

Transport Committee
Wednesday 28 October 2026
9th Meeting, 2026 (Session 7)

Pre-budget scrutiny

Introduction

This paper provides background briefing for a session with two panels of witnesses on major road and rail projects, and the maintenance of the Scottish trunk road network.

Background - Roads

The following section provides background information on **the trunk road network**, including plans for its expansion, and more information on major enhancement projects of interest to witnesses in Panel 1.

Trunk Road network basics

Scotland's trunk road network, which provides strategic road links between our towns, cities, ports, and airports, is the single biggest asset owned by Scottish Ministers. It is 3,736 kilometres long, has an estimated value of over £33 billion and is hugely diverse in nature - including everything from a 10-lane section of the M8 motorway in Glasgow through to rural single carriageway roads in the west highlands.

Network maintenance

Transport Scotland is responsible for the development, management and maintenance of the trunk road network, with day-to-day management and maintenance provided through [four geographic trunk road maintenance units](#) (south-west, south-east, north-east and north-west). The work of each unit is provided by a private sector contractor, chosen following a competitive tendering exercise, these are:

Contract	Operator	Contract details
North East Scotland	Amey	Contract commenced 16 August 2022 and is due to run for eight years, with an option to extend up to a maximum of a further four years at the sole discretion of the Scottish Ministers.
North West Scotland	BEAR Scotland	Contract commenced on 16 August 2022 and is due to run for eight years, with an option to extend

		up to a maximum of a further four years at the sole discretion of the Scottish Ministers.
South East Scotland	BEAR Scotland	Contract commenced 16 August 2020 and due to run for eight years, with an option to extend up to a maximum of a further four years at the sole discretion of the Scottish Ministers.
South West Scotland	Amey	Contract commenced on 16 August 2020 and due to run for eight years, with an option to extend up to a maximum of a further four years at the sole discretion of the Scottish Ministers.

In addition to these geographic area contracts, there are five Design Build Finance Operate (DBFO) operators, responsible for the management and maintenance of stretches of trunk roads under contract to Scottish Ministers/Transport Scotland. These are:

- **Aberdeen Roads Ltd:** Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route and Balmedie-Tipperty.
- **Autolink Concessionaires (M6) Plc:** the A74(M) from Junction 12 to the English Border.
- **PPP Connect:** the M77 from Junction 5 to Fenwick.
- **Highway Management (Scotland) Ltd:** the M80 from Stepps to Haggs.
- **Scottish Roads Partnership:** core section of the M8, M73, M74 network.

In addition to routine maintenance, Transport Scotland is having to invest growing amounts for repairs to significant structural elements of the network built in the 1960s and 1970s which are now reaching the end of their service life. One example is the [M8 Woodside Viaducts](#) in Glasgow, the current temporary repairs for which are estimated to cost between £126 million and £152 million. Transport Scotland has [consulted on options for a permanent fix](#), which have an expected cost of between £125 million and £500 million.

Plans for network expansion

There is no single trunk road network enhancement document. Transport Scotland identifies priorities for investment in the trunk road network in [its second Strategic Transport Projects Review](#) (STPR2), which covers the period 2022-2042. This highlights the 'Access to Argyll' project, essentially the development of a new section of the A83 at the Rest and be Thankful, and improvements to the A75 and A77 which serve the ports of Stranraer and Cairnryan. It also includes network-wide plans for speed management, road safety improvements, and climate change mitigation and resilience.

The Scottish Government published the [Infrastructure Delivery Pipeline 2026](#) on 13 January 2026, alongside the [Scottish Spending Review 2026](#). This lists infrastructure projects costing over £5 million and programmes over £20 million which are currently

being delivered, approved, assessed, or considered for progress by the Scottish Government. The Infrastructure Delivery Pipeline is a live document, and new projects and programmes will be added as investment plans are agreed. The Scottish Government intends to publish progress reports on the listed projects every six months.

The Pipeline lists the following trunk road projects as having agreed outline business cases (or equivalent) and agreed funding.

A9 Dualling Programme:

Tomatin to Moy, Tay Crossing to Ballinluig, and Pitlochry to Killiecrankie sections.

Major Roads Investment Programme:

A83 Rest and Be Thankful – Medium Term Solution

M8 Woodside Viaduct Propping.

It goes on to list projects that are at an earlier stage of development which:

“...will be added to the Delivery Pipeline once Business Case and funding are agreed. To ensure protection of the public purse, where business cases and value for money considerations do not stack up projects may be stood down from the development or future pipelines.”

