

Report to Partnership Meeting – 8th October 2009

EUROPEAN FUNDING

CEARCAILL NA GAIDHLIG

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To report to Members on the ERDF application submitted by Comhairle Nan Eilean Siar on behalf of the Cearcaill na Gàidhlig partners and seek approval for HITRANS to continue as a funder of this project until 2012/13.

BACKGROUND

Cearcaill na Gàidhlig (the Gaelic Rings) is a tourism marketing initiative which seeks to create an authentic Gaelic-based cultural tourism experience along routes throughout the Hebridean Islands and West Coast Mainland of Scotland.

Cearcaill na Gàidhlig links a transport journey to the language and cultural heritage of the area, to create the concept of “Gaelic Rings”. Cearcaill na Gàidhlig aims to ensure that improvements in transport infrastructure and services are integrated and accessed in order to boost cultural tourism and Gaelic language-related visitor activity, and to offer an innovative marketing opportunity to businesses undertaking cultural or Gaelic-related activity. Following a pilot in 2007, five new Cearcaill na Gàidhlig journeys were developed in 2008, allowing wide coverage of the Outer Hebrides and West Highland mainland.

PROPOSED ERDF PROJECT

Through their Economic Development team Comhairle nan Eilean Siar have acted as lead partner in the development and management of Cearcaill na Gàidhlig up to now. The Comhairle have managed and chaired the stakeholder steering committee of which HITRANS are also members.

In considering how to further develop Cearcaill na Gàidhlig the Steering Group has agreed that the next three years are critical to the long term sustainability of the project if it is to really deliver the economic benefits to the Western Highlands and Islands that it could achieve. The Steering Group has approved the preparation of a funding application to be submitted for ERDF funding and this has now been prepared and submitted by Comhairle Nan Eilean Siar.

ERDF funding would allow Cearcaill na Gàidhlig to undergo a step-change in its activities during 2010-2013, focusing on new areas of activity to achieve a higher level of impact:

- Wider marketing efforts, particularly in relation to targeting and reaching out to the Scottish Diaspora.

- Acting as a support mechanism to develop the 'Gaelic-rich' product and experience offered by local businesses in relation to their own marketing, promotion, events and customer service, in order to ensure an authentic visitor experience, increase visitor spend and length of stay.

PROJECT ACTIVITIES

The following activities would be supported through ERDF investment:

- Employment of a Project Co-ordinator
- Marketing and promotional activity.
- Engagement with the international travel trade and key organisations relating to the Diaspora.
- Advertising, advertorials and travel competitions.
- Targeted attendance at trade and consumer shows.
- Website innovations in relation to interactive mapping and user participation.
- Development of Cearcaill na Gàidhlig 'through ticket' for each Gaelic ring, and involving relevant travel partners.
- Working with private sector tour operators to encourage the development of Gaelic Rings tour packages.
- Working with the local tour guide network to develop short tours relating to the various Gaelic Rings and branded accordingly.
- Cearcaill na Gàidhlig Business Champions would support local businesses to develop the Gaelic provision they offer to visitors.
- Passport incentive scheme relating to the Cearcaill na Gàidhlig area. This would be integrated into the through-ticketing project.

PROJECT FUNDING

To deliver this significantly enhanced Cearcaill na Gàidhlig will require funding of £354,546. The opportunity of ERDF funding is available at a 45% intervention rate meaning project partners are being asked to provide match funding of £195,500. The table below details the proposed funding breakdown by project partner and Members will note that HITRANS are being asked to contribute £45,000 over the three years of the project from 2010/11 to 2012/13.

CNG ERDF Match Funding Breakdown	Total	2010/2011	2011/2012	2012/2013
ERDF	159,546	55378	56290	47879
Comhairle	75000	30000	25000	20000
HITRANS	45000	15000	15000	15000
Highland	30000	10000	10000	10000
Argyll and Bute	30000	10000	10000	10000
Bord na Gaidhlig	15000	15000	0	0
Total	354,546	135,378	116,290	102,879

Officers consider Cearcaill na Gàidhlig to be a strong project offering the potential for significant economic benefits for the communities served. There is also real potential to look at similar projects for other parts of the Region where other cultural and heritage characteristics could form the basis of a portal. This has been investigated separately by HITRANS in the Regional Access Scoping Study (see agenda item 7). It is the recommendation of this report that HITRANS agrees to support Cearcaill na Gàidhlig with support of £15,000 per annum for the three years commencing 1st April 2010. It is our expectation that this period will develop

Cearcaill na Gàidhlig to the point that it becomes sustainable without further funding from HITRANS beyond this period. The development of revenue generating opportunities is a key performance indicator of the success of this project and the Steering Group will monitor this closely over the three years to 31st March 2013

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Members are asked to note the report.
2. Members are asked to approve the continuation of HITRANS support to Cearcaill na Gàidhlig with £15,000 being allocated by HITRANS each year in 2010/11, 2011/12 and 2012/13 from the Partnership's Research and Development budget.
3. Members are asked to approve HITRANS continued membership of the Cearcaill na Gàidhlig Steering Group until 2012/13.

Report by: Ranald Robertson
Designation: Partnership Manager
Date: 10th September 2009