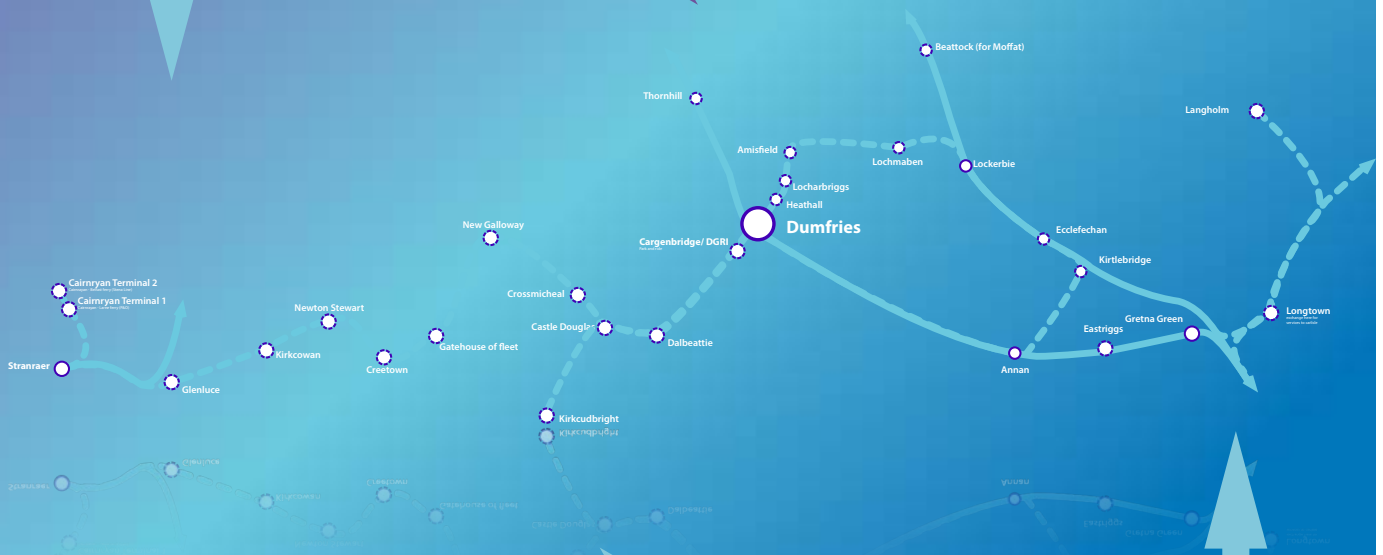


Dumfries & Galloway Rail Improvement Proposal

by S.A. Borthwick



Dumfries and Galloway Rail Improvement Proposal

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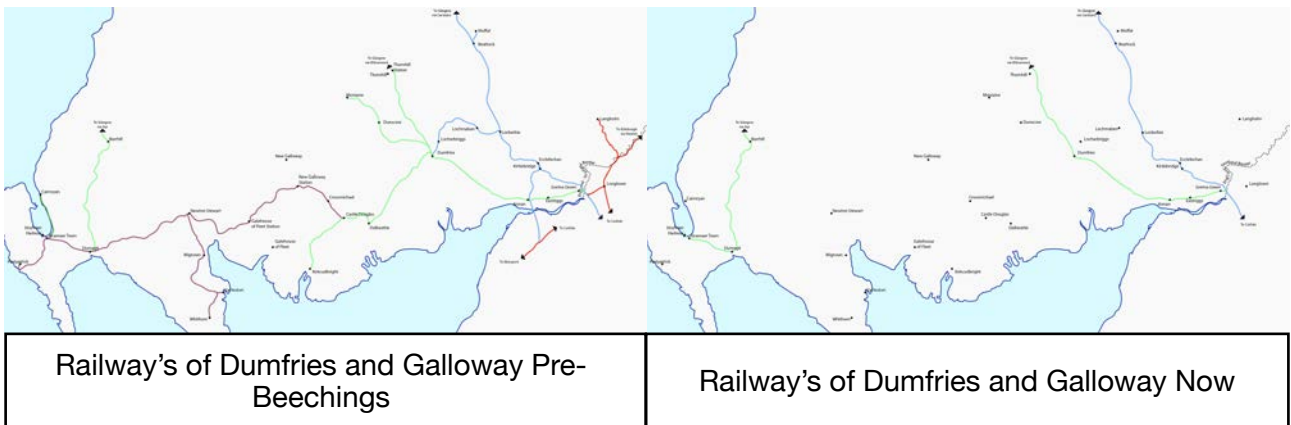
Introduction

The primary objective of this proposal is to elucidate the transportation deficiencies and potential enhancements that could be implemented to:

- Enhance existing rail transport connections
- Decrease the frequency of heavy goods vehicles traversing the region
- Reconnect local communities with the rail network
- Establish connections to offer tourist and recreational attractions, thereby benefiting local businesses and fostering economic growth

Throughout this proposal, I will draw upon other recently approved rail improvement schemes that have demonstrated comparable success with similar proposals.

History



The history of railways in the region commenced in 1847¹ with the opening of the Caledonian railway, which established a line from Carlisle to Glasgow or Edinburgh via Carstairs and Beattock. This route, now known as the West Coast Mainline, remains an essential transportation artery.

Subsequently, in 1848, the Glasgow, Dumfries and Carlisle railway was introduced², originating from the Caledonian main line at Gretna Junction. This railway subsequently merged with the Glasgow, Paisley, Kilmarnock and Ayr Railway to form the Glasgow Southwestern Railway in 1850³.

The Border Union Railway was established in 1859⁴, providing a route from Carlisle and southwestern Scotland to Edinburgh via the borders, traversing towns such as Hawick and Galashiels. This route, famously known as the Waverley route, gained significant prominence.

Each of these railways extended its network with branch lines originating at various locations within the region. Notable examples include:

- **Castle Douglas - Dumfries railway⁵:**

Opened in 1859, this line branched off the Glasgow Southwestern route just north of Dumfries station. Dalbeattie served as a crucial stopover point on this route. The line was subsequently absorbed by the Glasgow Southwestern route in 1865 and later by the London Midland and Scottish Railway in 1923. The line ceased operations as part of Beeching's cuts in 1965, leaving a small stub at the Maxwelltown oil depot. The remaining section of the route closed in 1994, leaving only a fragment of track just north of Dumfries, where it once diverged from the mainline.

