

Borders Railway line costs twice as much as it earns claim

Calls for a review of the Borders Railway line as it celebrates its 10th anniversary have been made amid claims it costs twice as much as it earns to run.

A meeting of Midlothian Council heard plans were underway to organise events to mark the line's decade of operation with local authorities asked to contribute in their own areas.

But while councillors were happy to support taking part in the celebrations they called for a review of the success, and lessons which could be learned, of the service.

Councillor Peter Smaill told the meeting that the Borders line cost £14million to operate each year but only brought in £7million in revenue meaning it was being subsidised more than it earns.

He said: "The average ticket costs £3.90, the average subsidy is £3.92.

"Scotrail's take on it is 'Borders costs are 50% higher than North Berwick despite carrying only 10% more passengers. This is different because it is two trains an hour during the day and is driven by diesel not electric train operations.

"At this point it is important to look at these financial metrics and how we can make things better."

ScotRail said the figures Councillor Smaill referred to came from a report in 2019/20 but that there were not any updated figures broken down in the same way, however they said a more up to date economic impact report from last year gave more general figures.

And they said the success of the railway was measured by more than just profits.

Scott Prentice, ScotRail strategy and planning director said: "The Borders Railway has delivered far more than just fare revenue – it's reconnected communities, opened up new employment and education opportunities, and supported tourism and regeneration across the region.

"Public funding helps to ensure people can stay connected and services remain accessible. We're proud to play our part in supporting sustainable transport and local economies."

Councillor Ellen Scott praised the impact the railway has had in Midlothian saying "the ability to get on a train and be in Edinburgh in 25 minutes is fantastic. \It has opened up all our communities on the borders line."

And Councillor Derek Milligan called on ScotRail to look at the service and ways to improve it as it moves into its second decade.

He said: "Ten years is an ideal time to assess the success of the railway. I think it has been a lot more successful than anyone thought, however its big failures have been on capacity with quite a lot of the trains.

"I think this is the ideal time to raise again the question of getting more carriages on the trains, more frequency, can we talk to the train companies about later trains for example.

"The last time I got a train from Edinburgh and it was the last one coming out genuinely the only place people were not

standing was on the roof. There were folks standing in the toilets, it was that busy.”

The council was told a working group including local authorities on the railway line met regularly to discuss issues.

Derek Oliver, the council’s chief officer place, said: “Transport Scotland has indicated it would like to do a ten year evaluation on the line and its success or otherwise.”

Councillors agreed to instruct officers to engage with the rail company over events to mark the anniversary.

By Marie Sharp Local Democracy Reporter