

# Full steam ahead for new St Andrews railway station?

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The feasibility of reintroducing a railway station to St Andrews was discussed at length on Friday 18 May, following the station's closure after government cuts in 1969. A report, produced by York-based Tata Steel UK Rail Consultancy Ltd. and commissioned by campaigning group St Andrews Rail Link (STARLink), was unveiled in the Best Western Scores Hotel in front of an audience consisting of transport professionals and representatives of the tourist industry.

With the report concluding that, although it would cost £76 million to construct a new railway line, profits would reach up to £1.63 million annually, how likely would a train station in St Andrews be; and just how much do St Andrews citizens need one?

Advantages of having a rail line linking St Andrews to the rest of Fife would indeed be many. Demographically, the town has grown exponentially since the Beeching cuts in 1969, which saw St Andrews station being axed along with more than 2,200 others across the United Kingdom. As *The Courier* reported, the permanent St Andrews population has increased from 9,500 to 14,000 people and The University of St Andrews increased more than 3-fold from 2,000 students to at least 7,000.

This rapid influx has also seen the arrival of many more cars and, with them, policies being adopted by the university strongly discouraging students to bring them. As Rail Future Scotland told STARLink: "St Andrews is getting overwhelmed by the cars of visitors, students and locals. A railway line would improve the situation and allow passengers to bypass the traffic jams that happen at big events."

Fewer cars would also mean less noise and air pollution to St Andrews and the surrounding areas. As the Chancellor of St Andrews and MP Sir Menzies Campbell said to the campaigning group: "As a recognised tourist attraction the town deserves the best possible transport links. On environmental grounds greater emphasis should be placed on rail travel." Additionally, Sir Menzies points to the possibility of attracting even more tourists with a railway link: "A rail ticket marked London to St Andrews would surely tempt many foreign travellers."

Iain Smith, a former MSP, also told STARLink that he backed the propositions: "I have long supported the idea of restoring a rail link to St Andrews. The Open was a good illustration of the necessity for such a link. It would constitute a considerable improvement on the rail/bus interchange and the clogged roads that golf fans, tourists and local residents have to put up with at the moment."

Despite this positive feedback, how likely would a railway station in St Andrews be? Progress thus far has been slow. The campaigning group, STARLink, began in 1989 and, whilst it has slowly been gaining pace, the campaigners are still only discussing the possibility, with no tangible plans to build a rail link in view. At a time of economic recession, and with the Edinburgh tramway grinding to a painfully expensive halt, STARLink will need to up their campaign to convince railway companies to invest, and to sustain hopes that work will commence in the next few years.

With Principal Louise Richardson and First Minister Alex Salmond both voicing their support for a prospective railway station in St Andrews, and the Tata Steel UK Rail Consultancy issuing a report which indicates potential profits of £1.63 million per annum, STARLink campaigners are cautiously optimistic.

Speaking of Friday's talk, STARLink said on their website: "Keith McCartney, one of the St Andrews members of Fife Council, who was present at the launch of the findings, urged everybody to study the detail and come to a considered view, while Kyffin Roberts, the chair of the Royal Burgh of St Andrews Community Council observed sadly that, although they had supported the campaign since it began, it had taken over 20 years just to reach a concept report and though the report was very professional and carried out by a reputable organisation, there was a long way to go."

The STARLink campaign's website: <http://www.starlink-campaign.org.uk/>