- **Portpatrick and Wigtonshire Joint Railway⁶:**

Opened in 1861 as part of an extension to the Castle Douglas Dumfries Railway route, the Portpatrick and Wigtonshire Joint Railway provided trains from Castle Douglas to Stranraer and subsequently to Portpatrick. Key stops included New Galloway, Creetown, Newton

Stewart, and Stranraer town. The line ceased operations in 1965 as part of the Beeching's cuts, with the remaining section from Challoch Junction to Stranraer Harbour

- **Dumfries, Lochmaben, and Lockerbie Railway⁷:**

Launched in 1863, the Dumfries, Lochmaben, and Lockerbie Railway diverged from the Glasgow South Western Railway north of Dumfries Station and the Caledonian Railway north of Lockerbie Station. Locharbriggs, Amisfield, and Lochmaben served as primary stops on the route. The line closed in 1966 as a result of the Beeching's cuts.

- **Kirkcudbright Railway⁸:**

Operated by the Castle Douglas, Dumfries Railway since 1864, the Kirkcudbright Railway extended the route to the seaside town of Kirkcudbright. The line was discontinued in 1965 as part of the Beeching's cuts.

- **Langholm Branch⁹:**

Established by the Borders Union Railway in 1864, the Langholm Branch extended from the Waverley route north of Longtown to serve the town of Langholm. The line closed in 1967 as a consequence of the Beeching's cuts.

- **Moffat Branch¹⁰:**

Opened by the Caledonian Railway in 1964, the Moffat Branch diverged from the Caledonian Railway north of Beattock Station to serve the town of Moffat. The line ceased operations in 1964 as part of the Beeching's cuts.

- **Solway Junction Railway¹¹:**

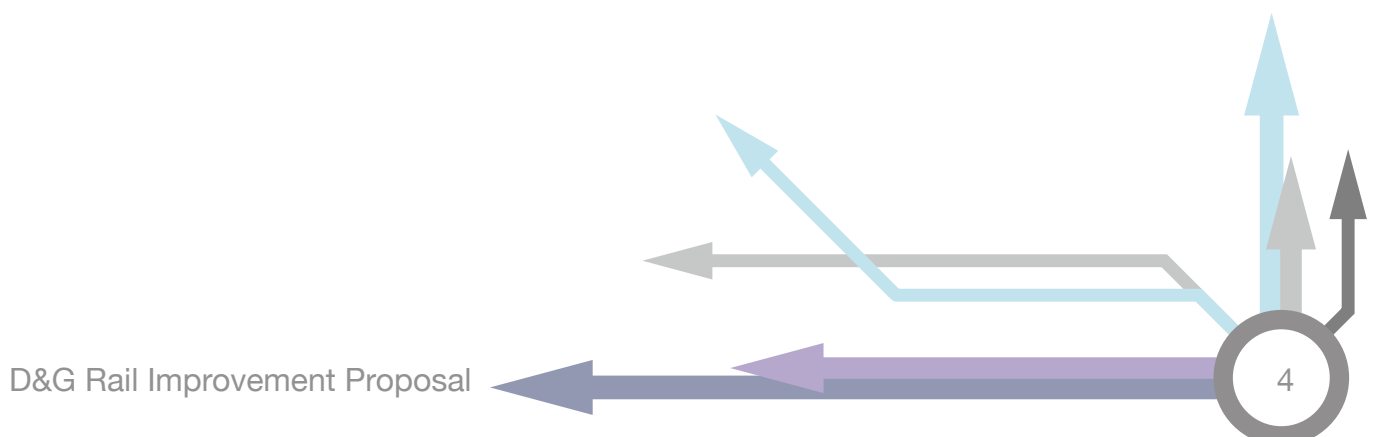
Opened in 1869 by the Caledonian Railway as a mineral line to bypass the Carlisle area, the Solway Junction Railway initially branched off the Caledonian Railway south of Kirtlebridge station¹². It then crossed the Glasgow South Western Railway just south of Annan railway, establishing a single-line connection between the two railways. Subsequently, it traversed the Solway Firth over the impressive Solway Viaduct and joined the Maryport and Carlisle Railway just north of Brayton station. The route ceased operations in 1931 due to a decline in traffic.

- **Girvan, Portpatrick Junction Railway¹³:**

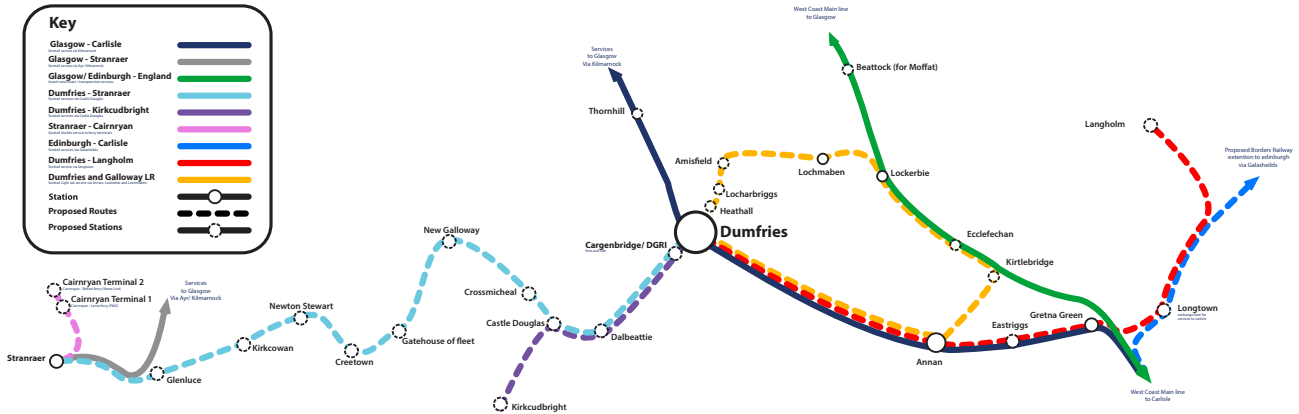
Launched in 1877 as an extension of the Maybole and Girvan Railway, the Girvan, Portpatrick Junction Railway connected with the Portpatrick and Wigtonshire Joint Railway at Challoch Junction. The line provided passenger services from Glasgow and Ayrshire to the ferry terminals near Stranraer. Although the route remains in existence, its traffic volume has significantly diminished since the relocation of the ferry terminal to Cairnryan.

- **Cairn Valley Light Railway¹⁴:**

Operated by the Glasgow and South Western Railway since 1905, the Cairn Valley Light Railway originated from the Glasgow and South Western Railway north of Dumfries, serving the village of Moniaive. The route closed in 1949 due to a decline in passenger traffic.



Service Improvements



Glasgow Southwestern Services

Currently, the Glasgow southwestern services are operated by Scotrail¹⁵ and provide comprehensive coverage. The only potential changes would involve the introduction of new rolling stock that operates more environmentally friendly than the existing BR Class 156¹⁶ trains currently in service.

