

## **Report to Partnership Meeting 7 October 2011**

### **RESEARCH AND STRATEGY DELIVERY**

#### **Bus Route Development**

##### **Purpose of Report**

To update Members on the progress made in delivering the kick start bus route development project approved in the 2011/12 Business Plan to upgrade the Scottish Citylink bus service 926 from Campbeltown to Glasgow.

##### **Background**

The Partnership allocated funds of £20,000 in 2011/12 towards the increased operating costs incurred by Scottish Citylink in increasing the mileage operated on Service 926 from Campbeltown to Glasgow. The increased mileage will be achieved through increased journey frequency throughout the year on the route. In addition to this the route will also benefit from significant investment in the form of a new fleet of coaches to operate the route.

The kick start project will operate for three years and HITRANS funding for years 2 (2012/13) and 3 (2013/14) will reduce to £10,000 in each of the following years. The HITRANS funding support is matched by Argyll and Bute Council. The service will become commercially viable from year 4 onwards.

The support from HITRANS and Argyll and Bute Council has been awarded in the form of Public Service Concessions Contract support under the same terms as the Bus Route Development Grant Scheme formerly provided by the Scottish Government.

##### **Service Upgrade**

The Kick Start project on the Campbeltown to Glasgow Scottish Citylink bus service has delivered a real improvement in terms of service frequency and vehicle quality.

The number of journeys each day during the summer season (23 May- 2 October) has increased from 3 to 5 covering the whole route with an additional late afternoon journey between Glasgow and Ardrishaig. The latter journey is provided by an Ardrishaig based coach which is also being used to guarantee duplication of one Glasgow bound coach eliminating a long standing problem with overcrowding on the route.

In the winter months the plan HITRANS and Argyll and Bute Council agreed to support was that the increased level of service would continue to operate on Friday, Saturday and Sunday. However due to the success of the early summer season it has now been agreed to only scale back one return journey on Monday – Thursday.

Previously the service had capacity problems which resulted from potential passengers choosing to travel at the last minute rather than pre-booking journeys. Given the nature of the route the

service provides a number of local journey opportunities along the route from remote locations into nearby small towns/villages for shopping and leisure opportunities which tend to be of a discretionary nature rather than a journey which would be pre-booked. The new timetable spreads the opportunities for this type of journey.

An additional morning journey leaves Campbeltown at 0830. This journey provides a new connection with the ferry from Islay that allows islanders reach Glasgow by around 1240. Previously the first coach connected ferry gave an arrival in Glasgow of 1545. Additional journey opportunities are now possible through Tayinloan for the island of Gigha.

By providing a journey from Campbeltown at 0630 to arrive in Glasgow at around 1040 journey opportunities are available connecting into the cross-border coach and rail network leading to a potential increase of tourism opportunities.

### **New Fleet**

The Kick Start Project has seen a radical improvement in the service frequency that has been matched with a substantial investment in the fleet of coaches operating on the route. West Coast Motors (the contractor who operate the route under Scottish Citylink contract) have introduced 5 new coaches on the route. The new coaches will be joined by another 2 new coaches. This means the fleet upgrade will extend to the Scottish Citylink service from Oban to Glasgow. These vehicles offer passengers a wide range of comforts and have increased seating capacity to 59 seats or 55 seats and a wheelchair. The total investment in vehicles alone is in the region of £1.6Million. The new coaches are the first fully accessible coaches to enter service in Argyll. The buses were launched by Colin Craig of West Coast Motors and Sir Brian Souter of Stagecoach (on behalf of the Scottish Citylink / Megabus Joint Venture) at Inveraray Castle on Friday 12<sup>th</sup> August.

### **Impact of Upgrade**

Passenger growth has been recorded for the early summer period and this has been shared with HITRANS.

- The period from 21<sup>st</sup> May to 24<sup>th</sup> June 2011 saw an increase in passenger numbers when compared with the equivalent period for 2010 of 37%. This is very encouraging although it should be recognised that in the same period route mileage increased by 61%.
- The period from 25<sup>th</sup> June to 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2011 saw an increase in passenger numbers of 21% against the equivalent period of 2010. This period also saw route mileage increase by 50%.

The high increase in patronage recorded so early in the kick start period is excellent and growth should become even stronger when the impact of the new coaches is recorded. The new coaches entered service on 15<sup>th</sup> August 2011.

The kick start project has out-performed the projections Scottish Citylink calculated for increased patronage as a result of the upgrade. This has allowed Scottish Citylink to look again at the winter schedules and instead of reducing the service to 3 return journeys on Monday to Thursday the reduction will probably only be by a single return journey on the full length of the route and the short working to Ardrishaig. The full summer service will continue to operate on Friday, Saturday and Sunday. At the time of preparing this report the final decision on this had not been taken but officers should be in a position to confirm this verbally at the Partnership meeting.

Should the increased service be retained as expected this will be really good news and demonstrates the operator's commitment to delivering a long term upgrade to service levels on the route that will continue beyond the period of bus route development grant support.

### Recommendation

1. Members are asked to note the report.

<b>Risk</b>	<b>Impact</b>	<b>Comment</b>
RTS delivery	√	Improving bus links to national centres was identified in the RTS as an area HITRANS should support.
Policy	√	Increases accessibility to Argyll and Bute by increasing coach service frequency and introducing wheelchair accessible coaches.
Financial	-	The project budget is committed within the 2011/12 Business Plan.
Equality	√	The new coaches on the route are DDA compliant with wheelchair lifts to improve accessibility on the route.

**Report by:** Ranald Robertson  
**Designation:** Partnership Manager  
**Date:** 30th August 2011