This is the submission by thgRAIL, in response to the call for written evidence by the Glasgow Airport Rail Link Committee.

The Committee is seeking views on (a) whether the accompanying documents to the Bill are adequate to allow for proper scrutiny of the Bill and (b) on the “general principles” of the Glasgow Airport Rail Link Bill, that is to say; is a new railway service between Glasgow Airport and Glasgow Central Station a sensible policy to pursue?

1.0 Accompanying Documents

The documents which accompany and support the Promoter’s Bill are inadequate in a number of instances. Some of the aims and objectives of the Bill cannot be adequately explained without support or expansion of the argument by the inclusion of further details.

1.1 Glasgow Airport

The BAA Master Plan would be a useful document to include, at least as a reference document. It is worrying that the publication of this important plan has been delayed as it would have provided useful insight to how BAA views the new railway as part of their ground transportation strategy. For example, if the railway is to be part of a public transport interchange then it would make sense to design the new station to accommodate this. Such a redesign would offer costs savings; provide the airport with a shell structure below the station and remove a glaring anomaly in the connection between the station and the terminal building, i.e. the ramp is far too steep.

The Master Plan would also help explain the mysterious background to the removal of the airport fuel storage depot. It is known that BAA have been considering an alternative method of fuel storage for more than a year and this involves a possible pipeline connection between the major fuel depot at Bowling direct to the airport. Renfrewshire Council can confirm this. The draft Master Plan shows that BAA had every intention of removing the fuel store with their plans to extend the International Terminal – should the taxpayer be footing this bill?

Notwithstanding the possible alternative means of fuel storage, the Committee may wish to take account of the report being compiled in response to the Buncefield Fuel Depot disaster. It is important to note that one of the objects of the inquiry is that the “results of this work will be of significance to the industry”. Please see [http://www.buncefieldinvestigation.gov.uk](http://www.buncefieldinvestigation.gov.uk) .
1.2 M8 Bridge
The only indication of what this bridge will look like is an artist’s impression viewed from some high vantage point within the airport. This gives no meaningful insight to the actual impact this structure will have when viewed from the main vantage points of the M8 motorway. There is an opportunity now to access the motorway during the existing roadworks (terminating on 8th May) and take suitable photographs to use in assessing this structure and its impact on the landscape. For example how will it look in the context of the many motorway gantry signs at this location? Similarly, the Committee would benefit from a cost comparison between the current proposal and the more conventional form of boxed beam railway bridge. Finally, the construction method may be better explained perhaps by reference to another example. The only comparable we can find is the same structure and method as used on the M42 overbridge. This appears to have been completed successfully with the structure being put in place overnight. However this was some twenty years ago which begs the question – if it is so successful why are there no more recent examples? Is this a specialist undertaking and, if so, could there be programme implications? Is the exercise affected by seasons? These questions should be raised with the Promoter.

1.3 St. James Park crossing
Despite claims during the public meetings that there was no cost differential between a viaduct and an embankment crossing of the playing fields at St. James Park, the Promoter now admits that the form of construction used is the more expensive. (SKM Stage 2 Report, Page 48) Again as the exercise has been completed the Promoter should be asked to provide a detailed cost comparison.

It should be noted that as with the visual impacts of all the proposed structures the Promoter has again provided limited information on how the proposed viaduct will look as it crosses the football pitches. Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) has been consistent with its criticism in this respect. (SNH 110305 http://shandwick.fs-server.com/spt/uploaded/ufile121.pdf & 110805 http://shandwick.fs-server.com/spt/uploaded/ufile455.pdf). The Promoter has already been challenged on the poor quality of the scant visual support information provided. It should be recognised that the graphics are not representative, omitting major landscape features such as the massive structure of the elevated St. James Interchange.
Similarly, as suggested by SNH, the use of simple graphic tools such as photomontage or even a model should be insisted upon. These tools were supplied in support of other similar Bills and with a budget of £3m to reach this stage the SPT clearly have the resource to commission such. If necessary our own model can be loaned to the Committee for the duration of the Parliament’s consideration of the Bill.

1.4 St. James Park mitigation works
The support documentation for the Bill suggests a form of mitigation works designed to compensate Renfrewshire Council for the loss of the football pitches at St. James Park. These works have been discussed with the Council officials and an agreement was reported to the full Council in December 2005. At that meeting it was confirmed that the agreement would be formalised and therefore binding. If such an agreement exists it should be made available to assist the Committee’s understanding of the arrangement to provide temporary and permanent replacement playing facilities. Certainly without such support it is difficult to understand how the Promoter envisages this arrangement working. For example, if part of the agreement is to provide two new pitches and changing rooms at nearby Ferguslie; the Bill does not authorise the Promoter to carry out such work. In short, it would be illegal for the Promoter to work in areas outwith those shown on the plans or within the Book of Reference. The only reference to these works is contained in Page 21; line 23 of the Bill which specifically limits the recreation works to being in St. James Park.
On a similar point the SPT as Promoter gave undertakings to the actual users of the football pitches and again an explanation is required. Specifically, the SPT agreed to provide any replacement facilities before removing the St. James Park pitches. Furthermore, they also agreed not to disrupt an existing season (August to May). Such undertakings, individually and collectively have massive repercussions to the programme.

