

## **SCOTRAIL'S ADOPT A STATION POLICY : STIMULATING VALUE CO-CREATION BETWEEN THE TRANSPORT PROVIDER AND LOCAL STAKEHOLDERS**

John Yellowlees, ScotRail External Relations Manager



### **ABSTRACT**

ScotRail's adopt a station policy is a franchise commitment that helps the company to improve its performance under Transport Scotland's Service Quality Incentive Regime, and endears the railway to the communities that it serves.

### **INTRODUCTION**

ScotRail is Scotland's national rail operator, a franchise until November 2014 that was awarded by the Scottish Government to FirstGroup and is managed by Transport Scotland. We run 95% of passenger services in Scotland, carrying 78M passengers a year and employ 4500 staff. We are a growing network with several line-reopenings in recent years – Hamilton-Larkhall, Stirling-Alloa, Airdrie-Bathgate and yet to come the restoration of the 49-km Borders rail link from Edinburgh to Tweedbank.

Our network comprises :

- suburban services round Glasgow and Edinburgh ;
- interurban services linking Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen, Inverness ;
- rural routes in Dumfries & Galloway, the West and North Highlands ; and
- the Caledonian Sleepers linking London six nights a week with Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen, Inverness and Fort William.

ScotRail lease 346 stations from Network Rail - 68 of them opened since 1984. 138 are staffed all or part of the time. Two-thirds have 24-hour online CCTV which is of cutting-edge quality : car registration numbers can be read, and the joke goes that the operators

need not buy newspapers – they could just make an announcement that would the person on Platform 3 please turn the page!

ScotRail's stations and trains are subject to Transport Scotland's Service Quality Incentive Regime under which we are scored every 28 days according to our performance on 36 criteria including litter and the condition of station shelters and waiting areas. Last year our fine fell from £785k to £460k, but SQUIRE is still the biggest risk to our business that is within our control.

### **SCOTRAIL'S ADOPT A STATION POLICY**

ScotRail's Adopt A Station policy launched in 2005 at the opening of the Rannoch Heritage Centre is inspired by practice in England and Wales (which in the absence of SQUIRE included fault reporting). It is a franchise commitment that aims to create pride in community achievement, making the station a place that people are comfortable about visiting. Vandalism is deterred by 24-hour online CCTV and because it comes to be about trashing the community rather than attacking some faceless agency.

The policy divides into three aspects :

- gardening
- empty buildings
- artwork

#### Gardening



Station gardens hark back to a golden age of rail travel, yet even where a station is staffed its team rarely has the time to recapture this dimension whose seasonal variations can please daily travellers and first-time visitors alike

Adopters that are now doing gardening at 127 of our 346 stations range from Community Councils, Rotary Clubs and Keep Scotland Beautiful members to schools, colleges or solo individuals. They help deliver social inclusion: planter suppliers include the National Autistic Society 's Daldorch House School and HMP Glenochil, while gardeners include special-needs and mental-health groups. ScotRail has simple safety rules : we must bolt the planters,

volunteers sign in or out and wear hi-vis jackets, no use of hoses please. The emphasis is on incrementalism : you can start small, add more later. Gardening helps develop the station as a community focus: organisations that start with their stations can go on embrace the whole town, and now Keep Scotland Beautiful's Tidy Stations Standard introduces an element of competitiveness, with 12 stations awarded Platinum or Gold.

#### Empty buildings



Surplus accommodation arises often where buildings surplus to requirements cannot be demolished or disposed of because they are integral to the station and may be listed as of special architectural or historical interest.

New uses include bookshops, station cafes, model railway clubs, heritage centres, artists' studios, meeting rooms, a toy library.

Having any sort of use is of course better than no use at all since a property that is not heated or lit deteriorates faster than one that is. When the Pitlochry Station Bookshop expanded into the room next door, they found it occupied by a pile of "To Let" signs! Operational requirements that necessitated Caledonian MacBrayne vacating the rooms that they had occupied on the Grade A-listed station proved to be of benefit to their customers who during any weather-related or other disruption can now spend their time browsing in the Pitlochry-inspired bookshop created there by the Friends of Wemyss Bay Station.

Where the use is for community purposes, the occupier pays only a nominal rent: where it is to become commercial, the railway will naturally claim its stake in his or her success. An example of a successful commercial operation in previously unused accommodation is The Ironing Station at Dunblane, which provides commuters with a high-quality ironing service : no wonder its slogan is "decrease your day"!

The occupier must fund his own utilities and fitting-out costs, but assistance towards the latter is available from the Railway Heritage Trust, created a quarter of a century ago for the purpose of finding new uses for buildings on the operational estate that are listed or in

conservation areas, and the Stations Community Regeneration Fund that was established under the ScotRail franchise-extension in 2008 to bring empty accommodation into use.

## Artworks



These embrace :

- murals, notably in Scotland's two mural towns Prestonpans and Invergordon
- posters - school or heritage – which can be cost-effectively produced by sending the artwork on a cdrom to our printer
- statues and a stained-glass window, also
- wildlife interpretation – birds in the adjoining tidal basin can now be more easily viewed from the platform of the adjoining Montrose Station.

