Press release from Campaign for Borders Rail – not for publication until Saturday 5th September 2015

**BORDERS RAILWAY ‘A UNIQUE GRASSROOTS ACHIEVEMENT’ SAYS RAIL GROUP**

The opening of the Borders Railway [1] is a unique achievement of grassroots campaigning, says the Campaign for Borders Rail (CBR) [2]. CBR argues that the new railway, which is the longest route to be re-opened in British history, stands out from other recent Scottish line re-openings, as its original inspiration and key elements of the final delivered scheme came from the ideas and efforts of campaign groups. Reflecting on the significance of the achievement, CBR’s UK Parliamentary Officer, Nick Bethune, commented:

‘The Borders Railway should be recognised as one of the greatest achievements of grassroots rail campaigning in British history. Other route re-openings in recent years in Scotland [3] – Larkhall, Alloa and Airdrie-Bathgate – have essentially been “top down” schemes conceived and planned by local and/or central government. But the origins of the railway to Galashiels and Tweedbank can be traced back to the vision of Borders-based Simon Longland back in the early 1990s [4]. This led on seamlessly to the founding of CBR in 1998, and under the inspired leadership of our first Chair, Petra Biberbach, campaigners played a big part in persuading Borderers that they really could get their railway back – generating a 17,200 signature petition to the Scottish Parliament [5].

‘There hasn’t been a bigger reversal of a Beeching cut anywhere in Britain, and a whole region that was cut off from the rail network is now back on the railway map. Most other route re-openings have been essentially suburban in character – but the Borders Railway is very different, and nothing quite like this has ever been done before. This is a credit not just to campaigners, but also to local and central government, and to the rail industry.’

Commenting on the role of campaigners in influencing the final design of the Borders Railway, Bethune said:

‘As well as the core strategic achievement of the return of a railway from Edinburgh through Midlothian to Tweedbank, local rail campaigners can take credit for some important supporting successes [6], a number of them achieved in the face of official resistance. For example, we persuaded Parliament to include a station stop at Stow when none was to be provided, and it was our initiative which led to the saving of the original 1849 station building at Stow from demolition. Crucially, years of research and lobbying by us – plus the input of Claudia Beamish MSP – convinced Transport Minister Keith Brown in 2012 that the Tweedbank station track layout should be redesigned to take 12-coach tourist trains, providing the basic infrastructure needed to bring additional tourist spend to the Borders. More recently we persuaded Transport Scotland that the Borders Railway Class 158 trains should be refurbished to provide a better experience for commuters and tourist alike. The new railway offers much more than it would have done without the efforts of hundreds of unpaid campaigners over the last 17 years.’

**MORE INFO:**

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**NOTES FOR EDITORS:**

[1] When ScotRail train services begin running on Sunday 6th September, the 30½ miles of newly constructed railway from Newcraighall in south-east Edinburgh to Tweedbank will represent the longest line to open in Scotland since the Fort William-Mallaig railway in 1901. Edinburgh-Tweedbank trains will cover 35 route miles between Waverley Station and the line’s terminus. ‘Golden Ticket’ trains for community activists and prize draw winners will operate over the line on Saturday 5th September.

[2] The Campaign for Borders Rail (CBR), established in 1998, is one of Britain’s most successful grassroots rail campaigns. CBR’s initial aim will be realised on 6th September when ScotRail services begin running over the new Borders Railway from Tweedbank and Galashiels to Edinburgh – bringing trains back after an absence of more than 45 years. CBR’s next objective is to see the railway extended to Hawick and Carlisle, completing the return of the Waverley Route closed in 1969 as part of the ‘Beeching cuts’ – which saw the Borders become the only region of Britain without a rail service, and left Galashiels and Hawick further from the rail network than any other towns of their size in Britain. [www.campaignforbordersrail.org](http://www.campaignforbordersrail.org/) .

[3] Hamilton-Larkhall (3 miles) re-opened in 2005; Stirling-Alloa (7 miles) re-opened in 2008: Airdrie-Bathgate (14 miles) re-opened in 2010.

[4] In 1992 Melrose-based architect Simon Longland undertook a motor bike-based photographic survey of all the surviving structures along the 98-mile corridor of the old Waverley Route, and produced a comprehensive report on *A preliminary case for the reinstatement of a Borders Rail Link.* After establishing an informal rail re-opening group in 1994, Longland then set up a private company, Borders Transport Futures, which in the mid-1990s undertook feasibility studies of a passenger railway from Galashiels to Edinburgh. This work would prove to be a key building block of the railway which will open ion 6th September 2015.

[5] The first meeting of the Scottish Parliament’s Petitions Committee to be held outside Holyrood was in Galashiels on 27th March 2000, where MSPs were presented with CBR’s 17,200-signature petition for the return of the railway to the Borders.

[6] As well as the core strategic achievement of the return of a railway from Edinburgh through Midlothian to Tweedbank, local rail campaigners – notably CBR, Stow Station Supporters Group and the Waverley Route Trust [7] – can take credit for some important supporting successes, a number of them achieved in the face of official resistance:

* first coining the ‘Borders Railway’ name (in 2003)
* persuading Parliament to include a station stop at Stow when none was to be provided *(the Scottish Parliament passed the Waverley Railway (Scotland) Act in 2006)*
* saving of the original 1849 station building at Stow from demolition (2011), with the potential for beneficial community re-use
* Tweedbank station track layout redesigned to take 12-coach tourist trains, providing the basic infrastructure needed to bring additional tourist spend to the Borders (2012)
* a requirement for the new ScotRail train operator to accommodate ‘paths’ for tourist charter trains to fit in with the regular service timetable (2013)
* cutting the maximum waiting time at the A7 pedestrian crossing from bus to rail stations in Gala from 90 to 30 seconds, improving convenience and safety for rail passengers (2013)
* the first train of the day to Edinburgh retimed to provide a robust connection into the 06.25 service to London (2014)
* persuading Transport Scotland that the Class 158 trains should be refurbished to provide better window/seat matching and enhanced luggage/cycle space (2014).

[7] The Waverley Route Trust (WRT) was launched in 2002 ‘to promote a community railway to and through the Scottish Borders’ and argued for a more innovative and tourist-friendly railway than that proposed by the railway promoter. WRT’s research – in conjunction with CBR – ultimately led to the Tweedbank terminus of the railway being redesigned to accommodate tourist charter trains.

**END OF RELEASE**