

Report to Partnership Meeting 13 September 2019

RESEARCH AND STRATEGY DELIVERY

Skyefall

Purpose of Report

To inform members of the progress in solving the Strome ferry bypass problem.

Background

The A890 and the Kyle railway provide crucial infrastructure links in north west Scotland. An approximately 3.5km section of the A890 between Ardnarff and Attadale is single track road with passing places, and with low traffic flows. There have been 10 significant rock falls between 1990 and 2011 with an increasing risk of a re-occurrence. Closure of the road due to rockfalls, results in a 130 mile detour that is detrimental to the local economy. The 2011 rockfall took 4 months and cost £3.5M to clear with remedial actions costing £500k+ per annum and are likely to increase with time due to subsequent road closures. The road is a key element of the local infrastructure with the route used by the school bus. Reducing or eliminating the effect of rock falls on the road and rail infrastructure is key to ensuring that these vital infrastructure links are resilient against future events. Of the options already considered the cheapest, at £80M to £100M, is the construction of a new road. This is considered too expensive and options to combine the road with the railway are to be taken forward for further consideration.

A previous STAG commissioned by the Highland Council ruled out options that involved a road rail interface. We believe that this should be revisited as Network Rail may not have been aware of possibilities that could be explored both internally and with HMRI.

Capacity on both rail and road can be increased through true collaborative operations.

This is an example of infrastructure failure resulting in serious community severance and a loss of economic activity, including access to employment.

The key aspiration for HITRANS is to provide resilient infrastructure that allows the safe operation of regular passenger trains, occasional rail charters, freight, and some engineering trains on the railway while allowing road traffic to use the railway alignment to bypass known and potential rockfall sites. Additional HITRANS aspirations include: providing a rail vehicle, that meets the "scenic" specification offering passengers better views along the route; an increased frequency of service; and that each option taken forward identifies local employment opportunities.

The Strome ferry issue features in the HITRANS Regional Transport Strategy and is a regular topic of discussion between the Highland Council and Scottish Ministers.

Project Update

HITRANS has engaged Network Rail to revisit the inconclusive study carried out for us by Mott Macdonald and to identify a viable solution for a shared clearway. After a number of site visits, one of which resulted in a new traffic management scheme being deployed by Network Rail in record time in August 2018, animations of proposed operation are being created. These will then be passed to our Rail Safety advisor for comment.

Fair Exchange

Additional capacity in the signalling system is required regardless of the outcome. HITRANS has accessed £115k ERDF Smart Cities funding, matched with £115k from Press'n'Ride which is no longer required.

This project creates additional capacity, improved resilience and better maintenance access on the Kyle railway line between Strathcarron and Kyle. The line is signaled by Radio Electronic Token Block, with movement authority controlled by the issue of electronic tokens to the train.

It is proposed to capital fund a new Token Exchange Point near Stromeferry. This will see the installation of lineside equipment to enable the train to communicate with the signaller in Inverness. New signalling locations have not been created since the signaling system was devised in 1989. No infrastructure currently exists in the location require to install the Radio Electronic Token Block.

This will increase the capacity of the line which is constrained by a long 42 minute section between Strathcarron and Kyle – perhaps the longest single track section in the UK. This will enable trains to leave Strathcarron while shunting is taking place at Kyle; it allows trains to follow each other into Kyle at 25 min intervals rather than 42 min; it provides greater access to the track for maintenance; and it allows for greater flexibility during periods of rockfall maintenance.

Key objectives include:

- New Radio Electronic Token Block infrastructure with expansion capacity to be installed
- Increased capacity of Far North Line which is currently constrained by a long 42 minute section
- Reducing section time from 42 mins to 25 mins
- Improved access to track for maintenance
- Greater flexibility during periods of rockfall maintenance
- Improved resilience during perturbation
- Improved passenger information.

The project contributes to Smart Mobility indicators by making the journey more attractive and thus aiming to increase public transport usage and lower private car use in the area, as well as making the route more sustainable.

The project also acts as a demonstrator for other signalling locations on the North Highland and West Highland Lines which may be created, improving capacity and resilience on the network.

Benefits specifically in terms of the system itself include:

- Currently no infrastructure exists and therefore this activity will provide basic electronic token infrastructure along with appropriate sustainable power infrastructure allowing for future expansion.
- An improved electronic monitoring and management system with software specifically written for this unique location. This system and software will allow for subsequent expansion of the system.
- As a closed system for security reasons there will be no specific data set generated by this improvement. However, the results of this improvement will be seen in other data set that are already in the public domain such as increased frequency of trains and even the addition of a new monitoring point on real-time information systems. In addition to the above there are additional service, user and transport benefits such as:
 - Increased capacity provides communities with access to employment, education, health, social and leisure activities in the region
 - Improved connectivity which is vital to the development and growth of Inverness and the surrounding area
 - Further uptake of these transport services will secure viability and drive growth with additional benefits of reducing private car usage
 - More efficient access to the network for maintenance, reducing down time.

Further funding will be required to take the budget to the estimated £460k needed. A key meeting is to be held in September with Network Rail to discuss the project further.

RTS Delivery

Impact – RTS compliant

Policy

Impact – Mode shift, connectivity, environmental benefits, sharing of infrastructure

Financial

Impact – 50% funded currently

Equality

Impact – Nil

Recommendations

1. Members and Advisors are asked to note the report.

Report by: Frank Roach
Designation: Partnership Manager
Date: 3rd September 2019