To introduce an intercity service to Edinburgh, connecting Carlisle to Dumfries, Kilmarnock, Barrhead (for services to Glasgow), and then continuing to Edinburgh via Motherwell and Haymarket, join the west coast Mainline via Muirhouse south junction. Similar services, such as Ayr to Edinburgh via Glasgow low level platforms, are already available.

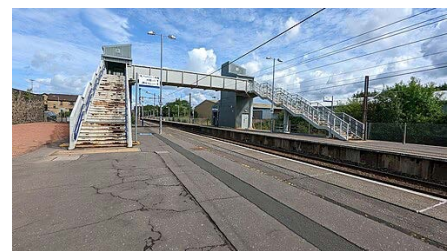


Scotrail Class 156 currently running services on the Glasgow southwestern services

West coast Mainline Services

Running select West Coast Operated trains (currently Avanti¹⁷ and Transpennine Express¹⁸) on this route during diversions would allow the south west of Scotland to connect to major cities like London, Birmingham, and Manchester without the need to change trains.

Another option that could be reintroduced is the direct service from Glasgow to Newcastle and the service from Stranraer to Carlisle via Kilmarnock or Annbank. These services once operated but were discontinued due to objections from the franchise holders at the time. However, both Scotrail¹⁹ and Northern²⁰ are now government-operated entities, which presents an opportunity for some services to resume.



Lockerbie station with its new footbridge in July 2022



Scotrail Class 380 and class 385 capable of running services on the west coast mainline

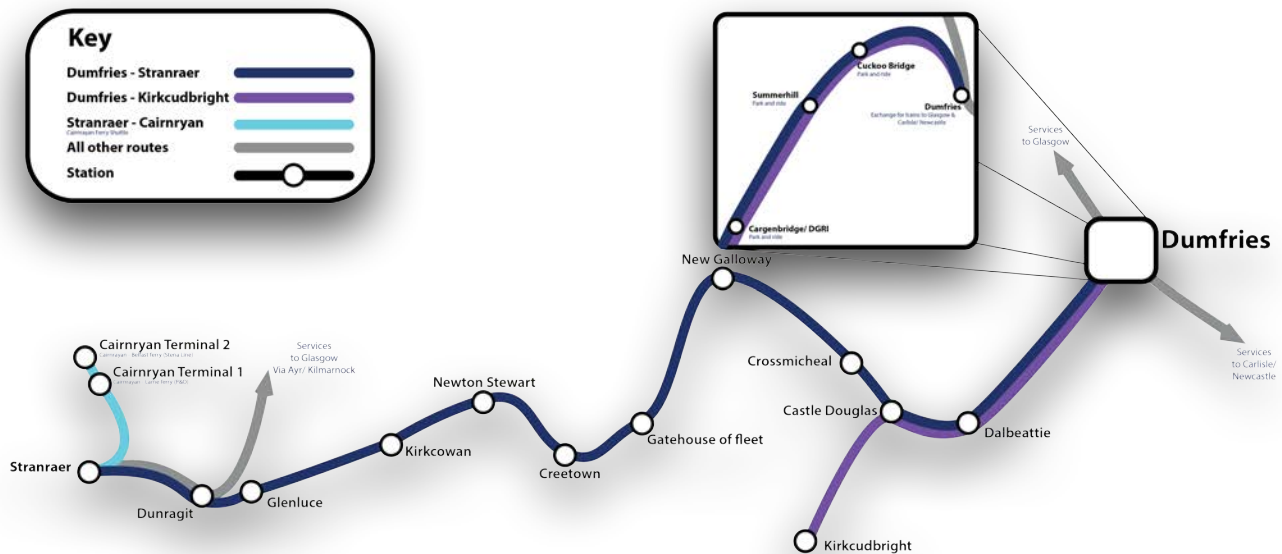
Any further service improvements would require the development of new routes and infrastructure, which will be addressed in a separate section.

Currently, Lockerbie²¹ is only station in Dumfries and Galloway that is on the West Coast Main Line. Out of the 93 trains that are routed past Lockerbie, only 42 stop there. This is a slight improvement from the 2023 timetable in which only 36 of the 89 trains stopped at Lockerbie, which is less than half, With the majority of the service is provided by Transpennine Express²².

Services could be improved on the route if, as previously mentioned, the select service could be routed via the Glasgow southwestern route Ayr or Glasgow, freeing up the timetable for Scotrail to provide a stopping service on the route between Carlisle and Glasgow or Edinburgh. This could be made easier with the creation of a bi-directional loop platform at Lockerbie, which would allow the stopping service to be overtaken by the intercity services.

New Routes and Stations

Dumfries to Stranraer/Kirkcudbright



The Proposed Route

The proposed route would be implemented in three phases, similar to the Borders Railway²³. Phase 1 would involve reopening the line from Dumfries to Kirkcudbright via Dalbeattie and Castle Douglas. Phase 2 would see the route fully reopened as far as Carlisle (subject to approval).

Currently, a campaign is underway to reintroduce services between Dumfries and Stranraer via a newly constructed line²⁴.

Phase 1

This phase would reopen the line from Dumfries to Kirkcudbright via Dalbeattie and Castle Douglas. This would reintroduce services to the area for the first time since 1965. Services would commence from Carlisle/Dumfries and follow the original route, which is largely undeveloped. Potential stops include:

- Cuckoo Bridge Retail Park²⁵:**
 This would provide connections with various high-end retailers, travel links for the Lochside/Lincluden/Sandside areas of Dumfries, and access to the Queen of the South football team for traveling supporters.
- Cargenbridge:**
 This stop would provide services to the village of Cargenbridge, located on the outskirts of Dumfries near Dumfries and Galloway Royal Infirmary²⁶. The station would offer car-free transport to the hospital and could also serve as a park-and-ride stop for access to the town centre, situated just off the A75.
- Dalbeattie²⁷:**
 The original rail route in and out of Dalbeattie has undergone significant development. However, as exemplified by other new railways such as the Borders Railway²⁸ and HS2²⁹, there are areas that would allow the railway to be rerouted around the town if compulsory purchasing the

original land is not feasible. The town, like most locations on this route, would benefit from being reestablished with the country via the railway. This would facilitate leisure travel to hiking and mountain biking destinations similar to the Highlands of Scotland³⁰ or Oxenholme³¹ in the Lake District, which attract a substantial leisure traffic.

- **Castle Douglas³²:**
The original routes and station at Castle Douglas have been developed, but there is also space for alternative routes. This area would benefit from leisure and tourist connections.
- **Kirkcudbright³³:**
a seaside town, would benefit from reconnection with the rail network. Many fishing villages along the country have experienced this, as it attracts tourists to sample local seafood and enjoy beach walks. Kirkcudbright's former railway service provided similar benefits.

The first phase would allow services to be phased in, build revenue, and establish core passengers and services, similar to how borders railways have done. This approach would be beneficial for the area, which has been isolated from public transport for years. Limited bus services and a two-hour service from Carlisle are inadequate.

