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Campaigners press case for new stations



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Transport Correspondent

CAMPAIGNERS are urging ministers to add 12 new stations to Scotland's rail network as the Government puts the finishing touches to a £1 billion investment programme in the central belt.

Councillors and a number of MSPs have also called on Government agency Transport Scotland to consider building the new destinations into the Edinburgh Glasgow Improvement Programme (EGIP) before detailed plans are put out to consultation in summer.

When complete in 2016, the project aims to increase the number of trains between Glasgow and Edinburgh from 10 to 13 an hour while journeys on the newly electrified route will be cut from 50 minutes to 37.

The only new station currently planned as part of EGIP is Edinburgh Gateway, which will connect Glasgow and Fife services with trams going to the city centre and airport.

However, a number of local campaigns have sprung up to demand the benefits of project – arguably the biggest investment in Scotland's rail network since the Victorian era – extend to key commuter belts as well as services between Scotland's two biggest cities.

Of the proposed new stations, four are on the main Glasgow-Edinburgh line and a further four on commuter routes into those cities.

Jamie Hepburn, the SNP MSP for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth, said Transport Scotland should reconsider calls to build a station at Abronhill that date back to the late 1960s.

"Clearly the primary basis for EGIP is the creation of faster links between the settlements the lines being upgraded serve. That is a rationale I wholly appreciate and support. However, I believe there is also a clear case for utilising the opportunity presented by EGIP to consider the provision of new stations where demand and potential capacity merits it," he said.

Though drawing on campaigns that stretch back decades, the campaigners' views have crystallised during a consultation exercise undertaken by Network Rail on its infrastructure plans that closed yesterday. They pose a potential headache for ministers who will also have to decide on timetabling proposals before a second consultation this summer that could prove unpopular as some trains are shunted aside to make way for the increase in Edinburgh-Glasgow services.

Most controversially, ministers will have to decide whether to withdraw some services from Glasgow Queen Street to Maryhill and Anniesland which many fear could be the kiss of death for a route that was only opened in 2006 and has seen an increase in passenger numbers since.

Despite the enthusiasm for new stations, sources at infrastructure company Network Rail, which is delivering EGIP, say only two proposed sites –Robroyston in Glasgow and Winchburgh in West Lothian – have a clear business case that could make them attractive.

As well as adding cost, officials in charge of the project fear more stations would wipe out the benefits of decreased journey times by adding around three minutes per stop.

Geoff Cook, senior scheme sponsor at Network Rail, said: "EGIP will deliver significant journey time savings, not just on Edinburgh-Glasgow journeys but routes such as Dunblane to Edinburgh. If you add three or four stations on a route you could wipe those benefits out.

"Anything is possible but the danger is the project grows arms and legs and ends up trying to be all things to all people."

Project insiders say the next few months will be vital to ensure the project remains on time and budget for completion in 2016.

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