

REPORT on a MEETING between  
representatives of the SCOTTISH POTATO  
TRADE ASSOCIATION and BRITISH RAIL held  
in the Station Hotel, PERTH at 2.30 p.m.  
on Friday, 21st November, 1980.

---

PRESENT: S.P.T.A. - Messrs. J.E. Cook, R. Doig, B. Fulton, J. Henderson and D.H. Lindsay, with D. Blackmore in attendance.

B.R. - Messrs. R. Johnson and A. Webster.

Mr. D. Hendry Lindsay (President, S.P.T.A.) occupied the Chair.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Messrs. J.M. Waddell (S.P.T.A.) and R. Harries (B.R.).

DISCUSSION: Mr. Johnson explained that a locomotive fire had delayed the start of the meeting (arranged for 10.30 a.m.) to consider the Feasibility Study Report prepared and submitted by British Rail several months ago. The meeting also provided an opportunity to introduce Mr. Webster who is to succeed Mr. Johnson when he retires on 19th December, 1980.

He further explained the Study was initiated to address the problems arising from the assumed ultimately inevitable closure of the Forfar Branch Line. With state aid for B.R. restricted to passenger traffic, freight traffic must be self-financing. Forfar line being freight only, the whole costs of the line fell on the revenue from declining traffic. Along with all others, the Forfar line was under regular review and all the indications are that closure is inescapable.

To overcome extra costs imposed on the potato trade by the closure, the study considered pallet loading, tonne bags and sling-loading. Each of these methods were cheaper than traditional methods and more easily forklift-handled. Bought in bulk, slings cost about £2 each and are cheaply returnable. A range of sizes are also to become available under GKN's "renta-pallet" scheme. Mr. Johnson accepted that recessionary pressures inhibited further developments at the present time but welcomed discussion of the various points in the meantime.

S.P.T.A. representatives were of the view that closure of the line would result in loss of the potato traffic for British Rail. Labour handling and costs being the principal problem in consignment of potatoes by rail, proposed savings in handling would not compensate for additional haulage charges to more distant rail loading points. Mr. Webster pointed out that the "Speedlink" network, with contracted terminal distribution, is already much extended but that branch lines thereto are always problematical. In replies, Mr. Johnson stated that British Rail would not rent out pallets and or slings (which the industry itself would require to finance) and that current plans were to complete the phasing-out of vacuum-braked traffic, in favour of the entirely air-braked system, within five years.

Mr. Johnson drew attention to Section 8 of the 1974 Railways Act. This provides for government grant-aid of one half of the cost of mechanical handling equipment provided it is proved that the job cannot be done without it. This covers situations where want of such equipment results either in existing rail traffic being transferred to the roads or existing road traffic will be transferred to rail. Mr. Johnson explained the Act precludes British Rail from receiving such grant-aid which must be claimed by (and paid to) the customer who pays for the equipment. Mr. Webster added that such grant-aided equipment must be used for rail traffic five years (10 years for customers' own wagons) and that, in his own experience, Scottish Office staff were invariably most helpful to applicants/

applicants for Section 8 Grants.

General discussions dealt mainly with problems arising from the different palletisation requirements of seed and ware potatoes, without solutions being immediately possible. The Chairman then thanked Messrs. Johnson and Webster for their attendance and, on behalf of Council and the whole Association, extended best wishes to Mr. Johnson for a long and happy retirement. The meeting was thereupon concluded.