Phase 2

Phase 2 would see the existing Stranraer-Glasgow Line reconnected with [Phase 1](#). This would reintroduce one of the most scenic routes in the country, along with lines such as the Settle-Carlisle railway and the Highland railway. This would attract many tourists and rail tours, as it once did. Even if the railway followed its original route or a modified one, as other opened routes have done, it would retain its stunning scenery.

Potential alterations to the route could see stations placed closer to their original locations, some of which were quite distant from the towns they served. This may have contributed to low passenger numbers and ultimately the route's decline. However, potential stops (excluding those mentioned in [Phase 1](#)) could include:

- **Crossmichael³⁴:**
A small village north-west of Castle Douglas, adjacent to Loch Ken. This would provide ample water and leisure activities, as well as potential housing developments.
- **New Galloway³⁵:**
A small, isolated town near the tip of Loch Ken. The town would greatly benefit from a connection to larger towns and tourist attractions. The original station was situated several miles south of the town, but a rerouted service could attract more passengers than its predecessor.
- **Gatehouse of Fleet³⁶:**
Similar to New Galloway, the original station was located some distance from the town. However, Gatehouse of Fleet is the centre of a range of tourist attractions and is conveniently located near popular getaway destinations in the area.
- **Creetown³⁷:**
Another seaside town with popular historic and tourist attractions, as well as potential housing development opportunities. A rail link to larger towns would benefit Creetown.
- **Newton Stewart³⁸:**
The last of the major towns on the route to Stranraer that was left isolated with the railway's closure. It also served as a junction for the line to Whithorn. If the railway were reintroduced to Newton Stewart, bus trips could depart from the station to visit popular seaside villages. Newton Stewart had the potential to grow into a larger town, but its distance from Stranraer and Dumfries has hindered its development, and job opportunities are limited.



ScotRail 'Highland Explorer' on the West Highland Line

Phase 2 would significantly benefit the area by providing more jobs and generating an economic boost. The region currently lacks these essential elements, and the potential exists for their implementation. The Highlands of Scotland currently benefit from a leisure service provided by a modified carriage (BR class 153³⁹) attached to another unit, accommodating bikes and skis⁴⁰. The potential exists to replicate this type of service in Dumfries and

Galloway.

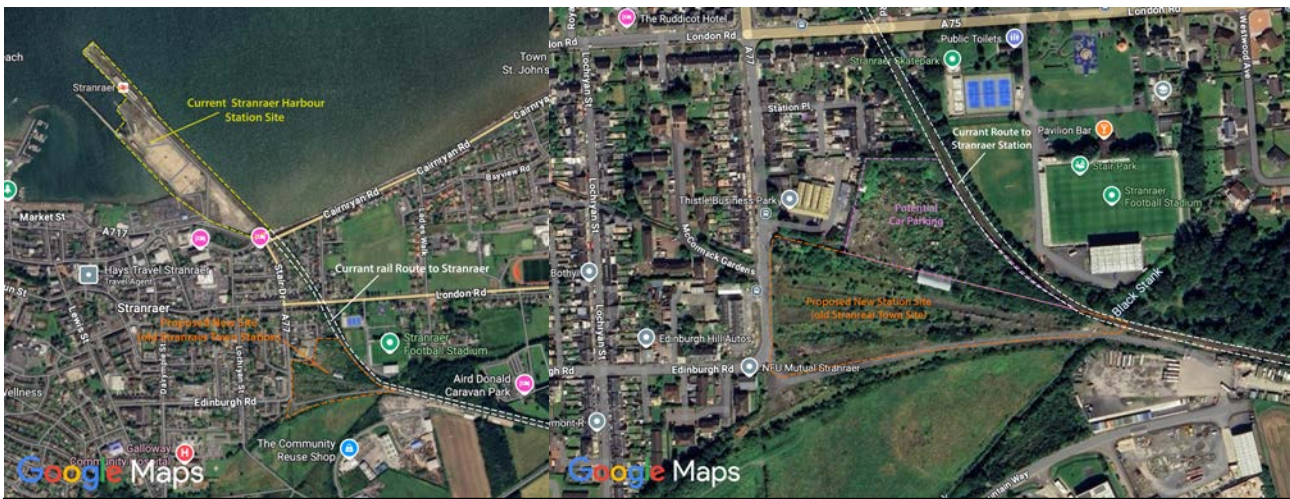
Phase 3

This proposal envisions the construction of a newly built branch line utilising the route of the Cairnryan military railway⁴¹ to connect the two ferry terminals at Cairnryan⁴². This development should have been a priority when considering the relocation of the ferry terminal from Stranraer to Loch Ryan⁴³.

Along the route between the terminals, a freight exchange terminal could be constructed to facilitate the loading and unloading of lorries onto ferries. This would eliminate the need for hundreds of lorries to travel long distances to reach the ferries, thereby benefiting local lorry companies and creating job opportunities in the region.

Furthermore, this project would alleviate the congestion caused by lorries using the A75 and A77, which campaigns⁴⁴ are advocating for to be upgraded to motorway or dual carriageway status.

The potential for shuttle services from Stranraer station to the ferry terminals, coupled with the existing station's location on the former pier rather than closer to the town centre, further enhances the feasibility of this project.

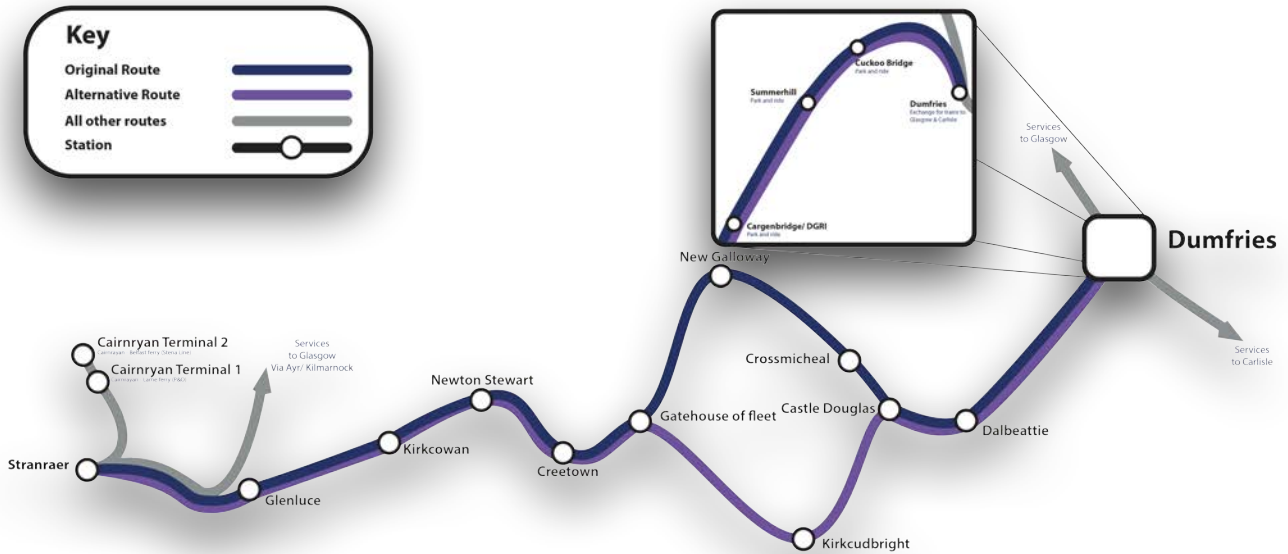


L: Map Showing location of Stranraer Town Hotel Compared to Stranraer Harbour
R: Overview Showing Potential Space available for New Station Site

