

Item:
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Report to Partnership Board 10 November .23

Rail Round Up

Purpose of Report

To inform the Board on progress on HITRANS rail projects.

Fort Transit

The appraisal for additional services around Fort William has been completed. This study has further progressed the largely technical *Fort William Opportunities Around Rail* study, which established the feasibility of timetable options that could be delivered by an additional diagram. This has been done by further developing the options and considering the benefits which could emerge from improving rail services in the Lochaber area, all within the context of an overarching strategic narrative.

As would be expected from a purely cost versus revenue perspective, the deployment of an additional diagram would require a subsidy, as is common with most rail services across the UK, particularly in rural areas. However, value for money in this context must be interpreted and understood in its widest sense. Whilst the new services would generate revenue and some conventional benefits from a transport appraisal perspective, it is the purpose of these journeys and the additional activities enabled by them that is essential in this setting. The strategic narrative and case for investment here works on two levels, national and local.

National Level

At the Scotland level, Lochaber, like every other area of Scotland, must contribute towards legally binding national greenhouse gas reduction targets²⁹ (and the associated commitment to reduce car kilometres by 20% by 2030 (from a 2019 base)). However, these are challenging targets to deliver at the Lochaber level as overall public transport connectivity in the area is simply inadequate in terms of providing a viable alternative to the car for most journeys. This is in large part because low population levels and density make it commercially challenging to deliver viable and attractive public transport services, particularly when set against diminishing national government and local authority budgets.

The Scottish Government has however committed to delivering its obligations “*in a way that is just and fair for all people across Scotland*”. This recognises that a

'one size fits all' solution cannot be applied nationally. In areas like Lochaber, achieving mode shift from the car will require the provision of a public transport network that meets the needs of local people, and this will almost certainly require to be subsidised.

The development of a local rail service in the Fort William area, which effectively does not exist at present, can make a meaningful contribution to reducing car kilometres and associated greenhouse gas emissions amongst both residents and visitors. This is especially the case if it is properly integrated with the local bus network to maximise public transport travel opportunities and expand wider connectivity by replanning the bus service to better integrate with rail. The success of the 2013 service improvements on the Oban Line provides a useful model here.

Local Level

At the local level, the delivery of additional rail services would support a range of positive transport outcomes and societal impacts. These include:

Transport outcomes

- A range of new journeys to employment, essential services, retail and leisure. Whilst small in absolute terms, this could offer important equalities and social inclusion benefits, particularly for groups with a protected characteristic or where 'forced car ownership' is prevalent.
- New visitor journeys to, from and within the area. This would combine 'trip on the line' travel with shorter day trip opportunities to the likes of Rannoch, Corrour and Glenfinnan. This supports the 'Lochaber car no more' philosophy that HITRANS is looking to promote – i.e., marketing the area as a destination for car free tourism.
- Mode shift from the car to rail for both resident and business travel, particularly if allied with proactive marketing and measures which reduce the attractiveness of taking the car (particularly to tourist sites).
- The replacement of bus travel to school with rail would offer a range of benefits beyond cost savings to THC, as demonstrated by the highly successful 'school service' operated between Dalmally and Oban.

Societal impacts

- The introduction of additional local rail services would likely generate interest amongst those who already visit Fort William and may attract others to Lochaber who do not currently visit.
- As well as creating eight new locally-based posts with ScotRail, improved local rail connectivity would support the more efficient functioning of the local labour market, particularly if integrated with existing bus services. Any growth in visitor numbers, duration of stay or spend as a result of the

new services would also generate direct, indirect and induced employment.

- Improved business productivity through growing the overall size of the consumer base, improving the efficiency of the labour market and addressing the perception of peripherality which Fort William and Lochaber more generally suffer from.
- A reduction in the negative impacts associated with car-based travel on local communities, including greenhouse gas emissions; congestion; indiscriminate and illegal parking; poor road safety; and community severance.

The report has been already fed into the Kate Forbes-led Glenfinnan Task Force, and will be presented to the West Highland Review Group when it reconvenes.

Fastline Faslane

The Options Appraisal work funded by Transport Scotland's Local Rail Development Fund continues. Our consultants are now working on this for completion by March 2024.

HITRANS has separately engaged Douglas Binns Ltd to produce an outline feasibility report into the siting of a railway station to provide access to His Majesty's Naval Base Clyde (HMNB Clyde) at Faslane.

HITRANS is also separately working on feasibility of the station site near the north gate of the Base. A single platform station including a small car park has been proposed by Douglas Binns Ltd, with the preferred option maximising the use of existing roads and pavements for access. The platform length will be suitable for a seven-car train. The estimated capital cost of the scheme will be provided by another party. The current track alignment through the proposed station appears visually to be compliant for the proposed platform.

This report examines the works associated with a new station and access:

- A new single platform station suitable for a typical seven car train
- A car park / turning head suitable for maintenance access and drop off only
- Pedestrian access to the public road and into the Base

We have now engaged SLC Rail to pull together a cost estimate for this option.

Evanton

Evanton Station feasibility has reached an impasse where it is unlikely for the project to succeed without additional infrastructure e.g., the Delmore loop, as on the current network disruption to services from lengthened journey time and concomitant traincrew hours issues make it unviable. There will be a further

meeting with the Community Council to discuss this. Green Freeport status obviously has a long-term impact on its feasibility.

Inverness Station Masterplan

HITRANS will be seeking expressions of interest for a feasibility study into the relocation of Rose St multi-storey car park to permit efficient access into the rail/bus interchange, regenerating the area around Farraline Park and the library. The new locations would be designed not to impact on the future configuration of the stations and its platforms.

Waste Not

Non-recyclable Inverness area waste is currently trucked to Dunbar's waste-to-energy plant. HITRANS has been in discussion with Highland Council and rail freight operators on the logistics of moving this flow to in order to reduce emissions and traffic. A new contract for waste haulage is to be let in 2024.

RISK REGISTER

RTS Delivery

Impact – Mode shift, integration, decongestion

Policy

Impact – Decarbonisation, transport efficiency, vehicle miles reduction

Financial

Impact – Faslane, Inverness Car Park and Evanton are fully funded.

Equality

Impact – Improved access to PT

Recommendation

1. Members are asked to approve the report.

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