

Item:
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European Union
European Regional Development Fund

Report to Partnership Meeting 23 August 2013

EUROPEAN PROJECTS

Journey Genie (Giant Puffin)

Purpose of Report

To provide Members with an update on the TransTourism ERDF INTERREG IVB Northern Periphery Programme project TransTourism. Through the project HITRANS are developing our itinerary and journey planner which can be found at www.journeygenie.co.uk. It is designed to work on recent versions of browsers.

Background

TRANSTOURISM-Sustainable Transport in Rural Tourism Areas is a Northern Periphery Programme project with partners in Sweden, Iceland, Scotland, Eire and Northern Ireland. The project runs from 01 September 2010 until 30 September 2013

The project delivers two key priorities:

- Promoting innovation and competitiveness in remote and peripheral areas
- Sustainable development of natural and community resources

As part of this programme, HITRANS is leading a major project aimed at promoting public transport based tourism across the Highlands and Islands through the development of a new web and mobile based journey-planning portal. The project has secured the financing and partner support necessary for delivery.

Project Partners

The lead partner of TransTourism is the Swedish Transport Administration.

The other partners are: Municipality of Harjedalen (S) Destination Lofsdalen (S), Destination Funasdalen (S), Icelandic Tourism Research Centre, **HITRANS**, University of Ulster, Clare County Council, Action Renewables (Co Down NI).

Our local associate partners are: HIE, University of Aberdeen, Destination Loch Ness, Cairngorm Business Partnership, First ScotRail, Calmac, Stagecoach, VisitScotland, Traveline Scotland.

Journey Genie Synopsis

Journey Genie (formerly Giant Puffin) aims to help visitors discover the many places they can visit by public transport, then help them plan their specific trip with ease and confidence. It pulls together all the public transport information that will allow them to discover their trip is possible, practical and offers sufficient interest to their needs. It takes existing transport feed information that is framed in terms only locals understand, and repositions it in terms that the visitor will understand. The goal is to help them realise there is an alternative to bringing or hiring a car, thereby supporting the future viability of many public transport routes.

The outputs consist of a website with static (and in a later phase user generated) content, a database driven application to search, plan and save journeys, and register for updates to those journeys – and a widget version of the application hosted on key partner websites. A mobile version of the full site recognizes if the user is accessing the Genie on a smartphone/tablet etc.

This project aims to relieve the constraints of current Highlands and Islands tourism/travel sites (either mode specific or simply very patchy in the information given) in order to provide visitors to the area with the opportunity to travel by public transport for a full multi-modal trip.

Currently, comprehensive single mode timetables provided by transport operators do not facilitate the creation of individually tailored itineraries taking in attractions/locations of choice, and are often too detailed for the visitors' needs. This project takes timetable data feeds - primarily from Traveline Scotland - one step forward, by "translating" them into a format that will be understood by someone unfamiliar with the area. Journey Genie builds on existing transport data feeds, but combines and provides a layer of interpretation onto existing data resources. It will present information in such a way that allows visitors who are unfamiliar with place names and specific stops, to query public transport journeys based on what they want to do.

As the mobile phone technology available for information dissemination develops, there will be an opportunity in the future to use the portal to give location aware information and real time journey planning information to people while they are on the move. This would prove very welcome in providing information to travellers in the event of missed connections or service disruption. This opportunity will be reviewed in the future as technology develops.

Journey Genie Project Objectives

The project objectives are to help inspire visitors to plan and make trips by public transport with confidence – even though they don't know the area, let alone the specific names of bus stops or stations. This will thereby increase public transport usage, increase sustainable travel particularly to remote areas and facilitate easier getting about in the Highlands and Islands - particularly for visitors. The project portal, offsite app interface and mobile apps will:

- Encourage public transport usage (though it will not sell directly, the transport partners will do this)
- Provide confidence/inspiration that public transport is a viable option when visiting the area
- Interface with commercial transport operators – it is not being delivered in competition, but partnership with existing provision
- Promote public transport as valuable experience for visitors
- Deliver reliable well used search engine for public transport which will produce:
- More users on public transport
- Scope to influence public transport provision & protect vulnerable links

The project needs to demonstrate benefits to both tourism industry and transport operators – it must support existing activities rather than compete against them.

The project's scope covers the Highlands & Islands including Shetland and Arran/Cumbræ. An implicit goal of the project is that it will drive more visitors to Scotland and the Highlands & Islands once it becomes clear the area is a well-connected place. A further goal is to facilitate visitors in getting off the beaten track and encourage modal shift of transport in busier parts of the region.

Recent Progress

The product is now available in beta form while user testing is being carried out but will soon be available in its final form.

The planned public launch was overtaken by events when we were invited by Highland Council and Scottish Enterprise to showcase the Genie at the Scotland Technology Show at the SECC on 11 June 2013. We manned a stand with our web developers and social media partners and launched the beta version.

The finished version will be launched shortly, accompanied by a social media campaign and adverts on Facebook and Google. A video demo is being created.

We are preparing for the final Transtourism project conference which takes place in Mallaig on Tuesday 24 and Wednesday 25th September 2013. The conference will be attended by the TransTourism project partners and a number of local stakeholders. In line with the TransTourism project aspirations it is intended to make this project a public transport showcase with delegates travelling to Mallaig by sustainable modes within Scotland.

Project funding

HITRANS has received total funding for our work within TransTourism of €250k. This funding has been secured at an ERDF intervention rate of 60% with the balance being provided through our own contribution of £66k and a contribution of £20k from HIE.

Recommendation

1. Members are asked to note the report.

Risk	Impact	Comment
RTS delivery	√	This project fits well with a number of RTS Horizontal themes.
Policy	√	This project has integration and environmental benefits.
Financial	√	This project is fully funded
Equality	-	No impact on equalities issues.

Report by: Frank Roach
Designation: Partnership Manager
Date: 12th August 2013