I propose repurposing the land currently occupied by Stranraer Town railway station⁴⁵, which closed in 1966 for passenger service and was completely closed in 2009. The track was lifted in 2017. This repurposing could accommodate three to four terminating platforms, which could serve existing services from Glasgow and new services from Dumfries and Loch Ryan ferry terminals. Additionally, there would be space for potential Caledonian Sleeper services⁴⁶ from London and charter trains that occasionally utilise the current station.

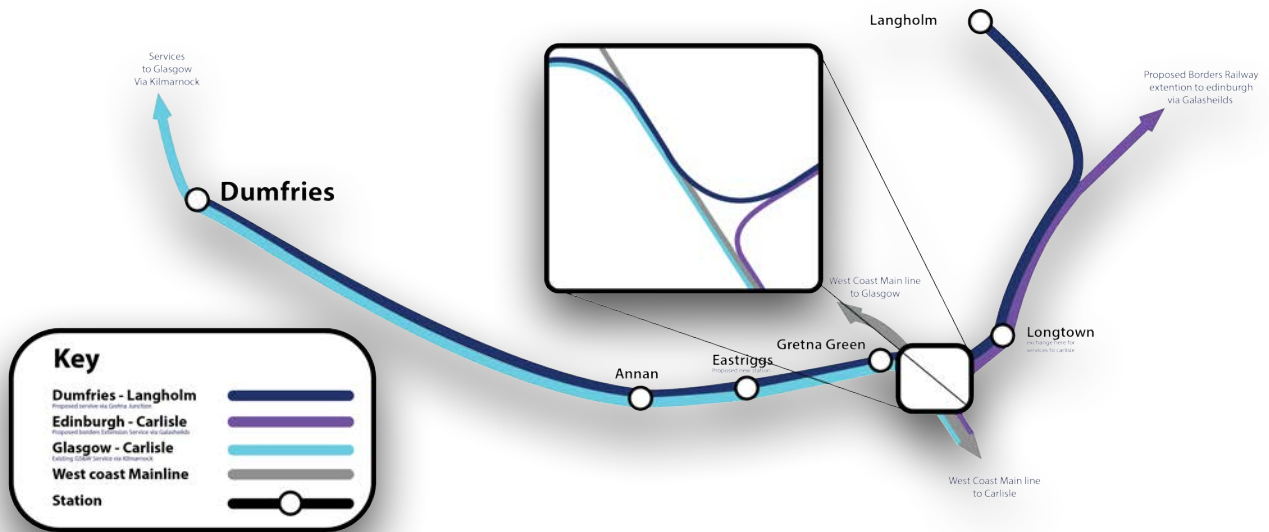
By transforming Stranraer into a more comprehensive ferry exchange station, this project has the potential to significantly increase passenger numbers from the current level.

Alternative route

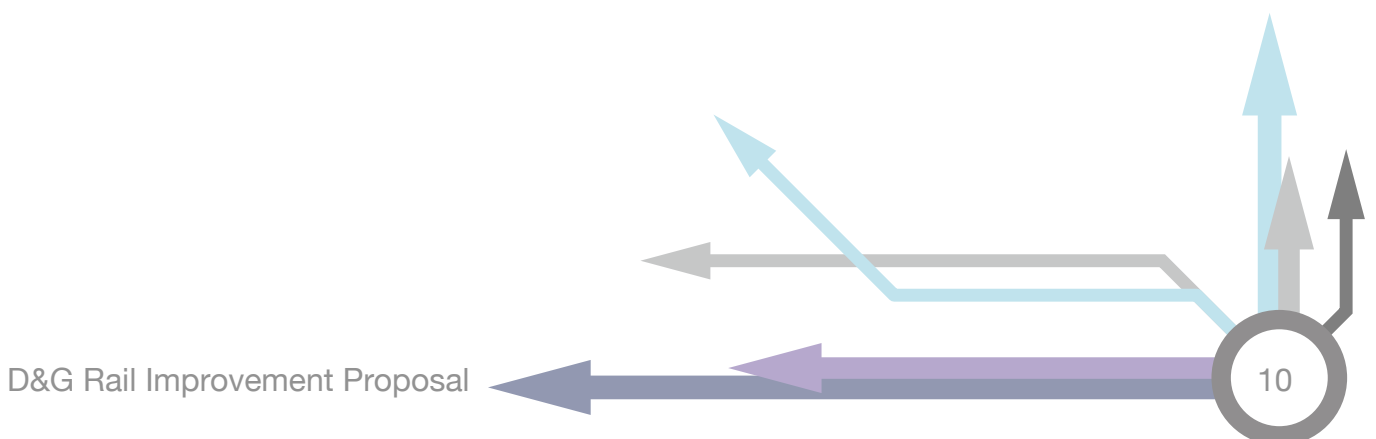


An alternative route presents itself, potentially more straightforward and efficient. This coastal route would circumvent Crossmichael and New Galloway, establishing a new southern site for Gatehouse of Fleet station. This development would enable the station to operate closer to the town. The construction of this alternative route would be undertaken in three phases, mirroring the process of the original route.

