31st March 2006

Objection to the proposed Glasgow Airport Rail Link

I am objecting to the proposed Glasgow Airport Rail Link on the following grounds:

1) Noise & Vibration – My property is an end terrace Victorian house and likely to be the closest owner-occupied domestic property to the proposed rail link as it crosses over MacFarlane Street. Noise, light and vibration pollution from the proposed rail track, which will pass directly to the side of my property at such a height and proximity to cause intolerable damage to my living conditions and quality of life. The layout of my property would mean equal disturbance being caused to living quarters at the side, front and rear. In effect there would be nowhere to hide! Additionally, the use of my garden area as a relaxing oasis of calm would be untenable.

2) Loss of Privacy – Due to the proximity and height at which the proposed rail link crosses MacFarlane Street, there will be a direct line of sight into my property, both internally and externally from passengers and staff using the trains. This will be especially intrusive to the use of the rear garden which is walled (used extensively by family, friends and myself as a relaxation area) and not generally viewable by the public at present. This intrusion would contribute greatly to loss of personal quality of life and would heighten security fears.

3) Loss of Natural Light – Due to the close proximity and height of the proposed rail link as it crosses MacFarlane Street there will be an adverse effect to my property due to the reduction of direct sunlight, especially affecting the use of my rear garden.

4) Destruction of immediate local environment – The crossing of MacFarlane Street would necessitate the felling of several mature trees from an extensive tree-lined avenue. MacFarlane Street is the ONLY remaining street in the vicinity to have retained mature trees as an important urban structure. The loss of several of these trees, the massive intrusion of the bridging structure and the bisecting of the street will have a severely negative impact on the visual amenity of the area. The positive effect of trees of such maturity is irreplaceable and even if replacement planting was conducted in the local area, no similar benefit would be accrued for generations. It seems to be another case of “death by a thousand cuts” to the remaining Green urban environment.
5) **Loss of Amenity** – The loss of the largest open sports/recreation area within Renfrewshire (possibly Scotland) would be caused with this proposed development. The St. James playing fields or “The Racecourse” has been subject to erosion and confinement for several decades and this development would continue to diminish this unique urban facility. It is extensively used by footballers, from both within and outwith the area. It is also a unique Green open space in an urban environment and brings pleasure to local residents with the facility to jog, walk their dogs, take the children for games of football, rugby, cricket, kite flying and frisbee throwing. This is, to name but some of the loosely structured activities this amenity lends itself to, and keeps individuals and families safe from the threat of traffic.

6) **Loss of Visual Amenity** – There is an understated value to the visual and emotional impact of an open green space, especially to residents in an urban environment. This can be an “uplifting” of the spirits to road users temporally passing by as a break from the built up urban structures they emerge from or, more important personally, the loss of this calming open space viewed from the rooms of my property.

7) **Impact on property value** – The proximity of the proposed route and the obvious impacts above would not only reduce the value of my property but would also be a barrier to the sale of it.

8) **Disruption to home life during construction.** Should the proposed bill succeed, not only would I have the above factors to face in the future, but during the construction process there would be the additional considerable noise, vibration and air pollution, and the general construction debris and traffic to face during the major civil engineering works that would be entailed, for a period of nearly two years.

9) **Impact on Livelihood.** I spend a great part of my working day in my home office. This means I would be exposed to the impact and disruption of the construction process and the longer-term noise and vibration for long periods during my working day, in addition to suffering these negative impacts during what should be relaxing “free time” in the comfort of my home. At present, there are road workings on the M8 airport flyover. This is causing the North, West & Centre of Paisley to experience severe traffic disruption. This relatively “minor” closure of one carriageway in each direction on the M8 must have a significant economic cost to businesses operating within this area as well as to those which involve transportation from west to east (and vice versa) of the airport as well as general road commuters. The proposed development involves “major” disruption and/or temporary closures of the M8, A726, MacFarlane Street, Murray Street, Clarke Street and additional roads over the construction period. There will also be disruption to the St. James train station service and at various times all routes into and out of Glasgow westward by rail. I do not believe that this economic and personal disruption/cost has been fully calculated and certainly know it would have a significant impact on my own business activities.
10) Non validity of “Public” consultation process – From and indeed, prior to the official “public” consultation process I have attended meetings (both public and in more focused groupings) with the Bill’s sponsor (and agents) and have been disgusted by the duplicity, lack of detail and non-timely presentation of relevant information. In addition, the “spin” presented to media and public as facts has been shocking.

Some examples of this:-

a) At the “pre-consultation” meeting held at Paisley Town Hall, we were informed that both notes and sound recording were being taken of the proceedings. I requested and was personally promised at the end of the meeting by Cllr Watson that a recording would be provided. I repeated this request, again, face to face with Cllr Watson the following morning while observing a BBC Radio Scotland “Sound bite” of the “Consultation” launch and again had this request confirmed. Despite several follow up requests, this sound recording has never been forthcoming.

b) The press coverage in the “Evening Times” and other media led with pictures of congestion on the M8 and how the GARL would be a major factor in reducing this. In fact, even taking SPT’s figures, in the most generous light, there would not be any significant reduction on M8 congestion by the proposed GARL project. This point is now a mere footnote to SPT’s case, but it was crucial in gaining public opinion (I, myself would view the proposal more favourably, if it were true).

This, like other information put forward prominently at the beginning of the Consultation process by SPT has been dropped or altered at later stages when SPT have been challenged on it. However, once a proposition is put forward into the public domain by a “responsible body” as a fact with wide spread media coverage, it still remains a “fact” in the public mind. What was worse is that public opinion has been canvassed by SPT from the beginning and this “coloured” opinion was retained in SPT’s figures despite their climb-down on reported facts.

I think it is such misuse of their position, along with other misinformation and the slow “drip-drip” of information, which prompted Patrick Harvie (MSP) to conclude in his official response to SPT’s consultation “...it is therefore of paramount importance that SPT displays its commitment to a meaningful consultation process and engages fully with objectors by providing more detailed information on the project and if necessary, beginning the consultation process again”. SPT failed to do this and in my view invalidated its entire consultation process.

c) Despite my comments in item “b”, the consultation process was started with the premise not to consult the public about any serious alternative to the present proposal.

Surely, the alternative concepts are what should have been publicly consulted upon. For instance, proposals that would have included Renfrew (the largest town in Scotland without a rail link) and the inclusion of Braehead (major shopping complex, a route including this does have the possibility of significantly reducing M8 congestion). These and other alternative routes were dismissed almost out of hand with vague and unquantifiable statements. Other serious proposals i.e. light rail extension from existing heavy rail infrastructure were not even seriously considered. SPT dismissed this modern cost effective approach on the grounds
that the route was too long for a light rail; despite other examples already in existence.

The "Consultation" degenerated instead into "are you in favour of a viaduct or an embankment?"

The choice of one or the other has been interpreted by SPT as a positive indication on the whole proposal. Rather like the question, "would you beat your wife frequently or occasionally?" Indicating the second as the lesser of two evils condemns you to endorsing the original concept.

A project of this magnitude surely requires proper consultation and discussion to determine the widest benefit possible. It should be a strategic choice and not a tactical "let's-just-do-this-bit-for-now".

In conclusion, I am objecting to the whole proposed bill. The objections raised above tend to focus on the St James spur; however, I believe that the whole bill as proposed at present, is misconceived and would be a strategic folly at great expense to the taxpayer with significant detrimental environmental, economic and personal consequences with minimal benefits to the community.

Yours sincerely,

Alan Hopkirk

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