This list includes major projects such as A96 dualling, the A83 Rest and be Thankful long-term solution, and the A720 Sheriffhall Junction Improvement. The Pipeline document ends by mentioning several projects being explored to determine if there is a case for investment, which could be included in future investment pipelines.

The Scottish Government consulted on a [new Infrastructure Strategy 2027-2037](#) between January and May 2026. It is currently considering responses to this. Rather than identify individual projects, the draft Strategy sets out an approach to assessing infrastructure needs, identifying priorities, delivering Scottish Government goals, and providing a structure to underpin future capital investment decision making.

Authorising new trunk roads (or significant upgrades)

The planning and authorisation of a major trunk road scheme can be a very lengthy process, extending to several years. It typically starts with an appraisal of possible options to address known transport problems within a region using the STAG (Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance) system.

Once a favoured option has been identified an initial business case will be developed. This will be followed by the completion of a statutory environmental impact assessment. The resulting Environmental Statement is then subject to a period of public consultation.

The project then moves to the formal approval process, which involves the authorisation of ‘trunk road orders’ by Scottish Ministers, under powers set out in Section 5 and Schedule 1 of the Roads (Scotland) Act 1984.

As part of the authorisation process, Trunk Road Orders are subject to public consultation, during which formal objections to the Orders can be lodged. If a Statutory Consultee, typically an agency of the Scottish Government or other public authority, lodges an objection which cannot be resolved then a Public Local Inquiry must be held. Similarly, an objection to a Compulsory Purchase Order by an affected landowner that cannot be resolved will likely result in a Public Local Inquiry being held. Inquiries are chaired by a Reporter appointed by Scottish Ministers, who produces a report with recommendations for Scottish Ministers – who ultimately decide whether to approve or reject the Orders. Ministers can choose to reject the Reporter's recommendations.

Funding new trunk roads and significant upgrades

As the Committee has previously explored, there are two options for funding trunk road improvements. Scottish Government capital funding, or a revenue funded private finance option – such as the Mutual Investment Model (MIM).

An interesting recent development in England is the introduction of the [Highways \(Financing\) Bill](#) by the UK Government in the UK Parliament on 10 September 2026.

This Bill aims to establish a new framework for financing major road infrastructure projects in England through private sector investment. It would enable private companies to fund, build, and maintain specific highways in return for being granted powers to charge tolls on those roads. The Office of Rail and Road (ORR) would act as the independent regulator of the new regime. While this legislation does not extend to Scotland, it does show that alternative means of funding major road projects are possible. The [House of Commons Library has produced a full briefing](#) on the Bill.

Major trunk road projects

The following sections provide more details on the A83 Rest and be Thankful project, A96 dualling, A75/A77 upgrades, and A9 dualling programme – which are of direct interest to Panel 1 witnesses.

A83 Rest and be Thankful

The Rest and be Thankful, the summit of the pass on the A83 trunk road between Arrochar and Inveraray, has suffered a significant number of closures due to landslips over recent years. When closed, the diversionary route via Crianlarich adds roughly 60 miles to each one-way trip. Transport Scotland is pursuing a three-pronged approach to this issue, as described below:

- **Short-term:** Since 2007, [Transport Scotland](#) has invested over £16 million in landslip mitigation works at the Rest and be Thankful and the provision of an alternate route along the 'Old Military Road'. Work on these short-term measures continues.

- **Medium term:** Transport Scotland is also working on the development of larger scale medium-term project, principally an upgrade to the Old Military Road diversionary route to increase its resilience.
- **Long term:** Following a significant period of investigation and analysis, Transport Scotland [announced its favoured option for a long-term solution](#) to the issue of landslips at this location – a debris flow shelter and catch pit along the exposed section of the current route (known as the Access to Argyll project).

This is a challenging engineering project that will take several years to deliver at a cost of around £400m to £470m at 2023 prices. The draft Road Orders for the long-term solution were published on 13 December 2024. The period for formal objections to be lodged closed on 7 February 2025.

[A83 campaigners have previously raised concerns](#) about the proposed medium- and long-term plans and continued one-way convoy working on the A83 at the Rest and be Thankful and the diversionary Old Military Road.

These campaigners generally support the development of an alternative medium-term solution to that being pursued by Transport Scotland. This would see a new road developed along the opposite side of the Glen to the current A83, as opposed to using the current Old Military Road. Campaigners argue this would be both cheaper and quicker to deliver than current short- and medium-term solutions.

