

News release – for immediate release

HITRANS welcomes Scottish Government's commitment to continuing Air Discount Scheme

Today's announcement confirming the Scottish Government's commitment to continuing the Air Discount Scheme (ADS) has been welcomed by the Highlands and Islands Transport Partnership HITRANS.

The scheme, launched in 2006, gives residents of Orkney, Shetland, the Western Isles, Islay, Jura, Caithness and North West Sutherland a 40 per cent discount on the price of core air fares.

Transport Minister Stewart Stevenson today confirmed the Scottish Government would be starting the process of securing European Commission approval to secure the ADS for a further three years until March 2008.

HITRANS chairman Duncan MacIntyre said: "Overall, HITRANS fully supports the ADS, which has provided reductions in air fares for many residents of the eligible areas, improving the affordability of access to Scotland's main service and economic centres for some of our most isolated communities.

"Whilst for some travelers this will have simply brought about travel cost reductions, for others it will have enabled them to make trips they would not have been able to afford previously.

"HITRANS is pleased to note the Scottish Government's intention to continue the ADS as announced in the Scottish Budget Spending Review and now confirmed in today's statement. We hope that this will enable the benefits of the scheme to be extended, both in terms of eligibility for the discount and the level of discount offered."

Most mainland parts of Scotland have access to heavily subsidised rail services which aim to provide fast, frequent and affordable access to the main service centres. It is not possible to extend these benefits by rail to remote mainland and island communities, but air services can potentially provide the equivalent "high speed network" for these areas.

As part of the review of current schemes HITRANS considers that equity of access and social integration across the country would be improved were the level of ADS discount increased, eligibility widened to all Scottish residents, a discount 'tourist card' considered, and similar cost structures applied to the air Public Sector Obligation (PSO) network.

HITRANS Director Dave Duthie added: "All of these interventions would create greater equity with rail and other UK domestic air fares enjoyed in most of the

country at present, and being considered through the pilot Road Equivalent Tariff pilot on ferries.

“Such action would stimulate the overall growth in movement of people and goods to and from these communities, leading in time to an improved air service provision for the Highlands and Islands as a whole, and providing a more sustainable base for the region's positive contribution to the Scottish economy.”

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