter, which outlined the facts of the cup final scheduling as they unfolded, did not provide enough detail.

Based on your latest letter I have responded to each question in order:

- 1. I was disappointed that your letter failed to set out (as the Committee had requested) what prior discussions you have had with Scottish Government Ministers, with transport service providers and with fan associations to ensure any disruption to individual travel plans caused by the change of kick-off time would be kept to an acceptable minimum.**

Firstly, it has never been the case before that the Scottish FA would require either discussions with, or permission of, Scottish Government Ministers when scheduling a kick-off time for a Scottish Cup final. Upon speaking to my colleagues at the SPFL it is also not the norm for the far more frequent changes to kick-off times necessitated by live broadcast requirements.

In terms of major event preparations, we have an established procedure of pre-operations and operations meetings. Traditionally, in line with best practice across major events domestically and internationally, these meetings take place with the host venue, participating club event and stadium staff, Police Scotland and the relevant stewarding company.

On occasion, clubs have, and are permitted, to invite Supporter Liaison Officers to the meetings but this is normally part of the club's own match planning procedures.

In relation to transport service providers, it is normally the case that we can support requests for special provision as required. On this occasion, we have remained in close dialogue with Inverness Caledonian Thistle FC, in particular, who were quick in ensuring adequate rail and bus provision for all fans travelling to Hampden for the game, which we had offered to help with, if required.

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The change of kick-off to a later scheduling of 5.30pm was done with the very intention of keeping disruption to a minimum and we reiterate that the club's preference was for a later kick-off rather than a lunchtime kick-off when 3pm could not be accommodated by BBC Scotland.

2. The Committee asks what steps the SFA has taken to compensate travelling fans for the additional travel costs they will have incurred as a direct result of the change of kick-off time.

Following discussions, we do not believe there are any additional costs and for the avoidance of doubt the cup final kick-off time was confirmed once discussions between ourselves, the participating clubs and the host broadcasters concluded. There was not, in this instance, a change of kick-off time but confirmation of the kick-off time once the aforementioned conversations had concluded.

3. It is regrettable that the announcement of this change was made only one calendar month before the game is scheduled to take place, following confirmation on 26 April that the FA Cup Final would kick off at 3pm that same day and in response to apparent pressure from broadcasters. It is equally regrettable that, instead of the SFA assuming responsibility, the onus for resolving the disruption caused by this decision has apparently been placed on clubs and fans.

For clarity, the cup final details can only be confirmed upon the conclusion of the semi-finals.

The kick-off time was confirmed within three days of the second semi-final taking place.

Based on the available provision of public transport, especially in relation to travelling fans from Inverness, we repeat that a later kick-off was the preference to a lunchtime kick-off and that the club are confident that all fans will enjoy their day at Hampden with the comfort of knowing they will have sufficient public transport to get home.

4. We note in particular the open letter from Inverness Caledonian Thistle Supporters Trust (ICTST), which describes the decision as "totally uncaring", states that the implications of the change of kick-off time "remain unresolved" and concludes: "Fans have been betrayed by those supposedly deemed to represent us, the SFA". In responding to this letter, I would request that you address directly the points raised by the ICTST's open letter and the steps you intend to take to rebuild trust with travelling fans and supporters' groups.

We have been in regular dialogue with the club and when it became apparent a 3pm kick-off was not possible with the host broadcaster, the club requested a later kick off to ensure fans would not be inconvenienced by a lunchtime kick-off and could enjoy the full Scottish Cup final experience. We have remained in contact with the club throughout this process.

5. The Committee ask, what lessons the SFA will draw to ensure such a situation does not arise again and that the Scottish Cup Final's traditional 3pm kick-off time can be safeguarded in future years.

It should be noted that the earliest Scottish Cup finals did not actually kick-off at 3pm and that there is sufficient data to show that a 'traditional' 3pm kick-off does not necessarily meet the demands of the modern football fan. That said, our preference would always be for a 3pm kick-off, as it was in this case. The reality is that following discussions with BBC Scotland, they could not accommodate that request based on their scheduling conflict.

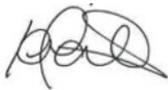
Moreover, as outlined, we would then consciously diminish the television audience and clash with both the FA Cup Final and UEFA Women's Champions League final on the same day.

It should also be noted that FA Cup finals, Champions League finals as well as other domestic fixtures no longer kick-off at a traditional 3pm kick-off to maximise a wider audience and create a spectacle for match-goers and television viewers alike.

We will continue to monitor supporter trends and data to ensure the Scottish Cup remains a showpiece event, optimised for fans of all ages, in whatever way they wish to consume it.

I hope the above addresses any concerns. I would also welcome the opportunity to discuss any of the questions raised in person. I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely



Ian Maxwell
Chief Executive