Campaigners have also questioned the predicted cost and deliverability of the long-term solution, arguing that construction is likely to be disrupted by the ongoing threat of landslides – which will add both time and cost to the project. They have called for the proposed long-term solution to be reconsidered, arguing that tunnel and/or viaduct options be reconsidered, arguing they may be cheaper and quicker to deliver, and offer greater resilience.

The Session 6 Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee considered [petition PE1916](#), which called for the establishment of a public inquiry into the management of the A83 Rest and be Thankful project. This petition was closed at the Committee's [meeting of 23 April 2026](#), following the provision of information by Transport Scotland about likely timescales for the delivery of the medium- and long-term solutions.

A96 dualling

The A96 is a trunk road that links Inverness (Raigmore interchange) and Aberdeen (Craibstone roundabout). It passes through, or around, several towns including Nairn, Forres, Elgin, Keith, and Inverurie. The Scottish Government first committed to dualling this 86-mile-long single carriageway route in 2011, with an expected cost of £3 billion and anticipated completion in 2030.

The Bute House Agreement, the joint policy programme of the SNP and Scottish Green Party Government between August 2021 and April 2024, committed the

Scottish Government to a review of the A96 dualling project – the resulting [A96 Corridor Review](#) being published in November 2024 and subject to a consultation that ended in February 2025. Following this, the Scottish Government remained committed to the full dualling of the A96, with the Inverness-Nairn section being the initial priority.

The **dualling of the Inverness-Nairn section** of the A96 was first mentioned in the final report of the Scottish Government's Strategic Transport Projects Review, published in October 2009, which slated it as a priority for investment. Transport Scotland launched a consultation on options for dualling the A96 between Inverness to Nairn in November 2013 and, following consideration of issues raised during this consultation, announced a preferred route in October 2014. This was followed by the publication of [Draft Orders](#), which when approved give legal authority to build the road, in November 2016.

A public inquiry was held in late 2018 to consider objections to specific proposals in the Draft Orders. Following consideration of the report of the public inquiry, Scottish Ministers [agreed that the Orders could be made](#) subject to amendment. The [Road Orders and Compulsory Purchase Order](#) were made on 22 February 2024 and came into force on 12 March 2024.

The latest update on the Inverness-Nairn dualling project was [provided in a statement](#) by the then Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Fiona Hyslop, on 3 February 2026, which stated:

“The Capital Spending Review published on 13 January allows for the commencement of the construction of the A9/A96 Inshes to Smithton link road in 2028/29 and the Nairn Bypass in 2029/30, subject to business case approval and confirmation of funding beyond the spending review period. We also expect to commence the delivery of advanced works for the Seafield to Balloch section of the scheme during this capital spending review period.”

A petition ([PE2132](#)) calling for the Scottish Government to publish a timetable for the dualling of the Inverness-Nairn Section of the A96 was considered by the Session 6 Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee, which closed the petition at its [meeting of 11 March 2026](#), based on Scottish Government evidence that “a firm timetable for delivery will be dependent on the completion of preparatory work and approval of business cases, and that it will be set as part of annual budget processes.” However, the Committee did suggest that the timetabling and delivery of A96 Inverness-Nairn dualling be considered by any future transport committee.

A77 and A75 upgrades

The M77/A77 trunk road links Glasgow with Stranraer. The M77 section runs for approximately 16.4 miles between junction 22 of the M8 and Fenwick, with the A77 section running for approximately 67 miles between Fenwick and Stranraer. The A77 trunk road is dual carriageway between Fenwick and Ayr. The sections of the A77 between central Glasgow and junction 22 of the M8 and between Stranraer (from its junction with the A75) and Portpatrick are not part of the trunk road network. The

most recent upgrade to the route is the 3.2 mile long [Maybole Bypass](#), opened in January 2022.

The A75 trunk road links Stranraer with Gretna. It is approximately 159 kilometres long and largely single carriageway with several Wide Single 2+1 (WS2+1) carriageway sections and short sections of dual carriageway that provide overtaking opportunities. The principal towns along the route include Stranraer, Newton Stewart, Gatehouse of Fleet, Castle Douglas, Dumfries, Annan, and Gretna. The most recent upgrade to the route was the 5.3-kilometre Dunragit Bypass, which [opened in 2014](#). Transport Scotland has appointed consultants [to assess options](#) for bypasses of the villages of Springholm and Crocketford, which are expected to report in 2027.

