

Report to Partnership Meeting 2 February 2018

RESEARCH AND STRATEGY DELIVERY

InJunction

Reconnecting the Keith and Dufftown Railway: Feasibility Study

HITRANS has appointed consultant Douglas Binns Ltd to investigate the feasibility of reconnecting the Keith and Dufftown Railway (KDR) to the national network. This is to facilitate the following hierarchy of operations:

1. KDR DMU connectivity with main line services
2. Loco-hauling (including steam) connectivity
3. In-bound charters
4. Freight

We believe that this piece of work should be carried out in five stages to test the feasibility of each of these, incorporating:

1. A study on the benefits of reconnection, including wider tourism and regeneration
2. Technical assessments including a broad cost envelope
3. Operational impact on KDR processes
4. Operational impact on Network Rail processes
5. High level Environmental Assessment including consideration of line-side neighbours.

The study, valued at £25k, is fully funded through partnership with Transport Scotland.

The output of this study should be presented in a tangible and qualitative, though credible, way that can help to determine whether there is an evidenced and supportive business case to progress with the project.

Background

The Keith and Dufftown Railway is a volunteer-run preserved railway operating over the 11 miles from Keith Town to Dufftown. It operates up to 3 days per week April-October between its base at Dufftown and the reconstructed Keith Town Station. The connection was severed on disposal from Railtrack.

Keith Yard is a Strategic Freight Site, owned by Network Rail, while the Dufftown Platform is used by the Royal Scotsman, and occasionally for ScotRail stabling. The Dufftown branch was severed on disposal with track lifted from at ch 53.26. The boundary between NR and KDR lies at ch 53.36, with track recommencing at ch 53.50. There is a pedestrian crossing over the trackbed at Isla Bank Cottages.

In 2004 Highland Rail Partnership (later subsumed into HITRANS) commissioned Scott Wilson to examine the reconnection and engage with Network Rail..

The proposal was to comprise a new platform between the old goods shed and Dufftown

Platform line, with the 'old' sidings lifted and replaced by a runround loop. Two options were proposed to facilitate the connection. Option A had the ground frame connection to the new line behind a locked boundary gate with the keys to both held at the signal box. Option B provided a signalled connection with one ground frame released by Keith Junction box, with a second ground frame released by a putative Keith Town Box.

On 7 August 2007 NR advised the Keith and Dufftown Railway Association that no further development work would be undertaken due to lack of progress with proposals.

In August 2015 the KDRA approached Transport Scotland to discuss the aspirations of the Association. A site visit was undertaken by Transport Scotland officials in October 2015, who met with representatives from the KDRA and Richard Lochhead MSP. TS agreed to share the KDRA's aspirations with NR and did so in December 2015. NR responded to KDRA in October 2016.

The KDRA proposal in 2016 "envisages running into the Dufftown platform, to meet scheduled main line services and to permit charter through running, by seeking that Network Rail provides permission for KDRA to run into and use the Dufftown Platform at Keith; provides permission for KDRA to make use of the parallel track as a run round loop; gifts or sells to the KDRA at nominal price, the platform, platform road and loop. The KDRA are looking for the simplest rail design and operation that will take us into the Dufftown Branch Platform at Keith Junction, including what we wish to acquire in order to make our operation into Keith Junction operationally feasible and efficient."

Following discussions with TS, HITRANS as the Regional Transport Partnership is now taking forward the procurement of this feasibility study in line with the objectives as set out above.

Issues

The following issues have been identified:

- NR has two existing customers for the Dufftown platform.
- Guarantee of access to the Dufftown platform when the mainline box is open.
- Access charge if Dufftown platform is owned/managed by KDRA.
- Substandard Dufftown platform.
- Priority when stabling overnight
- Adequate space for buffering/catch points.
- The signaller can only give authority to proceed to the Dufftown platform provided that the rest of the network south from Dufftown through Keith Town is isolated. At Aviemore the train can be held off the up loop on NR metals.
- The foot crossing will require new protection or closure - it can no longer be an open crossing.
- The gradient coming from Keith Town presents additional hazards for slowing/stopping at the crossing and at the Dufftown platform.
- There is a live examination of the case for Aberdeen-Keith-Aberdeen freight for possible food and drink traffic.
- The old goods shed may be listed.

RISK REGISTER

RTS Delivery

Impact – Positive- Freight/passenger mode shift potential

Policy

Impact – Positive- Economic development through tourism

Financial

Impact – Fully funded

Equality

Impact – Potential to widen public transport access

Recommendations

1. Members are asked to note the report

Report by: Frank Roach
Designation: Partnership Manager, HITRANS
Date: 23 January 2018