

Item:
13



Report to Partnership Meeting 2 February 2024

RESEARCH AND STRATEGY DELIVERY

Regional Rail Update

Purpose of Report

To inform Board Members on rail matters across the area.

Infrastructure

Inverness Station Masterplan

There has been new engagement with E-Rail and THC/HITRANS to investigate development opportunities around bus station relocation, multistorey car park etc – all off railway operational ground.

Faslane

Stantec LRDF Options Appraisal work is continuing with an update due at end of January. The project must be completed by mid-March 24. Separately, the single platform station design has been going through QS estimation.

Oban Link

Following last year's meeting on the Railway Pier to look at rail station to ferry terminal access with CMAL TS SR, feasibility for a covered walkway is to be drawn up by HITRANS.

Evanton Station

The technical feasibility report is soon to be completed. The case for the short-platform station has been boosted by the Green Freeport but is still relies on Delmore loop (just north of Clachnaharry) to be constructed. There is currently no visibility on funding for this c.£30m project.

Skyefall

The project to create a road-rail shared corridor on the Kyle Line between Strathcarron and Stromeferry is still under development. HITRANS is about to engage a specialist to produce costings for the proposal.

Services

Resilience

Recent snow followed by storms has resulted in a regrettably high number of no-trains days across the region.

West Coast Railways

Last year, following a temporary suspension of services, all Jacobite carriages were staffed by a steward controlling access to the doors. ORR have now specified 29 Feb 24 as the deadline for compliance for fitting Central Door Locking on all carriages. This may impact services on the Mallaig line this season.

Altnabreac

In a dispute over access, services are not calling at the remote station as the safety of ScotRail staff and passengers cannot be guaranteed.

Elgin

In the timetable change before Christmas a new Elgin service departing Inverness at 2215 was introduced.

Policy

Rail Services Decarbonisation Action Plan

An updated version from Transport Scotland is anticipated following the imminent publication of the STPR2 Delivery Plan. A re-profiled timetable for greener rolling stock replacement may be the outcome, meaning that fleets operating across the HITRANS area will be retained for longer. The Class 170 Turbostars (1999-2005) are comparatively young compared to HSTs (1975-82), 156s (1987-89) and 158s (1989-92). The first procurement tranche of new trains will be for East Kilbride, Fife (Levenmouth) and Borders.

Peak Fares

The initial 3 months trial of peak fares removal has now been extended to June 24, but fares will rise by 8.7% in April (England and Wales 4.9%).

LNER

The East Coast operator has introduced new fares on KGX-NCL-BWK-EDB. Out go off-peak walk-up fares, in comes 70Min Flex (book a train, and if you miss it you are allowed to use another up to 70 mins later). Tip- buy tickets to/from Haymarket if you still want the flexibility of Off Peak at a reasonable price.

The Strategic Timber Transport Scheme

The fund is to be cut from £7m to £2m p.a. This currently funds Timberlink from Argyll and assisted the Georgemas timber on rail trials of 2021.

Green Freeport

Storegga have received a further round of UK Gov funding for green hydrogen from Beinn Tharsuinn Windfarm, with Invergordon Distillery a likely off-taker. Additionally, it may provide H2 for transport.

Freight

Waste on Rail

HITRANS has initiated discussions with JG Russell and THC which may lead to waste being transported to Dunbar for incineration by rail, rather than the current road operation.

West Fraser

The company formerly known as Norbord is preparing an FFG for the creation of a terminal at Morayhill, taking advantage of the connection put in as part of the Dalcross station project.

Bottlenecks!

The HITRANS/Scotch Whisky Association study investigating constraints on the H&I transport network is underway. With the industry worth £7.1bn to the UK economy, following a report released on 16/01/24, its dependence on H&I transport can be seen from the value per Scottish region: Scotch Whisky Impact per region:

Highlands & Islands – £799m (25%)
Central Scotland – £442m (14%)
Glasgow – £627m (19%)
Mid Scotland and Fife – £507m (16%)
West Scotland – £379m (12%)
Lothian – £244m (8%)
South Scotland – £160m (5%)
Northeast Scotland – £77m (2%)

From a rail point of view the resilience of the West Coast Main Line for moving product to the market is key, as is deckspace on the Islay route, the Rest and Be Thankful, A95 etc, all compounded by climate change impacts.

RISK REGISTER

RTS Delivery

Impact –Mode shift, integration, economy, resilience

Policy

Impact –Transport efficiency, economic development, rolling stock decarbonisation.

Financial

Impact – Nil

Equality

Impact – Nil

Recommendation

1. Members are asked to note the report.

Report by: Frank Roach
Designation: Partnership Manager, HITRANS
Date: 24th January 2024