Transport Scotland's [Strategic Transport Projects Review 2](#) (STPR2), published December 2022, recommended that "...safety, resilience and reliability improvements are made on the A75 and A77 strategic road corridors, connecting Stranraer and Cairnryan to the rest of Scotland and the UK. This would include, but is not limited to improving junctions, enhancing overtaking opportunities with WS2+1 (wide single carriageway with two lanes in one direction and a single lane in the other direction) or climbing lanes at appropriate locations where slow-moving traffic leads to risky overtaking manoeuvres, and widening or realigning carriageways to alleviate 'pinch points' such as narrow structures or at stretches of older standard single carriageway."

The dualling of the single carriageway sections of the A77 and A75 were the subject of long-running parliamentary scrutiny through consideration of petitions [PE 1657](#) (A77) and [PE1601](#) (A75). Both petitions were closed at the Session 6 Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee [meeting of 23 April 2025](#), based on Scottish Government evidence that dualling of these routes could not be taken forward, but that it would pursue the delivery of commitments set out in STPR2.

A9 dualling

On 6 December 2011, the Scottish Government committed to dualling the 134 kilometres of single carriageway road on the A9 between Perth and Inverness. The project had an expected completion date of 2025, an estimated total cost of £3bn (at 2008 prices) and was to be delivered in 11 sections.

Following an initial spurt of progress, the project effectively stalled. Jenny Gilruth MSP, then Minister for Transport, made [a statement to Parliament](#) about the project on the 8 February 2023, by which time just two of the 11 sections had been built. She advised that the 2025 completion date would not be met and that an updated timetable would be provided to Parliament in autumn 2023. This timetable was provided [in statement to the Scottish Parliament](#) on 20 December 2023. This set out a revised completion date of 2035, a decade later than originally planned, and revised plans for the delivery of the project in six sections, four built using traditional capital funding and two potentially delivered using a privately financed Mutual Investment Mode (MIM), with a decision on whether to proceed with this approach dependent on market testing and value for money assessment.

The Scottish Government [announced on 14 January 2026](#) that it had abandoned plans to use MIM funding and instead intended to fully fund the programme using traditional capital funding – which will require investment of more than £3 billion over the next 10 years. Work is currently underway on several sections of the route, including:

- **Tomatin to Moy:** under construction, dualling expected to be operational by the end of Spring 2028.
- **Tay Crossing to Ballinluig:** under construction, dualling expected to be operational by end of 2028.
- **Pitlochry to Killiecrankie:** contract awarded October 2026, dualling expected to be operational by end of 2030.

Road maintenance

[National Transport Strategy 2](#) establishes a “sustainable travel hierarchy”, which favours investment in the maintenance and enhancement of existing transport infrastructure, with a view to optimising its use, before considering the development of new infrastructure. This builds on an approach identified by the Infrastructure Commission for Scotland, which advised in [its final report](#) that:

“Most of the underlying infrastructure that will be used in 30-years’ time already exists today. It is therefore essential that these assets are most effectively and efficiently utilised, maintained and enhanced to net zero carbon readiness” [and that there should be] “...a presumption in favour of investment to future proof existing road infrastructure and to make it safer, resilient and more reliable rather than increase road capacity.”

Roads authorities (that is the local authority for local public roads and Transport Scotland for trunk roads) have a duty to maintain public roads under Section 1 of the Roads (Scotland) Act 1984. While there is no statutory maintenance standard, roads authorities generally follow the risk-based approach to roads maintenance set out in [Well-managed highway infrastructure: A code of practice](#), published by the UK Roads Liaison Group.

Building on this approach, the Scottish Collaboration of Transportation Specialists (SCOTS) has [produced practical guidance](#) for roads authorities on the development of risk-based asset management plans, road asset safety inspection strategies and undertaking road inspections. The aim being to support the development of a consistent approach to road maintenance across Scotland.

This long-term approach to road maintenance, rather than a reactive approach focused on filling potholes and dealing with issues as they arise, has broad support amongst transport professionals (e.g. see the recent Chartered Institute of Highways and Transport press release [Beyond potholes: CIHT panel calls for long-term transport investment](#)). However, the reality of competing priorities for national and local budgets - as [identified by Audit Scotland](#) in the mid-2010s, mean road maintenance budgets often lose out to other pressing statutory needs.

