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## **Borders to Edinburgh rail extension contingency call**

**Rail campaigners are urging the Scottish government to start planning an 18-mile extension of the Borders railway due to reopen in 2015.**

Work is already under way on the track linking Edinburgh to Tweedbank.

The Campaign for Borders Rail (CBR) is making the case for extending the line to Hawick to transform its "accessibility and attraction".

Transport Scotland said the possibility had previously been examined but was not recommended to be taken forward.

The CBR is making its case during a visit of the Scottish Cabinet to Hawick.

It says that even when the new line opens, the town will remain - among places of its size in Britain - one of the furthest from the rail network.

The group argues Hawick was the "biggest loser" when the Waverley line from Edinburgh to Carlisle closed in 1969.

Simon Walton, who chairs the CBR, said that saw a train service taking about one hour and 15 minutes to Edinburgh being replaced by a bus which took an hour longer.

He said the current bus services still took more than two hours.

Mr Walton said the Hawick population had declined - losing its status as the largest town in the Borders to Galashiels.

"Two generations of Hawick people have missed out on the opportunities for access to education, employment and involvement in rail-based tourism which they would have enjoyed if the railway to Edinburgh had not been closed in 1969," he said.

CBR said it acknowledged there would be "significant improvement" in journey times from Hawick to Edinburgh once the railway opened.

However, it said that would not deliver the "step-change" which would be enjoyed by Galashiels, Stow and Tweedbank.

The briefing urges the Scottish government to review current plans for the route to ensure they are "future-proofed" to allow the line to be extended to Hawick.

It asks ministers and Scottish Borders Council to commission an analysis of the costs and benefits of such a move.

CBR also wants to see the local authority take steps to safeguard land for any potential extension.

A Transport Scotland spokesman said the Scottish government and its rail industry partners were currently focused on delivering the multi-million pound project to Tweedbank.

### **'Wider access'**

He said construction of the 30 miles of new track and seven stations would deliver a "fast, efficient railway" as well as "major economic and social development opportunities".

"The extension of the Borders railway to Hawick was considered as part of the Strategic Transport Projects Review but was not recommended for taking forward," he added.

"However, as part of the Borders railway project, SBC has formally committed to ensuring public transport systems, including local bus services and walking and cycling routes are integrated with services that will be provided by the railway to ensure wider regional access."

Part of the plans includes a transport interchange at Galashiels which will include bus connection to all other parts of the region.

It contains provision for an "integrated bus service every 30 minutes to Selkirk and Hawick meeting every train".



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