

Report to Partnership Advisors 17 September 2021

RESEARCH AND STRATEGY DELIVERY

Demand Responsive Transport App

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To update Members on work by HITRANS to commission and deploy a demand responsive transport app that will help support the operation, booking and marketing of non-scheduled transport services across the Highlands and Islands.

Background and Challenge

HITRANS report on the Rural Bus Service Support and Funding (March 2021) sets out the variety of challenges facing local bus services not just in the Highland and Islands but across rural Scotland. One of the actions it identified was the 'Investigation of the potential for more regional collaboration on Public Transport and DRT management and operations.'

While the cost of providing services has been increasing, the funding available has been reducing in recent years. This has meant that even without the increased challenges posed by Covid, the existing level of public transport and the model by which that is provided is becoming increasingly challenging.

Wider societal challenges also mean that the model of a bus service based around a fixed route and a timetable focused around the conventional working day is not only too costly but does not necessarily fulfil the demands of either the local population or visitors who rely on it or are potential customers.

In response to this challenge local authorities and community transport organisations have already developed much more flexible transport solutions with a vast array of different models now operating across the Highlands and Islands. These range from fully Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) services which operate within a specific or flexible geography on particular days and times to hybrid services where elements of the service is flexible or on request with passengers expected to pre-book it to serve particular destinations.

Many of these services are under-utilised for a variety of reasons including period of operation, accessibility of vehicle but also for a number of issues which we feel can be addressed with a co-ordinated solution and new technology.

- Limited or no budgets to promote awareness of them locally let alone to visitors to the area who might be interested in using them.
- The flexibility of the service makes them difficult to promote via many standard websites developed for scheduled services
- Many require journeys to be booked at least 24 hours in advance which removes the opportunity for passengers to use them for anything other than pre-planned journeys

- Coordination of the services is manually based which reduces the ability for efficiencies to be made
- There is no consistency of marketing or branding making it difficult for brand awareness to be developed.

Opportunity

Over the last few months, HITRANS officers have been working with partners to identify potential funding streams to enable the commissioning of a Demand Responsive Transport App which could be deployed on any non-scheduled local transport service and in so doing address some of the issues identified above.

Funding has been secured from a number of different sources with an overall initial budget of £330,000 identified. This includes contributions from the second round of Transport Scotlands MaaS Investment Fund, the Scottish Government's Islands team, Smarter Choices Smarter Places and two of the European projects which HITRANS are participating – G-PaTra and MOVE.

As a result of the funding package secured, HITRANS are now in a position procure a solution for the provision of a DRT Smartphone app on an initial 3 year contract. The specific services on which the App will be rolled out will be dependent on the value of the contract with services prioritised in partnership with local authorities and operators.

Scope

HITRANS are seeking to procure a software application suite that will simplify the booking and management of current DRT services within the region, initially focussing on the islands, with an aim to also increase awareness and accessibility of the services to all potential users.

The high-level service requirements for this tender are:

- Provision and maintenance of a Demand Responsive Transport software booking and management system that includes:
 - Journey planning, booking and payment through a smartphone app and website
 - Operational management system for service operators and local authorities
 - Driver application with schedule and navigation
 - Driver duty management
 - Advanced and real-time bookings
 - Fixed, flexible and mixed (fixed with flexible) routes
 - Automated service scheduling
 - Real-time passenger tracking of their service
 - Operator insight to the use of their vehicles and key operating metrics
 - Ability for reservations to be made for users
 - Ability to direct customers to a commercial and/or fixed timetable bus route if most appropriate for their journey.
- Capacity for a number of different DRT services in different geographies to be included with their own branding
- Potential to increase the services included during the contract period
- System status, fault monitoring and reporting facilities
- API to allow integration from other apps, specifically to include integration with HITRANS GoHi MaaS platform and the Scottish Islands Passport App.

- Optional extension to include additional operators and geographical areas during the Contract, that may include services operated in other Local Authorities or Regional Transport Partnership areas outside of the HITRANS region. Within the initial project this may include services within either the Shetland or Clyde islands within neighbouring Regional Transport Partnership areas of ZETRANS and Strathclyde Passenger Transport (SPT)

Timescales

The contract is being advertised on Public Contract Scotland w/c 6th September. It is hoped that a contract award can be made by early November 2021.

Recommendation:

Members are invited to:

1. Note the report
2. Consider local non-scheduled bus services that would benefit from the introduction of the DRT smartphone app in the HITRANS area

RTS Delivery

Impact - Positive

Comment – Local bus services support a number of RTS priorities relating to Public Transport and access to employment, education, healthcare and social inclusion.

Policy

Impact - Positive

Comment –

Financial

Impact – Neutral

Comment - As outlined in the report an initial budget of £330,000 is available for the project with contributions coming from a number of external funding sources.

Equality

Impact – Positive

Comment – Local Bus services help improve access to many of the most vulnerable groups within the area and also provide what can be described as a lifeline service to those communities where the local bus service is the only form of public transport available.

Report by:

Neil MacRae

Designation:

Partnership Manager

Date:

6th September 2021