

Report to Partnership Meeting of 4 December 2009

RAIL

Rail User Group (RUG)

1. The Board agreed at its meeting in June 2008 to establish a Rail User Group for a trial period of a year with invited representatives of Rail User Groups covering the West Highland, Kyle and North Highland Lines (there being, regrettably, no comparable groups in place for the Highland Main and the Inverness-Aberdeen Lines which are our busiest routes).
2. The RUG has been chaired by Robert Samson of Passenger Focus and attended by HITRANS officers and representatives of the individual rail user (Friends) groups.
3. The group has met on a six monthly basis. Agreed issues and action points arising from the meeting have been taken by the chair to the HITRANS Rail Advisory Group.
4. The HITRANS Rail User Groups met at the end of the trial year on 12 November 2009. John Laing and Dave Duthie were also present. After the usual useful sharing of issues around the region and agreement of a number of actions, the usefulness of the trial first year of the group was discussed.
5. There was general agreement by the User Group representatives that the RUG had proved to be a useful forum and allowed Groups with similar interests the opportunity to discuss common issues and agree how these might be, where appropriate, taken to the Rail Advisory Group for consideration.
6. There was a view expressed that a more formal structure and remit would benefit the functioning of the Group but this was not the view of the meeting as a whole. It was explained that HITRANS have successfully established a number of Advisory and Stakeholder forums to assist the Partnership in developing policy and delivering the Regional Transport Strategy without the need for formal structures, given that no decision-making powers have been subordinated by the Board to such groups. The practice was for these groups to discuss issues and for a list of agreed actions with a contextual note where appropriate, to be taken and circulated to group members after the meeting.
7. It was agreed by all present that the group would wish to continue to meet informally, twice yearly, with Passenger Focus in the chair. Passenger Focus will continue, as part of their role at the Rail Advisory Group, to present any actions from the RUG agreed to be taken to that Group, and report back any feedback to a subsequent meeting.

8. It was noted that HITRANS is unique among RTPs in having a RUG for third sector organisations.
9. RUG members will continue to be invited to attend Rail Stakeholder Group meetings.

Recommendation

The Board is asked to:

1. note the outcome of the RUG Meeting on 12 November; and
2. agree to continuing with the Rail Users Group as a useful and effective forum for facilitating dialogue between representative Rail Interest Groups with a view to helping improve rail services for users across the Highlands and Islands

Report by: Frank Roach
Designation: Partnership Manager
Date: 24th November 200