Transport Scotland sets out its approach to road maintenance in the [Scottish Trunk Road Network Asset Management Policy and Strategy 2026](#). The scale of the maintenance challenge on the trunk road network is significant, Transport Scotland's [Scottish Trunk Road Network Road Asset Management Plan 2026](#) states that "The overall maintenance backlog for carriageways, structures, ancillary assets and ITS combined was £3.1 billion in 2025, an increase from £1.2 billion in 2015".

Background - Railways

The following section provides background information on railway infrastructure projects that are supported by the witnesses appearing in Panel 2.

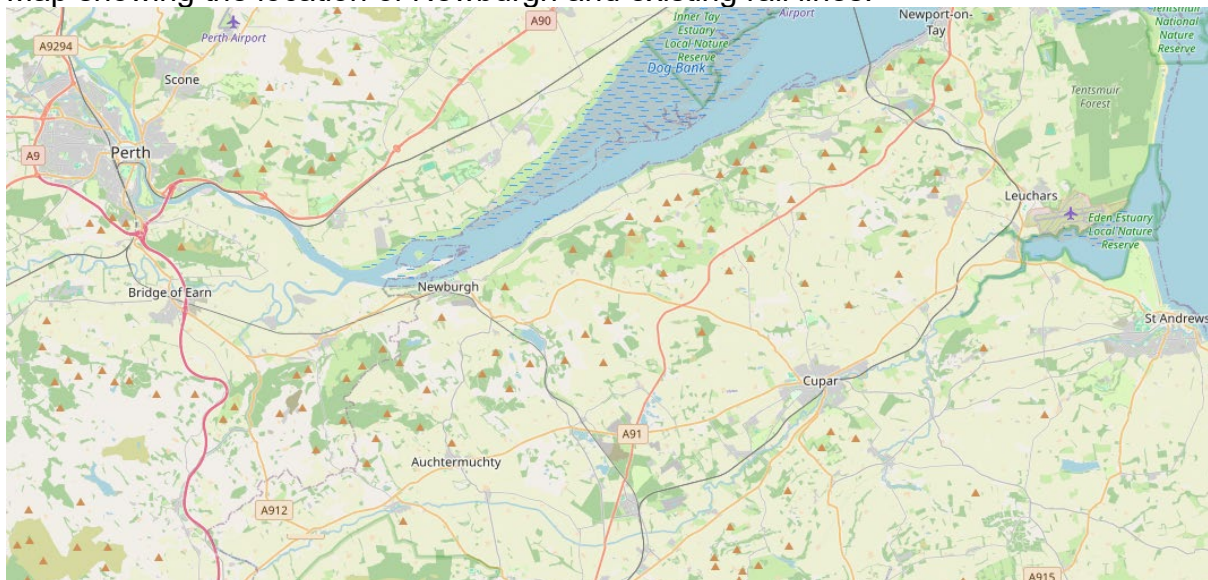
It is worth noting that such projects are funded as one-off, standalone items, rather than being covered by funds allocated to Network Rail for the routine maintenance and enhancement of the Scottish rail network. While the Scottish Government/Transport Scotland are typically the major funder of such schemes, major railway projects can also be (part) funded by private developers, local authorities, or other bodies.

Transport Scotland and rail industry partners have well established processes for assessing the costs and benefits of proposed rail projects, which can be explored with these organisations when they give evidence to the committee.

Newburgh Railway Station

Newburgh is located on the southern shore of the River Tay in northern Fife. The town is on an existing railway line, between the current stations at Ladybank and Perth, and was served by a railway station that closed to passengers in 1955.

Map showing the location of Newburgh and existing rail lines.



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The Newburgh Train Campaign is calling for the development of a new station in the town. [Significant work](#) has already been undertaken on developing proposals for a new station, including the development of a case for change, initial options appraisal, and [detailed options appraisal](#) – which was published in June 2022. This recommended that Transport Scotland consider the development of a new station at Abernethy Road in Newburgh, as this produced the highest cost-benefit ratio (BCR). The study reported that this produced a “BCR of 8.2 and PVB [Present Value Benefits] of £81.2m (over 60 years, 2010 prices).” A BCR of 8.2 represents a high positive return on investment for a transport infrastructure project, that is it returns £8.20 in benefits for every £1.00 invested, by way of comparison the BCR for the Queensferry Crossing was 4.31.

