

Report to Partnership Meeting 2 February 2018

RESEARCH AND STRATEGY DELIVERY

Midnight Train to Georgemas

Purpose of Report

To update Members on the study investigating the provision of an overnight rail service from Caithness/Orkney to Central Scotland. This study is now complete and will be on our website soon.

Conclusions

1. The report has examined the feasibility of developing a Rail Sleeper Service linking the Far North of Scotland with the Central Belt, helping to improve connectivity from remote part of the country and with the potential to support the local economy and develop new tourism markets.
2. There is considerable interest in the development of a Caithness Sleeper service helping to link the Far North with Edinburgh and Glasgow. Stakeholders in Caithness and Orkney have identified that the service would help to broaden the opportunities for travel for residents, both on the mainland and from Orkney.
3. Work in this study has examined the operational feasibility of delivering such a service. It has been identified that it would be possible to operate such a service with the option that would generate the greatest number of trips being a service operating from Thurso to Edinburgh, calling at Glasgow Queen St en route. Such a service would involve the operation of a portion to serve Inverness. By operating a portion for Inverness passengers it would be possible for the northbound service to connect with the morning sailing from Scrabster to Stromness.
4. The preferred method of operation of the service would involve the use of a Class 73/9 operating with a Driving Trailer vehicle which would also act as a parcels vehicle. This would provide flexibility in operation and allow the opportunity to use the service to move parcels and small high value items providing an additional source of revenue for the service.
5. The preferred service options would be for a Thurso – Edinburgh service with a separate Inverness portion. The Inverness portion is essential to provide a reasonable level of revenue for the service.
6. Using a range of data sources, we have estimated that the service would attract up to 32,000 one-way passenger trips per annum. The methodology deployed is

relatively conservative. In particular, further work might identify the potential for the service to generate additional tourism trips to/from the Far North area.

7. Based on these estimates, we believe that the proposed service would require a subsidy of around £3.14m per annum, representing approximately 55% of the associated operating costs. If market share from Inverness were only 5% the minimum annual subsidy requirement would rise to £4.02m While significant, this factor is likely to be comparable with the corresponding subsidy required to operate the Highland portions of the current Caledonian Sleeper services.
8. The operation of this service would represent an exciting opportunity to develop rail links to the Far North and improve connectivity to help support tourism and the local economy. This study has shown that there may be scope to develop such a service, although more detailed work may be required to understand certain detailed aspects of the proposed service.

RISK REGISTER

RTS Delivery

Impact – Positive-improves choice and connectivity

Policy

Impact - Positive

Financial

Impact –Study fully funded- completed

Equality

Impact – Potential to improve access

Recommendations

1. Members are asked to note the report

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