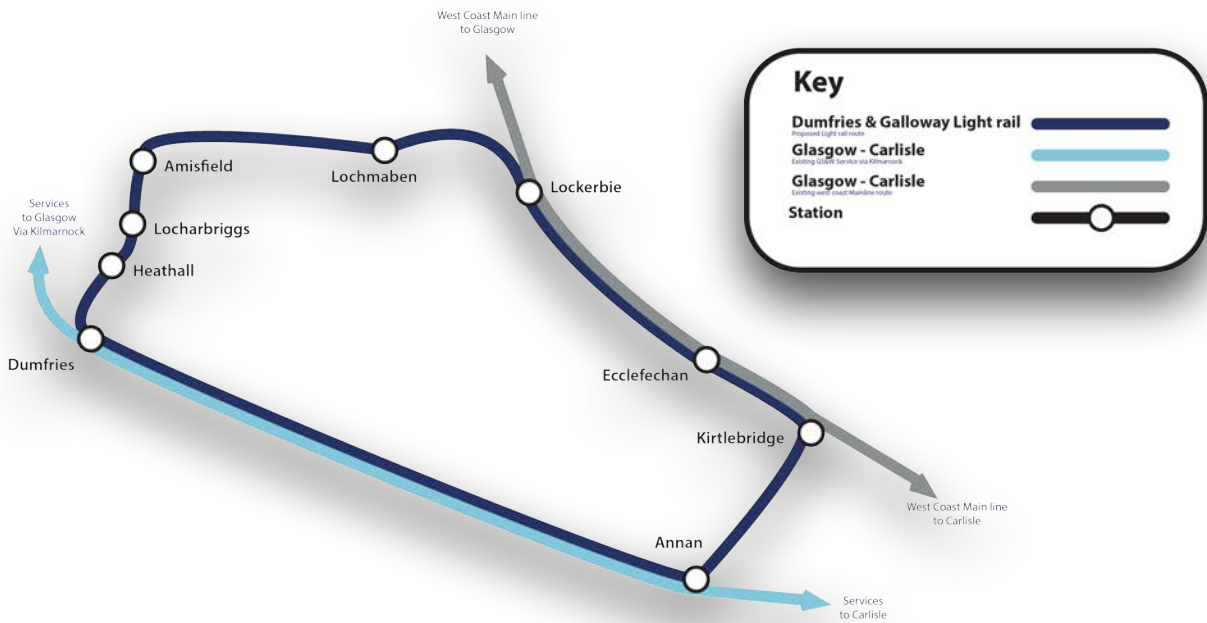
Gretna Junction to The Borders/ Langholm



As previously mentioned, there is currently a campaign to extend the existing borders railway from Tweedbank⁴⁷ to Carlisle via Melrose⁴⁸, Hawick⁴⁹, and Newcastleton⁵⁰, utilising most of the original route. However, one potential divergence occurs in the line's connection with the existing West Coast Main Line. South of Longtown, the route is heavily developed. One proposed solution is to utilise the current Ministry of Defence route from Longtown, which was constructed on the former North British Railway route from Longtown to Gretna. This alignment would facilitate a potential connection between Dumfries and the southern regions of Scotland and Edinburgh and the Borders. Other potential services could be introduced by relinking Langholm with the newly constructed borders railway. It appears that the plan is to use the existing route via Newcastleton instead of Langholm, as the original company intended when planning the original route. However, Langholm, like most locations in the Borders and the southern regions of Scotland, has suffered from the withdrawal of railway links and significant industrial decline. Consequently, similar to the locations currently served by the current borders railway, these areas will experience substantial economic growth with the introduction of a railway that connects major cities and facilitates connections with other routes.



Dumfries and Galloway Light Rail



The proposed circle route has been previously discussed locally and envisions the line branching northward from Dumfries along the Glasgow Southwestern railway. This branch would follow the historic Dumfries, Lochmaben, and Lockerbie route through Heathhall, Locharbriggs, Amisfield, Lochmaben, and ultimately connect with the West Coast Mainline north of Lockerbie. From there, the line would branch off north of Kirtlebridge and follow the Solway Junction Railway towards Annan, where it would join the main line just south of the town, completing the circle.

While navigating the original routes may pose challenges, a variant of this route could establish commuter links between three of the four larger towns on the eastern side of Dumfries and Galloway. This would enhance train connections to the south and north of the country via Lockerbie and Dumfries, potentially with stops at Heathhall/Locharbriggs, Amisfield, Lochmaben, Kirtlebridge, and the Green Energy Hub at the former Chapelcross power plant⁵¹. Furthermore, the regulation of trains on the west coast could benefit from the potential for a Loop Platform at Lockerbie.

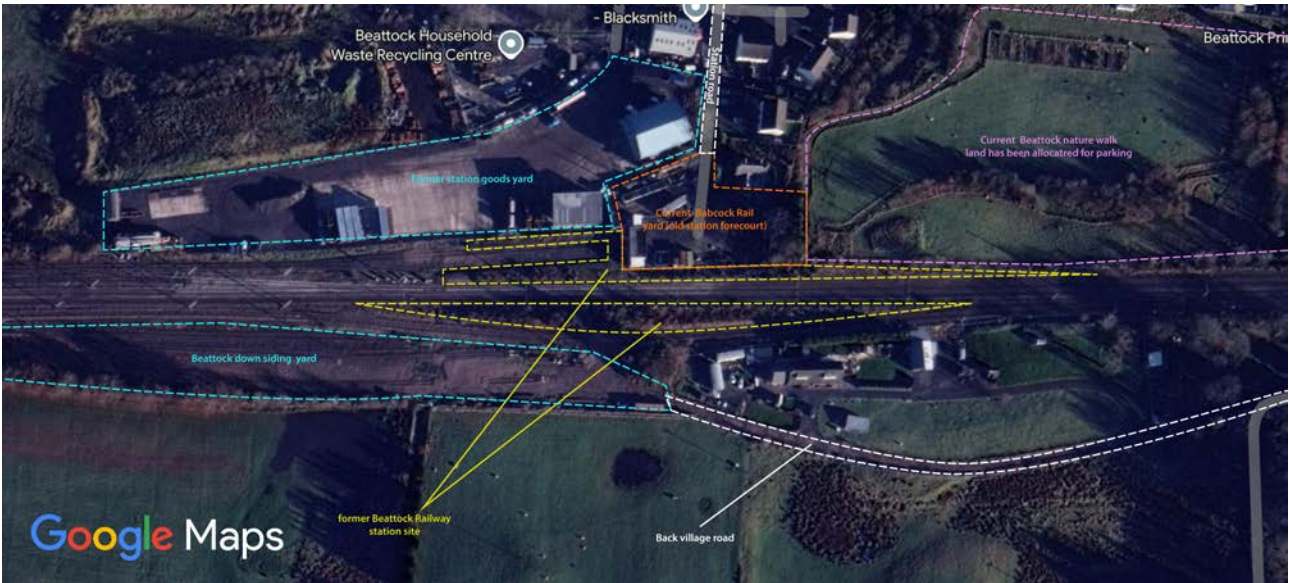
Current Lockerbie Station Track layout



Gretna Junction North

Constructing a north-facing junction at Gretna Junction would enable trains to reach Edinburgh via Gretna and the West Coast Mainline. This junction could also serve as the northern terminus of the previously proposed circle route. Additionally, it would facilitate connections from the capital that are currently limited to routes via Carlisle or Glasgow. The primary challenge with this proposal is the engineering complexity involved, but as demonstrated by recent projects such as HS2, engineering feats are achievable.