Winchburgh Railway Station

Winchburgh, located in West Lothian to the east of Linlithgow, is on the main railway line between Edinburgh and Glasgow, which branches at Polmont to also serve Dunblane. The village was previously served by a railway station which closed in 1930.

Planning permission for the construction of a significant housing led development at Winchburgh was granted in 2012, which included the development of a railway station subject to the condition that:

“Delivery of the indicative Winchburgh railway station, as shown on the master plan, will be dependent on the appraisal and business case being submitted by the applicant and agreed by the planning authority, in consultation with Transport Scotland. The railway station shall not be constructed until such a time that all necessary consents have been granted by Transport Scotland.

Reason: To ensure that a rail station at Winchburgh only progresses if Transport Scotland is satisfied that the appraisal and business case is proven and does not conflict with any other rail project.”

This permission is accompanied by a “Section 75” agreement between West Lothian Council and the developers, which states:

“In the event that the construction of a railway station within the Application Site is to proceed with the agreement of the Owners, all parties acting reasonably, the Owners shall within 28 days (or such longer period as shall be agreed by the parties, acting reasonably) of any request therefor, pay to the Council or Network Rail, as stipulated by the Council acting reasonably, the properly and reasonably incurred costs of the design and construction of the railway station (comprising station platforms, shelters, and appropriate access) and any necessary railway station car parking associated with the Development.”

Transport Scotland has granted the necessary consents, and West Lothian Council has granted planning permission for the development of the station. In their joint written submission to the Committee, the Winchburgh Development Ltd and West Lothian Council state:

“West Lothian Council (as co-promoter with WDL) submitted a funding application to the Scottish Government (addressed to the First Minister) to fund a total estimated expenditure of £24.7m on 17 November 2025. In that application, the provision for at least £50 million from the Scottish Government in the Edinburgh and South East Scotland City Region Deal to support development of strategic housing sites (of which Winchburgh is one) was identified as a potential funding source.”

Asked about the delivery of Winchburgh station [in PQ S7W-03713](#), the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Tourism and Transport replied on 20 October 2026 stating:

“The Scottish Government recognises the benefits that a new rail station at Winchburgh could bring to local communities and regional connectivity, and remains committed to working with partners and stakeholders to support its delivery.”

Fraserburgh and Peterhead railway

The Campaign for North East Rail (CNER) is principally focused on the (re)opening of rail lines linking Aberdeen, Fraserburgh and Peterhead. Maps showing these lines (closed to passengers in 1965 and freight services between 1970 and 1979) and a possible new route proposed by CNER are copied below.



Ordnance Survey railways map 1946.

CNER, working with the Aberdeen and Grampian Chamber of Commerce and funded by Transport Scotland, commissioned transport consultants AECOM to

produce the [Buchan Sustainable Transport Study](#), which was published in May 2024. This was a multi-modal study aimed at identifying the most promising options for improvement to strategic transport links between Dyce, Ellon, Fraserburgh, and Peterhead in north east Aberdeenshire, conducted in line with Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance (STAG). This identified three rail-based options as worthy of further study, one of which forms the basis of the CNER proposal mapped above.

CNER are also campaigning for the delivery of improvements to the East Coast Main Line (ECML) between Aberdeen and Edinburgh, and the development of new stations on the ECML at Newtonhill, and Cove Bay – both south of Aberdeen.

East Coast Main Line local services

The Rail Action Group East Scotland (RAGES), building on their successful campaign for new stations on the ECML at Reston (opened in May 2022) and East Linton (opened December 2023), continues to push for the establishment of stopping services between Edinburgh and Berwick-upon-Tweed, as well as the general improvement of rail services on the ECML in East Lothian and the Borders.

Other rail projects and priorities

Railfuture, and other local rail campaign groups, support the development of a host of new rail infrastructure and service improvements, including:

- Reopen the railway line between Leuchars and St Andrews.
- Extend the Borders Railway from Tweedbank to Carlisle.
- Reopen the Edinburgh South Suburban line to passenger services, possibly as part of a tram-train network.
- Develop Glasgow Crossrail, allowing for through running of trains between Queen Street and Glasgow Central stations – meaning services could pass through Glasgow to all points on the Scottish rail network.
- Extend overhead line electrification.
- Deliver smart and integrated multi-modal ticketing.
- Improve integration between modes, including walking and cycling.
- Improve physical accessibility at stations and on trains.

Alan Rehfish, Senior Researcher (Transport and Planning), SPICe

Date: 23/10/2026

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