## OUTCOMES

These can include proud communities, less vandalism and lower SQUIRE fines, respect for our staff and services, and young people attracted to rail – truly a virtuous circle!

In the Keep Scotland Beautiful tidy station categories, just 27% of stations awarded Bronze were adopted, compared with 71% for Silver and 92% for Gold. Gardening at Uddingston Station has twice enabled Uddingston Pride to win its section of Britain in Bloom with special commendations for the station. Pitlochry in Bloom is an international award-winner, and its welcoming presence enables the station to “buy into the brand”. The Pitlochry Station Bookshop has raised over £60,000 in six years for five charities.

Adopt A Station also expresses the continuity of service that exists between the railway and its community. A decade ago the infrastructure was owned by Railtrack and the service operated by National Express to the specification of the Strategic Rail Authority : now the three players are Network Rail, First ScotRail and Transport Scotland respectively, but improvements have been sustained and station adoption is an expression of the railway's true ownership among the stakeholders of the communities that it serves.

## **MOTIVATIONS**

Possible drivers for station adoption could include :

- “extra-milers” could include stakeholders who do gardening because it makes business sense.
- “community-priders” are organisations such as Rotary Clubs or Keep Scotland Beautiful members who may have had no previous interest in rail but see stations as key portals to their communities, showcasing them to the passing traveller and to new arrivals (e.g. Britain in Bloom judges!) for whom first impressions may be important.
- a third element is “putting-something-backers” : individuals for whom adoption often fulfils a life-long railway connection.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

There is an association with the Westminster Government's wider political agenda. ACoRP general manager Neil Buxton wrote (1) "the Big Society is a phrase we're rapidly getting used to, and it seems that government and others are beginning to recognise that Community Rail is the Big Society! Nothing new for us though, we've known it for years". His operations colleague Brian Barnsley had earlier said (2) "we see station adoption as a good way forward for Community Rail in Scotland as at the moment there isn't the political will for Community Rail".

At the local level station adoption can fulfil achievements in social cohesion. Falkirk Rotary Club who do gardening at both the town's stations have notice-boards telling users about their activities, while Vale of Carron Rotary who garden at Larbert have Christmas charity collections there that also seek to recruit new members. Gardening at Burnside Station brought the Community Council into contact with Keep Scotland Beautiful, who persuaded them to create Burnside in Bloom for gardening throughout their community. When the Friends of Wemyss Bay Station created a vegetable garden on a piece of spare land, chairwoman Nancy Cameron reported (3) "the new garden allows nearby flat-dwellers a chance to reconnect with gardening. Already the beds are planted with onions, leeks, carrots and salad crops."

Noting that ScotRail has done perhaps more than any other train operator to sponsor initiatives at stations, Salvesson (4) in reviewing the history of community rail says it is about more than just transport and takes in economic and social regeneration, sustainable tourism, education and culture - it's about the sort of communities we want to live and work in.

Wider aspirations are seen by the Glasgow Buildings Preservation Trust who are promoting the conversion of Pollokshaws West Station to a cycle resource centre. They note (5) that their end-user South West Community Cycles aims to help relieve poverty, improve the health and education of local people and protect the local environment through the provision of affordable bike-related services and activities.

Quality is also evident to the Railway Heritage Trust (6) who report that works to create the Kinghorn Station Studios and Gallery restored a very poor condition interior to an excellent state of repair, with good use of wood mouldings and wainscoting particularly in the windows.

Alexander (7) finds that the Adopt A Station scheme represents successful community level co-creation on a number of levels. Firstly, the firm harnesses local knowledge and passion of community actors to take ownership of the environment and make improvements that offer benefits for itself, the community and a wider set of stakeholders. Secondly, adopters are empowered to customize the station outside of standard commercial boundaries according to the needs of the group and the community.

Groups are legitimised and represent their community to the outside world. Crucially, he writes, Adopt A Station is not a traditional 'outreach' community programme but 'inreach' and as a result benefits are shared between the firm and adopters but also indirectly received by other passengers. The effect is superior to all the other elements that make up the commuting experience, suggesting that community co-creation is a crucial component in ensuring a satisfactory experience for rail users in this context. Adopt A Station moves beyond altruistic forms of community engagement by utilising community passion to enhance

the value proposition of the firm. The benefits of the scheme are not simply targeted corporate investments, but emerge from engagement of the community and the relationship between the firm and the adopters.

The impact that Alexander finds on commuters is not simply related to cosmetic evidence, but may represent an attachment to the station and the community it represents; the greater the ownership of the station by the community, the greater the attachment from passengers. Within our Big Society public transport firms can therefore look to community engagement schemes as a strategic imperative and offer improvements for multiple stakeholders.



## **REFERENCES**

- (1) Train Times, summer 2010
- (2) Train Times, winter 2010/1
- (3) Train Times, autumn 2011
- (4) Today's Railways UK May 2012
- (5) Glasgow Buildings Preservation Trust annual report 2011
- (6) Railway Heritage Trust 2011 annual report
- (7) forthcoming article in Scottish Transport Review