

Report to Partnership Meeting – 3rd April 2009

STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

Oban 5 a Day

1. HITRANS' Regional Transport Strategy makes the case for 4 trains per day being the minimum for Highland rural routes. This has now been achieved on the Wick and Kyle lines, leaving Oban and its three trains per day in each direction with the worst service in the country. This frequency is unacceptable given Oban's position as a key interchange for ferry services to the islands and as an important tourist destination in its own right. The West Highland Lines have recently been voted 'the most scenic railway in the world' by readers of travel magazine Wanderlust, which will further increase demands on capacity.
2. In December 2005 Highland Rail Partnership helped to bring about the extension of the Garelochhead commuter service back to Arrochar. This helped to preserve the peak hour slot at Glasgow Queen St.
3. In 2008 HITRANS commissioned timetabling work and economic analysis for a frequency enhancement of three trains per day to Oban to five per day. The resulting figures showed a strong business case, with a benefit:cost ratio of 5.0 optimistic, 3.9 pessimistic. Additional resources would be needed, requiring an additional £450k of subsidy in year one. Currently all the Class 156 units that are fitted for radio-signalling needed for this route are required in the evening peak in Strathclyde, but units may be released following the re-opening of Aidrie-Bathgate and infill electrification.
4. Transport Scotland have indicated that the corridor was investigated as part of the STRP sifting process but it is not being taken forward. Economic benefits which would aid development of the area's economy, were not identified as key objectives for interventions on the west highland transport corridors. It is evident that funds are to be focussed on projects/corridors that were included in the final document.
5. HITRANS has asked transport academic James Laird to consider the application of option values and other wider economic benefits in order to further refine and strengthen the business case.
6. We will now investigate alternative funding streams that may allow the project to start up in advance of the next ScotRail franchise (due 2014), in a similar manner to the very successful Invernet services which were subsumed into the franchise following local funding.

7. There may in addition be alternative interim scenarios which can be implemented on a de minimus basis, such as running the Summer Saturday 1037 GLQ-OBN and return every day, and these will be investigated and presented to Government and its Agency.

8. In doing this we will also work with SPT and TACTRAN who have an obvious interest in service improvements on the route.

RECOMMENDATION

1. Members are asked to note the report.

Report by: Frank Roach
Designation: Partnership Manager
Date: 27th March 2009