Beattock Railway Station



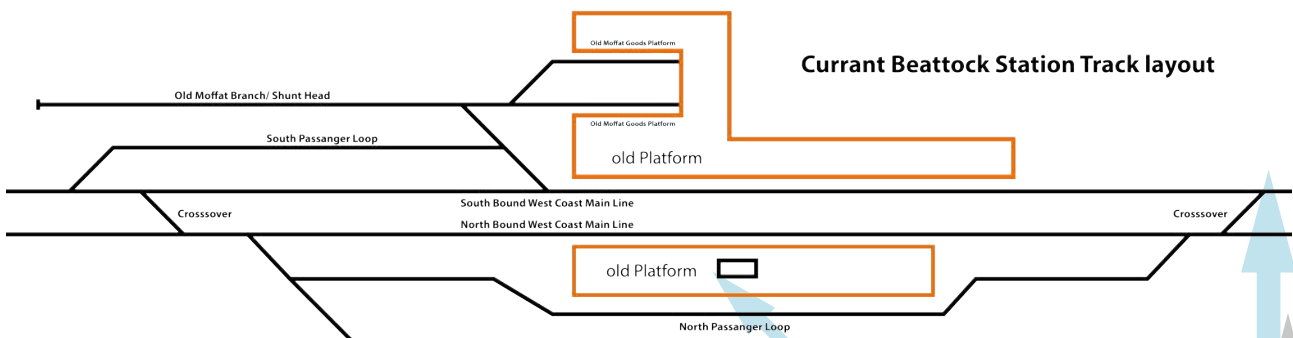
At one point, Beattock station⁵² was the most northerly station on the line from London to Scotland. This was due to the steep gradient towards Beattock Summit⁵³. The line was eventually extended with the introduction of more powerful locomotives and the introduction of banking locomotives for the heavier trains. The station became a popular stop for people wishing to visit the bath town of Moffat, which was famous for its spa water⁵⁴ from 1633, as it was believed to have healing properties. This led to Moffat becoming a popular tourist destination from then to this day. From 1883 to 1964, there was a branch line to Moffat from Beattock, which allowed tourists to alight from trains on the mainline and board the local train to Moffat to take in the attractions Moffat had to offer at the time.

The area has undergone significant changes, but Moffat remains a popular visitor destination. The area has become more of a commuter location with the introduction of the M74.

The introduction of a train station in Beattock would promote the area as a popular commuter location. It is situated in the middle of Glasgow, Edinburgh, and Carlisle on the West Coast Main Line and has the luxury of having a passing loop on the north side of the line, which would allow the stopping trains operated by Scotrail (presumably) to be passed by the intercity trains operated by Avanti and Transpennine Express. This is also a possibility at Lockerbie railway station on the southbound platform as mentioned previously, potentially providing a regular stopping service on this route, which is not only demanding here in Dumfries and Galloway but also in Lanarkshire.

Currently, an action group is campaigning to reopen the station⁵⁵.

Method



Currently, the majority of Beattock station has been demolished, including buildings, platforms, and a footbridge. The station concourse is entirely unrecognisable, with the space occupied by permanent way Portakabin's and equipment rooms. However, none of these structures impede the construction of the station. The Portakabin's can be relocated to the opposite side of the



station site, but there is sufficient space to develop the site, as the Beattock community council, which owns the field to the south of the site, has allocated space for car parking.

The platforms, as observed in new stations such as East Linton⁵⁶ and Reston⁵⁷ on the East Coast Main Line⁵⁸, can be constructed during engineering works without disrupting railway operations.

The most pressing question is whether Beattock should be built as a two or three-platform station. The third platform could be constructed along the north passenger loop, and alterations to the track and signalling would enable both north and south-bound services to utilise the platform using the crossover points located to the north and south of the current site. This would allow other services to pass through without delay. This process is similar to that at Lockerbie, although the north loop would be used for the third platform in this instance.

Thornhill



The original Thornhill station⁵⁹ closed in 1965, but the site remains largely unchanged. The station house is now flats, and the platforms remain as they were on the day of closure. The station is situated in the middle of the longest stretch of the line without a station between Sanquhar⁶⁰ and Dumfries⁶¹. Although the station is located on the outskirts of the town, approximately a mile away, this proximity would facilitate the redevelopment of the site to modern standards, as the surrounding area is relatively undeveloped.

The reintroduction of a station at Thornhill would enhance connectivity to the town and the nearby Drumlanrig Castle⁶², the residence of the Duke of Buccleuch and Queensberry⁶³, a popular tourist destination in southern Scotland. This would generate additional income for the region. Additionally, it would alleviate the gap between Dumfries and Sanquhar, reducing the travel distance for residents.

Currently, an action group is actively campaigning to reopen the station⁶⁴.

Method

The method of reintroducing a station at Thornhill can be undertaken in one of two ways:

- **Method 1:**
Revitalise the existing station, which remains largely intact, by extending and elevating the platforms to meet contemporary standards. This can be accomplished by extending the northbound platform back towards Dumfries by a suitable distance and extending the southbound platform over the road, away from Dumfries. The latter aspect of this proposal presents the most substantial challenge, as the bridge abutment situated near the station would necessitate extension to accommodate the new platform. However, this extension is not an insurmountable obstacle.
- **Method 2:**
This method proposes constructing a new station on a site situated just north of the original one. This approach is preferable for accessibility reasons, as it would facilitate the installation of a contemporary footbridge for disabled individuals and provide easier access to parking facilities. Furthermore, it would enhance the overall cleanliness of the site, as it would not be restricted to the existing boundaries.

Eastriggs



Located approximately halfway between Gretna and Annan, Eastriggs boasts a significant military history. The village is home to two Ministry of Defence sites, including Longtown. During World War I, the site served as Britain's largest cordite factory and featured a network of narrow and standard gauge railways that remain connected to the national rail network to this day.

