

Report to Partnership Meeting 28 November 2014

RESEARCH AND STRATEGY DELIVERY

Ferries Accessibility Fund – Thistle Assistance Card

Purpose of Report

To advise Members on the detail of the Ferries Accessibility Fund which was launched in October 2014 and HITRANS application for support from the fund to allow HITRANS to produce and roll out the Thistle Assistance Card in the Highlands and Islands.

Background

The Minister for Transport and Veterans Affairs announced the Ferries Accessibility Fund in August 2014 with details of how to apply produced in October. The fund was identified as a commitment in the Scottish Ferries Plan published in 2012. This was one of the recommendations made by the Accessibility Sub-Group of the Ferries Review. The Sub-Group's report noted that the most practical and cost-effective way of enhancing the accessibility of vessels and ports was to address this in the design of new vessels and significant harbour developments. However, the cost of reasonable retrofitting should not be prohibitive and the Accessibility Fund has been launched by Scottish Ministers to stimulate and support such works.

The finances of the Fund will be administered by Caledonian Maritime Assets Ltd (CMAL) on behalf of the Scottish Government. Decisions on applications will be taken by a Fund Management Group, which will comprise representatives from Transport Scotland and the Mobility Access Committee for Scotland. CMAL will carry out the financial administration but, as they may also be an applicant to the Fund, they will not be part of the Fund Management Group.

The operation and effectiveness of the Fund and its administration will be reviewed after 2 years. A sum of £500,000 has been made available for the fund. Allocations will be on a match-funding basis. Normally this will be 50/50, which gives the opportunity for £1m to be spent on accessibility improvements. However, the Fund Management Group will have discretion to consider and approve bids requiring, on the basis of objective justification, more than 50% of total costs.

The purpose of the Fund is to improve the accessibility of ferries and ports and to enhance the ferry travelling experience of disabled people. The Fund is there to support projects that go beyond regulatory requirements.

Thistle Assistance Card

The introduction of the Thistle Assistance Card will help people with disabilities have their needs understood and catered for when they access transport modes. In practice PRMs often need a little more time to get on and off public transport and to have a safe and comfortable journey to their destination.

The aim of the Thistle Assistance Card would be to help anyone who has difficulty in using transport services including ferries because of their age, disability or illness. It will quickly and easily tell the ticket attendant or ferry and terminal staff about any extra help PRMs need during their journey.

The introduction of the card is an aspiration HITRANS have had for some time following discussions with SESTran who introduced the card in South East Scotland a number of years ago. Tactran are now rolling the card out in Tayside and Central region. Including the Highlands and Islands in the coverage area will help move towards making the scheme Scotland wide and recognisable across all modes.

Discussions have taken place with the Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland at the RTP Chairs forum identifying the real value that PRMs would see in the card becoming commonly available.

HITRANS has discussed the proposal to introduce the card with transport operators and it featured in discussion at the ferry workshop during the recent Forum for Integrated Transport event in Oban. Support has been confirmed by Caledonian MacBrayne, Stagecoach, ScotRail and West Coast Motors. Advisers and HITCOG have considered the potential for the card in the Highlands and Islands and it has been supported by all involved in these discussions.

Budget Implications

HITRANS officers have submitted an application to the Ferries Accessibility Fund for 50% of the costs of a £15,000 project. The cost allows a budget of £5,000 to train ferry staff in the use of the card and understanding its purpose. The remaining budget of £10,000 will cover the production of the card and information packs and subsequent print runs.

Recommendations

Members are asked to :-

- (i) Note the report.
- (ii) Approve the allocation of £7,500 from the Research and Strategy Delivery programme budget for External Funding Application Support to fund HITRANS share of costs for the deployment of the Thistle Assistance Card should our application for match funding from the Ferries Accessibility Fund be successful.

Risk	Impact	Comment
RTS delivery	√	The project supports HITRANS RTS themes on improving accessibility of transport services.
Policy	√	The item supports HITRANS work in supporting the delivery of the Scottish Ferries Plan.
Financial	√	The project will have a positive financial impact as it will draw down additional funding.
Equality	√	The project will make it easier for PRMs and anyone with additional support needs to access transport services.

Report by: Ranald Robertson
Designation: Partnership Director
Date: 18th November 2014