

[REDACTED]

SRT 158

10/08/2022

Dear *Stephen McLeod*

I am writing in response to your Freedom of Information request which was received by ScotRail Trains Limited (SRT) on 20/07/2022. As SRT is a Scottish Public Authority, your request is subject to the terms of the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 (FOISA).

Your request

I am submitting a request for information relating to the provision of service to Pollokshaws East Train Station.

Specifically I am seeking information on:

- * The reasoning for the reduction of service to/from Pollokshaws East in 2020.*
- * The reasoning and for any subsequent decisions or discussions relating to service provision to Pollokshaws East, namely why the service has not been reinstated since that time.*
- * Information on timetable reviews relating to Pollokshaws East over the past two years, including any conclusions drawn on the basis of balancing 'demand' and 'value for the taxpayer'.*
- * Any data supporting those determinations.*

This request is based on the following confirmation from ScotRail that there are no plans to reinstate this service - <https://twitter.com/ScotRail/status/1549527532701159426>

Response to your request

Thank you for your query. First of all we must apologise for the incorrect advice you've been given during earlier dialogue with ScotRail colleagues. We are developing a new timetable for Glasgow South Electrics routes and plan to publicly consult this later this year. One of the objectives for the new timetable is to provide Langside, Pollockshaws East, Shawlands, Maxwell Park and Pollockshields West with a two trains per hour daytime service level. The requested information on our decision making process is set out below:

- The World Health Organisation declared COVID-19 a pandemic on 16th March 2020.
- In response to significant falls in passenger demand, ScotRail reduced services levels across the country on 23th March 2020 and then again on 30th March 2020. Scottish Government advised non essential social contact should be reduced on 17th March and introduced a national "lockdown" on 23rd March 2020. From then until COVID-19 protection measures were legally withdrawn across Scotland until

18th April 2020, measures were in place to one degree or another which suppressed demand for public transport.

- Train services which serve Pollockshaws East station form part of the Glasgow South Electrics service group. This comprises the following services:
 - Glasgow Central to Newton via Burnside
 - Glasgow Central to Neilston
 - Glasgow Central to Glasgow Central via Cathcart Circle
- ScotRail established stakeholder groups with NHS Boards, Local Authorities, Regional Transport Partnerships and other public transport operators in the early stages of the pandemic to agree service levels which would enable access to employment (particularly key workers) and education as well as leisure journeys when permitted. It was recognised that the service provided would always be a compromise as it could never meet the requirements of everyone who may wish to travel whilst minimising risk to staff and avoiding unnecessary cost to Scottish Government – the reduction in passenger demand increased subsidy requirements in 2020/21 by more than £400million.
- The timetable operated on Glasgow South Electrics has broadly been stable since August 2020. This provides an hourly daytime service at Langside, Pollockshaws East, Shawlands, Maxwell Park and Pollockshields West. All other stations on the South Electrics have at least a two trains per hour daytime service. All stations have an hourly service in the evening. Additional services operate via Langside, Pollockshaws East, Shawlands, Maxwell Park and Pollockshields West in the morning peak to provide a half hourly service level.
- Between August 2021 and October 2021, ScotRail held the first ever national consultation on future timetable proposals in 2021 and were delighted that almost 3,500 responses were received from customers and more than 100 from stakeholders. In our consultation document we advised:

ScotRail is not proposing to make significant changes on the Glasgow South Electric route from the current timetable. The May 2022 timetable will continue to provide two trains per hour between Glasgow and Neilston with one train per hour in the evening, two trains per hour between Glasgow and Newton with one train per hour in the evening, with a limited Cathcart Circle service. During peak hours additional services will be provided to or from Neilston and Newton, and on the Cathcart Circle. A further review of this group of services will be undertaken for May 2023 to ensure that the level of service being provided is appropriate for the number of passengers travelling.

