

Item:
12



Report to Partnership Meeting 17 September 2021

RESEARCH AND STRATEGY DELIVERY

Fort William Opportunities Around Rail

FWOAR

Purpose of Report

To update the Board on study to investigate opportunities for additional services around Fort William.

Background

Fort William suffers from well-known congestion problems, with low journey reliability on the road networks across the town especially during April-September. The increase in tourist traffic impacts on HGV movements at major industrial sites including the smelter, sawmill, and fish processor. This is exacerbated when accidents occur leading to very lengthy diversions. The congestion is not only in the peaks but can also be impacted by tourist staying in the town overnight leaving their accommodation to journey out to visitor attractions. Uniquely rail can provide alleviation for some of these problems.

Systra were engaged to carry out some What If? timetabling work, based on an additional Class 156 being available, and two theoretical new stations at Torlundy Nevis Range and Carrs Corner Lochy Bridge.

Executive Summary

This report has proposed 7 options for new local services to / from Fort William. These options have explored different ways of providing enhanced local connectivity either towards Mallaig or towards Rannoch. Each of the options have also incorporated new stations at Carrs Corner and Torlundy Ben Nevis into both the existing ScotRail service and proposed services.

SYSTRA has constructed these timetables to have a minimal impact on the operation of existing services and has ensured that existing paths to / from Glasgow are retained for ScotRail services, that the Sleeper and the Royal Scotsman services are unaffected and that only the dwell times of the Jacobite are affected. The freight services have been impacted the most as it is required that the Alcan – North Blyth morning freight service is moved in order to provide a school service to both Banavie and Carrs Corner.

One of the aims of providing an enhanced local service was to provide connectivity to Lochaber High School. The timetabling work has shown that whilst it is possible to provide a good service to / from Carrs Corner all week, providing a service to / from Banavie is more difficult (particularly on a Friday afternoon when school closes at 13:15). Options 1, 3 and 5 have been shown to provide the most comprehensive connectivity of the options.

Another aim was to provide enhanced ferry connectivity. Again, this has proven difficult considering the heavy usage of the route between Fort William and Mallaig including the relatively slow Jacobite steam service. All the summer options provide connectivity with the last ferry arrival of the day at 19:55. Only Option 4 provides connectivity on top of this and links with the arrival of the Armadale ferry at 12:53 and the departure of the Armadale ferry at 13:30.

The best approach may be to operate Option 3 in summer, providing school services, an additional service to Glenfinnan and two services Rannoch, helping open up a sustainable tourism market towards Rannoch Moor. In Winter Option 6A or 6B could be operated providing an alternative out of season tourism service towards Mallaig.

To develop these proposals, further engagement with ScotRail is required, in addition there is a need to explore both the engineering feasibility of Carrs Corner and Torlundy Ben Nevis stations and the likely value for money case of these stations.

Next Steps

To discuss the study with ScotRail and partners in the West Highland Review Group.

RISK REGISTER

RTS Delivery

Impact –A82 decongestion, connecting communities.

Policy

Impact – Decarbonisation, mode shift, transport efficiency, network usage maximisation.

Financial

Impact – The study was fully funded.

Equality

Impact – Access to the network.

Recommendation

1. Members are asked to approve the report.

Report by: Frank Roach
Designation: Partnership Manager
Date: 17th September 2021