SUBMISSION FROM VISIT SCOTLAND

Introduction

VisitScotland welcomes the opportunity to submit written evidence to the Glasgow Airport Rail Link Bill Committee on the proposals to provide a new railway service between Glasgow Airport and Glasgow Central Station.

VisitScotland operates from over 140 locations throughout the country with our main offices in Edinburgh and Inverness. We have a considerable array of local expertise throughout our network which stretches from Lerwick to London.

As an organisation we have three key roles with related objectives. These are:

- To attract visitors to Scotland
- To engage with partners within the industry
- To add value to the visitor experience.

As the national tourism agency we have two customers – the consumer (visitor) and the tourism industry itself. We have a strategic role as the lead public sector agency for tourism to provide leadership and direction for the development of Scottish tourism to ensure we leverage the maximum possible economic benefit for Scotland. In addition, we exist to support the development of the tourism industry in Scotland and to market Scotland as a quality destination.

Consumer Attitudes

As visitors become increasingly cash rich and time poor, the journey is becoming a more important element of the visitor experience. Research suggests that visitors want to reach their destination within three hours and as the trend towards short breaks increases, easy and quick access to Scotland will become even more important, as will movement around the country.

Although VisitScotland has not carried out specific research regarding visitor preferences in respect of travel from airports, these trends would suggest that a rail link between Glasgow Airport and Glasgow Central would be welcomed by visitors to Scotland. The research being undertaken by the Scottish Executive (as referred to in the Tourism Framework for Change) may provide more detailed information.

VisitScotland does undertake a Consumer Attitudes Survey which asks a limited number of questions on transport. This identifies that 45% of our visitors arrive by plane, with this percentage rising to as much as 91% for some of our overseas visitors. It also tells us that ease of travel to a destination is important for 55% of our visitors, while 62% of visitors cite ease of travel around Scotland while here being an important factor.

Airlines

Because direct access to Scotland is becoming increasingly important for our visitors, VisitScotland works closely with Scottish Enterprise and BAA Scotland to
encourage airlines to introduce new routes to Scotland. VisitScotland is often involved at the very early stages of negotiations to discuss joint promotional opportunities. Our experience of airline negotiations would suggest that airlines are primarily influenced by the size of the market (the city and its conurbations); the economics of landing charges; and additional sources of financial assistance (e.g. the Route Development Fund, promotional activity / investment by organisations such as VisitScotland).

While links from the airport might not be a primary consideration for airlines, it should be borne in mind that Scottish airports are competing for new routes on an international level. Many of our competitors already have good rail links from their airports to city centre destinations. A rail link from Glasgow airport to the city centre would therefore assist Glasgow in competing for new routes.

Summary

In summary, VisitScotland agrees that the rail link between Glasgow Airport and Glasgow Central will be welcomed by both visitors and airlines.