1.5 Glasgow Central Station
Extensive works to Glasgow Central Station are included in the SPT scheme. The Promoter has been informed that platform capacity to host the new airport service can be made available if other services are diverted from the main line station. This is a founding principle behind the SPT’s plans for the CrossRail project, which they are also
planning to have available by 2010. Why do we need the works to Central? Please see http://www.spt.co.uk/news/story332.html

1.6 The Programme
The works designed to create the new railway link have been assessed in terms of time and graphically represented in the Promoter’s Programme. This together with the process of the Bill through Parliament has allowed the Promoter to estimate the likely timescale for completion of project. This is reported as the end of 2009. However, without greater detailed explanation this would appear hopelessly optimistic. A major part of the programme appears to have been missed completely. The time between obtaining assent for the Bill and commencing work on site has been ignored. In that time, compulsory purchase procedures must be instigated; replacement football pitches constructed; a new fuel farm designed and constructed and all of these actions have associated lead in times in terms of design, tender and pre-contract administration. The best possible interpretation of that period of activity would be a minimum of six months but more likely to be one year. This would result in a completion date of the beginning of 2011 and the Promoter should be requested to provide an overall programme to explain their hopeful approach.

1.7 Compulsory Purchase and Human Rights
A consequence of the Promoter’s actions in apparently entering a binding agreement with Renfrewshire Council and perhaps other agreements with BAA is to create a possible upset in the compulsory purchase process. If, as suggested, the Promoter is committed to an over generous settlement with the Council and/or BAA these actions will effectively set a new record for land purchase in these areas along the route of the new railway. If the Promoter attempts to use different approaches to the acquisition of the require land for the undertaking then there would be possible Human Rights consequences. As it appears to stand, all parties will benefit from the extravagant offer made to Renfrewshire Council unless the Promoter has a strategy which includes recovery of some of these costs through a Betterment Levy. The Promoter should therefore be asked to give details of any plans to recover some of the costs in such circumstances. The current submissions suggest there are no recovery plans. If so, it would appear that the costs of compulsory acquisition have been woefully under estimated. Similarly, the Promoter’s assumptions in terms of the acquisition of land required for the rail link appear to be optimistic. In particular, the suggestion that the Rentokil site at MacFarlane Street can be acquired in part would be at variance with what appears to be happening on site. The Rentokil site has the benefit of specialist consents for the handling of industrial waste. It would appear to be difficult for them to trade from a reduced site and relocation to an alternative would hold an incumbent time and expense penalty whilst new consents are obtained. The Promoter should be asked to explain their strategy in this respect.

2.0 General Principles
The general principle of a policy to establish a direct rail link between Glasgow and its international airport appear to be well supported through the documentation supporting the Bill. However, the example of the Sydney Airport Rail Link serves as a sobering reminder that these projects can and do fail. http://smh.com.au/articles/2004/11/18/1100748146129.html.

As such, the Promoter may help by explaining the assumptions used in establishing a positive return on their interpretation of the cost/benefit analysis of the considerable
investment. All the historic reports show a patronage of 500,000 per annum. Indeed, when the proposal was unveiled to the public in November 2004 this was the figure used. Yet within two months that figure was increased to 850,000 without any apparent explanation and no evidence of a supporting study or report. See http://shandwick.fs-server.com/spt/uploaded/ufile244.pdf. Similarly, the Present Value of the Scheme Benefits moved from £239m to £294m between the two Faber Maunsell Stage II and Stage III Reports, yet the Scheme Costs only moved from £217m to £230m during the same period (Feb 2005 to Oct 2005). As a reality check, what if the Stage III Costs (£230m) and the Stage II Benefits (£239m) are correct? This would render the project as unfeasible – echoing the suggestions of the original SKM Report 2003 which did not support the economic case for a Glasgow Airport Rail Link.

The general case for a rail link is accepted. However, the economic case requires being more robust. Anomalies such as the reported increase in costs from £140m to £160m during the design period need to be explained in a more transparent manner. Likewise, the £160m price has at least three different reported formats. The important one is that contained within the Explanatory Notes which shows a contingency of some £35m. This “contingency” is the Treasury required Optimism Bias and is set at 28% of the anticipated costs. However, Treasury guidelines specifically call for this figure not being applied to true cost contingencies (i.e. sums which may be subject to final survey or measurement) and also to land costs. If the sums are reworked on that basis then the total costs fall to around £145m.

The quoted costs also appear to include a “fee” for the Promoter of something in the order of £4m – in addition to the grant of £3m already given to the SPT for the design work to date. At this stage it would be expected that a full breakdown of all costs could be given. Certainly a more transparent report on all the costs should now be available and this would assist the Committee’s understanding of the Promoter’s plans.

By the request of the Clerk to the Committee this response has been limited to four pages. However the claims and suggestions made in this document are backed by a number of reports and research documents which can also be made available if required.