- The reasons for not making changes to the South Electrics routes in 2022 were:
 - The COVID-19 pandemic had a major impact on ScotRail's ability to train new drivers to replace those leaving the business. The approximately 160 trainees in the driver training programme had their training suspended for 15 months as it was not possible to practice physical distancing in a train driving cab. This issue has been well publicised. The greatest impact with no trainees being passed out was at Motherwell, Glasgow Central and Yoker depots, all of which operate suburban services in the Greater Glasgow areas. This means we are limited in the number of services which can be resourced from these sites until 2023; and

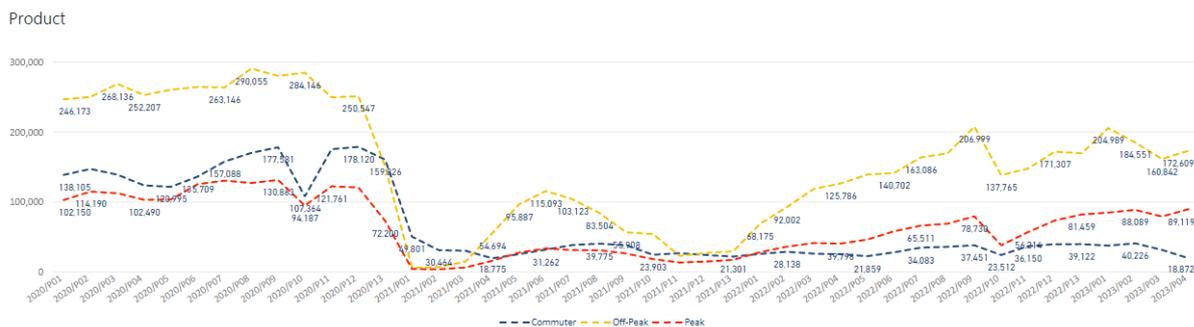
- The Greater Glasgow area has the most mature rail market in Scotland and our pre-pandemic transport mode share was greater than in other regions. The review of historical demand identified that off peak services were poorly utilised across most of the Strathclyde network. Once the impact of the pandemic on commuting and leisure travel behaviours were better understood, more effective timetables which were attractive to customers could be designed.
- In support of the consultation we published detailed analysis showing the costs and use of operating services across the country. This can be found here: [PowerPoint Presentation \(scotrail.co.uk\)](#). Not only has there never been a national rail timetable consultation in Scotland since rail privatisation but no other UK train operator has provided such transparency on how services are resourced and used by customers.
- This review identified that whilst there were some busy trains in the peaks, the majority of services were quiet. For services operating on the Glasgow South Electrics routes, during 2019, each carriage had an average load of 13.4 passengers for the time it was in service. This compares to 16.2 passengers per carriage for ScotRail as a whole. The route operated eight services per hour throughout the day (two in each direction on Cathcart Circle and two each to Newton and Neilston) and is expensive at a cost of £26.5million per year (not including the cost of maintaining track, signalling and overhead power lines) whilst generating revenue of just under £10 million. Every passenger journey on the route was subsidised by £2.32, considerably more than the average revenue of £1.31 per journey generated from fares. Nobody is arguing that rail services in South Glasgow should break even, however there are only two sources of funding for rail services in Scotland – the passenger via fares or the taxpayer. The pandemic has changed travel behaviours but not such that large numbers of people are going to start using services which they previously didn't. Part of the reason for a lower use of services compared to the national average was the availability of good alternate public transport options, namely bus on the corridors also served by ScotRail. 30-40% of the population around the stations served by Glasgow South Electrics train services have access to free bus travel.
- ScotRail published our response to the consultation in February 2022 and details can be found here [West of Scotland | ScotRail](#). With regard to Glasgow South Electrics, we advised:

In the Fit for the Future consultation, ScotRail did not propose to make significant changes on the Glasgow South Electric route from the May 2021 timetable. The proposed timetable would continue to provide two trains per hour between Glasgow and Neilston, with one train per hour in the evening: two trains per hour between Glasgow and Newton, with one train per hour in the evening, with a limited Cathcart Circle service. During peak hours, additional services would be provided to or from Neilston and Newton, and on the Cathcart Circle.

