SUBMISSION FROM THE SCOTTISH COUNCIL FOR DEVELOPMENT AND INDUSTRY

Introduction

1. The Scottish Council for Development and Industry (SCDI) is an independent membership network, which strengthens Scotland’s competitiveness by influencing Government policies to encourage sustainable economic prosperity. Its membership includes businesses, trades unions, local authorities, educational institutions, and the voluntary sector.

2. SCDI is a long-time campaigner on Scottish transport issues and welcomes this opportunity to provide a contribution to the consideration of the general principles of the Glasgow Airport Rail Link (GARL) Bill.

3. The objective of SCDI’s transport policy is the achievement of a high quality, cost effective and coordinated transport infrastructure based on sustainable principles, such as social equity, accessibility and minimisation of environmental impact.

4. As a way of helping to achieve that objective SCDI supports the expansion of the rail network that is occurring in Scotland. SCDI has, as part of its transport policy, called for the completion of what it sees as priority projects. These priority projects are considered those which will provide relatively significant benefits to the areas they would service and to the Scottish transport infrastructure as a whole. They are felt to provide value for money and also help to meet the social needs of the areas serviced.

5. Many of the major transport infrastructure projects currently being undertaken by the Scottish Executive were considered priority projects by SCDI, including the Glasgow Airport Rail Link.

6. SCDI supports the policy objectives of the Bill, and believes that these will bring benefits not just to the West of Scotland but to Scotland as a whole.

Support for the Scottish Economy

7. SCDI supports the Scottish Executive’s overall aim for transport as being to promote economic growth, social inclusion, health, and protection of our environment through a safe, integrated, effective and efficient transport system. Transport and the links that such a system provides obviously have a major role to play in growing the economy; the top priority for the Scottish Executive. The first policy objective of the bill is ‘to stimulate economic growth in the West of Scotland by developing the capacity and capability of the national and regional rail network.’ SCDI believes that, in addition, a rail link to its busiest airport...
will benefit the economy of the whole of Scotland. However, work will need to be done to ensure that this potential is met. Not only does the airport and the rail link support and create jobs directly (BAA predicts the number employed on site will grow to 8200 by 2015 and to 12100 by 2030), but an airport rail link will allow Glasgow to compete with other major European cities for both business and leisure tourists. Many of our major competitor cities have existing rail links for their airports to the city centre and they are increasingly becoming expected, especially by business travellers.

8. The rail link will be of a great benefit to tourism, which is such an important sector to Scotland’s economy. However, its benefits will also be much wider. Scottish organisations are increasingly competing at the global level and require not only good transport infrastructure at a national level, but also require high levels of international connectivity.

9. SCDI has been a great supporter of the Scottish Executive’s Air Route Development Fund and believes that the Glasgow Airport Rail Link will be a welcome addition. It is hoped that the addition of the GARL will help to attract new direct air services to Scotland.

10. Whilst it is welcomed that the Glasgow Airport Rail Link will allow an increased service to Renfrewshire, Ayrshire and Inverclyde (through the stop at Paisley Gilmour Street), the proposed project would be fundamentally enhanced should the Glasgow Cross Rail Project go ahead. This would allow passengers from the airport to access both Central Station and Queen Street Station and as such would greatly increase connectivity to the rest of the rail network. It is vital that this project be advanced following the Strategic Projects Review in 2007.

11. It cannot be assumed that the majority of passengers who arrive at Glasgow airport will be staying in the Glasgow area and so good connections to the national rail network is a prerequisite to the success of this project. This high level of connectivity will enhance the strategic benefits for the whole of Scotland.

12. In order to fulfil the potential of the line it should be considered whether freight, and not just passenger transport, could make use of the line. SCDI would hope that in the future this possibility could be investigated.

Scotland’s International Image

13. As mentioned above travellers have a level of expectation and it is vital for Scotland's image that the rail link service should commence in a well designed, modern and attractive railway station, which is fully integrated with the airport. As such, SCDI welcomes mention in the promoter’s memorandum to this bill that the station would offer ‘an opportunity to create a landmark structure’.
14. It is vital that the image of a first class service continues through the whole journey and as such SCDI welcomes the proposal to build a new platform at Central Station. It is vital that there is no ‘weak link’ which could compromise the image of the service and it should be investigated whether Paisley Gilmour Street Station should be modernised. Waiting facilities at this station will be particularly important if this is to be used as an interchange.

Social and Environmental Benefits

15. Figures produced by both BAA and by the Department for Transport show that passenger numbers to Glasgow airport are expected to grow considerably over the next thirty years (The Aviation White Paper estimates 15 million passengers per annum by 2030, whilst BAA predicts 24 million passengers per annum by the same year). The road which carries passengers to this airport, the M8, is already a heavily congested road, and as air travel continues to grow, will become even more so. Currently, the vast majority of passengers travel to the airport by road and it is clear that as the volume of passengers increases this will become unsustainable.

16. The establishment of a rail link will greatly improve accessibility by allowing passengers to access the airport by other modes. A reliable service will allow passengers accurate journey times without the dangers of being caught in heavy traffic.

17. As the potential for passenger numbers is met the more environmental benefits that will be accrued, including reduced use of private cars, reduced congestion and better air quality levels.

18. SCDI welcomes the proposal to make the service frequent (every fifteen minutes) with quick journey times (16 minutes). A fast reliable service will maximise the possible advantages a rail link can have over travelling by private car and will encourage more passengers to switch to this option.

19. As this project is delivered it is important that sufficient promotion of the GARL is undertaken to ensure that as many travellers as possible consider the service on offer. The services must then meet the expectations of the traveller to ensure that they continue to use the train and do not revert to use of the car. This includes, as detailed above, a reliable, punctual and frequent service with high levels of customer service provided. The impression of passengers’ will also be helped with comfortable, clean rolling stock with adequate storage space.

20. Increasingly travellers are making multi-modal journeys and this fact must be considered when trying to attract more people to use the train. Accurate and accessible information about intermodal options for journeys must be provided.
21. Connectivity would be greatly increased with the use of through-ticketing and the use of smart cards to ease the change between modes of transport, including buses and the Glasgow underground. Other changes which can improve the experience of multi-modal passengers include increased coordination between bus and train companies and the option of multi-modal tickets. This should ensure that there is no cost penalty on journeys involving transfers.

22. With regard to the social benefits, SCDI welcomes the role that the rail link will play in the regeneration of the M8 corridor and in connecting areas of low car ownership by increasing their rail options. The rail link will also alleviate the overcrowding experienced currently on services.

Conclusion

23. As this consultation by the committee tries to ascertain whether the GARL is a sensible policy to pursue, as SCDI as detailed in the evidence above, we believe that it is a policy with the potential for significant benefits for Scotland. Its potential will be maximised should the recommendations detailed in our submission be adopted, in particular the Glasgow Cross Rail project. As with all major projects in order to be successful it is important that the £160 million GARL project be delivered on time and on budget.