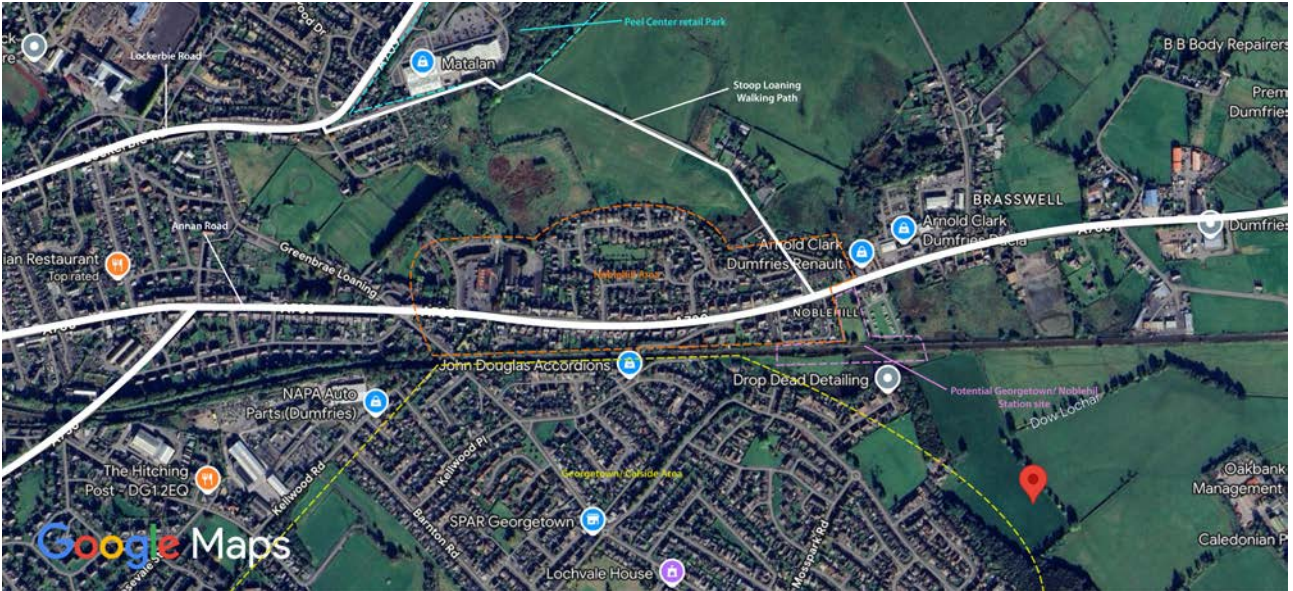
The site has been acquired by Rail Sidings LTD⁶⁵, which intends to transform it into a railway storage and maintenance depot. Eastriggs has experienced recent development, with the construction of new homes. This development has positioned the village as a potential primary location for a railway station, catering to commuters. The village's proximity to the renowned Devil's Porridge Museum⁶⁶ further enhances its appeal as a tourist destination.

Currently, an action group is actively campaigning to reopen the station⁶⁷.

Method

The simplicity of this proposal lies in the straightforward process of selecting a suitable site and constructing a station there. Eastgriggs is situated in an area where, provided the necessary land is acquired, the construction of a platform and the subsequent building of a track can be accomplished without significant obstacles.

Georgetown/Noblehill



In the Dumfries suburbs of Georgetown and Noblehill, a station in isolation, considering its proximity to Dumfries Railway Station, may not significantly benefit the area. However, when considering proposed initiatives such as the Stranraer line, which includes stations in other Dumfries suburbs, and the potential of the circle route with additional stops, the station's importance could be enhanced.



Method

The station could be constructed on land that is currently undeveloped and relatively unused. Road access to the site and car park would be achieved by extending a road from the roundabout at Oakfield Drive and a Mossbank Road. Foot access would be possible through the park on Annan Road. Additionally, there is potential access and parking space on Annan Road at the Craigsview and trailer centre, which is currently closed.

Conclusion

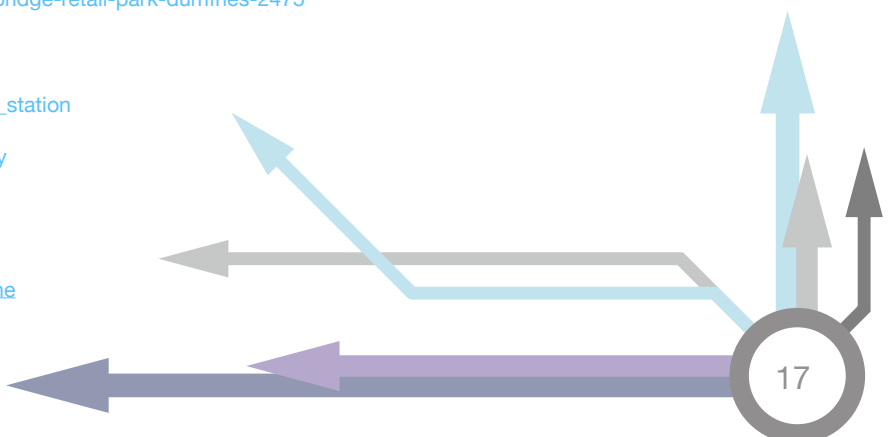
As mentioned in the proposal's history section, Dumfries and Galloway is severely affected by the beaching cuts. Re-establishing rail links would greatly improve community connections within and outside the region. This would alleviate the strain on under-invested road systems and better link D&G to major British towns and villages. It would also provide a better connection with Northern Ireland, making the nation feel more unified instead of isolated.

The Stranraer to Dumfries section of this document should be strongly considered. It would link Dumfries with Stranraer, relieving the strain on the A75 road. It would also link Ireland with London. This line was once a major artery and a huge oversight when it was considered for closure.

Beattock station proposal is one of the strongest in the country for reopening. Considering the infrastructure at the location, a decent service could be implemented between Carlisle and Glasgow and Edinburgh. As mentioned, the stretch of line has been starved off a decent service under the West Coast and Transpennine franchises.

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⁵⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moffat#Early_tourism_as_a_spa_town

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⁵⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/East_Coast_Main_Line

⁵⁹ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thornhill_railway_station_\(Scotland\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thornhill_railway_station_(Scotland))

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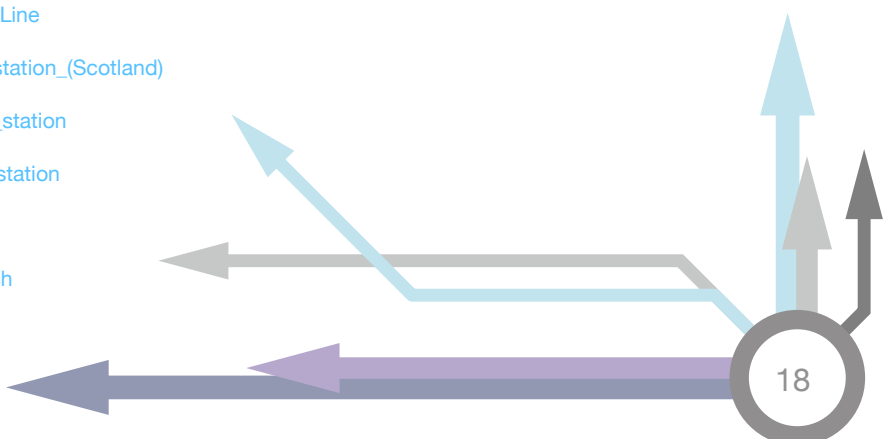
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