ScotRail received 393 responses from customers who travel on services on the Glasgow South Electric route. This compares to 306,000 passenger journeys per month along the route in 2019. The main theme highlighted was about frequency (83 per cent), with specific comments about school connections and gaps in the timetable outwith the normal peak periods.

The Fit for the Future timetable on the Glasgow South Electric route maintains the May 2021 timetable level of service due to the uncertainty over how demand will recover over the next twelve to eighteen months and because there are insufficient drivers due to the impact of COVID on training during 2020 and 2021. The Fit for the Future timetable will be implemented in May 2022 with no change to the level of service that was proposed. Average seating occupancy on this route on a typical weekday in 2019 was 20 per cent of seat miles provided, and with the same level of demand applied to the May 2022 timetable, that would increase to 24 per cent. A further review of this group of services will be undertaken for May 2023 to ensure that the level of service being provided is appropriate for the number of passengers travelling.

- With respect to other information which we have used to inform our analysis, the chart below shows journeys made in four weekly periods on the Glasgow South Electrics routes from April 2019 (2020/P1) to July 2023 (2023/P4). It is broken down by:
 - Commuting – journeys on season tickets and flexipass (blue dashed line)
 - Peak – anytime singles and returns (red dashed line)
 - Off peak – cheap day return and other discounted fare (yellow dashed line)



- The impact on passenger demand of the March to June 2020 lockdown (2021/P02 onwards) and December to April 2021 lockdown (2021/P10 onwards) can clearly be seen. The Omicron variant of COVID-19 was prevalent between December 2021 and April 2022 and whilst the Government did not impose travel restrictions, ScotRail staff absence increased and an emergency timetable operated for nearly two months. This can be seen from 2022P10 onwards.
- Prior to the pandemic, the commuting market was growing faster than off peak on the South Electrics routes. Following easing of travel restrictions, off peak travel grew quickly. It is now just around 75% of the equivalent period in 2019. Peak travel has partially recovered with commuting still well below pre-pandemic levels. Combined, peak and commuting travel is now just over 50% of the equivalent period in 2019.
- We know the pre-pandemic timetable on South Electrics, whilst convenient for many customers, was not well used throughout the day and was expensive to operate. It is not appropriate to revert to this in full. However we also know that an half hourly daytime service level is required in most urban areas to make rail a competitive and attractive transport mode for leisure travel. Therefore the current hourly service to Langside, Pollockshaws East, Shawlands, Maxwell Park and

Pollockshields West will not meet the medium term needs of these communities. A new timetable structure is currently being developed and we plan to consult this with customers later in 2022.

Your right to request a review

Should you be dissatisfied with the way in which the SRT has dealt with your request, you have the right to require us to review our actions and decisions. If you wish to request a review, please contact FOI, ScotRail Trains, Atrium Court, 50 Waterloo Street, Glasgow, G2 6HQ or e-mail: foi@scotrail.co.uk within 40 working days. Your request must be in a recordable format (letter, email, etc). You will receive a full response to your request for review within 20 working days of its receipt.

If you are dissatisfied with the way in which we have handled your request for review you may ask the Scottish Information Commissioner to review our decision. You must submit your complaint to the Commissioner within 6 months of receiving the response to review letter. The Commissioner's Office may be contacted as follows:

Online Appeal Service: Website: www.itspublicknowledge.info/Appeal

By post:

The Scottish Information Commissioner
Kinburn Castle
Doubledykes Road
St Andrews
Fife
KY16 9DS
Telephone: 01334 464610
Fax: 01334 464611
E-mail: enquiries@itspublicknowledge.info

An appeal, on a point of law, to the Court of Session may be made against a decision by the Commissioner.

Yours sincerely,

FOI Team