

Ambitious plans to transform Scottish rail network unveiled

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Plans to decarbonise Scotland's rail passenger services by 2035 have been launched by Transport Secretary Michael Matheson.

The Cabinet Secretary was speaking during a visit to ScotRail's Shields Road electric fleet Depot where he unveiled Transport Scotland's '[Rail Services Decarbonisation Action Plan](#)'.

The action plan is testimony to the Scottish Government's determination to deliver on its Programme for Government (PfG) commitment to decarbonise passenger rail services and continue to reduce carbon emissions.

Through its contribution to decarbonising wider transport, and through modal shift to rail, this action plan supports the aims of the National Transport Strategy, and wider Scottish Government policy. It also seeks to remove diesel passenger trains from Scottish services, and secure significant benefits for rail freight over the next 15-25 years.

Preparatory work for the first electrification projects, on the East Kilbride and Barrhead lines, is already

underway, with Anniesland/Maryhill and Borders routes also being progressed. Early work has also begun to assess how inter-city routes can be tackled to inform delivery programmes and funding decisions.

Mr Matheson said: “The current covid-19 pandemic has been a challenging and difficult time across the globe. As we continue transition through the Scottish Government’s Routemap to Recovery it is clear we need to do all we can to boost the economy through green initiatives.

“While our Programme for Government commitment to publish our plans for decarbonising Scotland’s railways was rightly paused, I am now pleased we can share them. This is particularly important for the rail industry and its supply chain who are keen to see projects progress.

“Building on our recent strong track record of delivering electrification projects we have set out ambitious but achievable plans to decarbonise our rail passenger services by 2035, five years ahead of the UK target.”

Alex Hynes, Managing Director of Scotland’s Railway, said: “Delivering on the Scottish Government’s bold and ambitious Rail Decarbonisation Action Plan is a top priority for Scotland’s Railway. We’re continually working to deliver a cleaner, greener railway for Scotland.

“Although rail is already a low-carbon mode of transport, we are committed to reducing our environmental impact ever further.

“The massive projects that have been delivered so far – the electrification of the Central Belt, new electric trains – mean more seats and faster journeys for our customers, as well as a rail service that is better for our environment. This plan will deliver even more for our passengers in the decades to come.

“It connects people with jobs, business with customers, tourists with destinations, and it’s delivering a railway of which we can be truly proud.”

David Clarke, Technical Director of the Railway Industry Association (RIA), said: “The Plan published today is very welcome and is an important step in the journey towards decarbonising the passenger railway in Scotland by 2035. The Plan sets out a clear focus on decarbonising the network through a rolling programme of electrification and investment in low carbon self-powered rolling stock, both of which the rail industry stands ready to deliver.

“We have also greatly valued the engagement Transport Scotland and the Scottish Government have had with the rail supply community in developing this strategy. The sector looks forward to working together to deliver a green railway network, for the benefit of Scottish passengers, freight users and the wider economy.”

Malcolm Brown, Chair, Rail Industry Decarbonisation Taskforce, said: “Decarbonisation of the UK economy is a challenge which requires coordinated planning and commitment from all sectors, including transport and specifically the rail sector. Last year, following extensive consultation, the Rail Industry Decarbonisation Taskforce’s recommendations as to how the rail industry would best be able to contribute to the national net zero emissions target were welcomed by the Minister for Rail.

“I am delighted to see that Transport Scotland’s rail decarbonisation plan builds on these recommendations and, indeed, adapts them to Scotland’s railway and wider circumstances, where there is the opportunity and the need to do so. We look forward to continued close cooperation throughout the rail industry to support rail decarbonisation throughout Great Britain.”

The plan looks to achieve its aims through further electrification and, for some routes, through the use of battery electric-powered trains and to work with developers of hydrogen fuel cell powertrains to accelerate their development and deployment in Scotland which is vital for the diversification of the economy here.

Transport Scotland has challenged the rail industry to work in partnership with them on this plan, providing real opportunity to drive innovation, create skilled and sustained employment, and contribute to inclusive and green economic growth.

Photo credit: Transport Scotland

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