

TRANSPORT DEVELOPMENT PROJECT PROGRESS REPORT - 3 OCTOBER 2003

1. INTRODUCTION

The infrastructure elements of the first phase of the project are being progressed on schedule. The waiting shelter contract is being delivered with a total of 95 set to be installed by the end of October. The Inverness bus to railway station walking route improvements will be completed by the end of the year.

Progress has been made towards the aim of improving the level of information available to people travelling by ferry. The two Variable Message Boards in Lochmaddy and Tarbert have been installed while the signs to be located at Fort William, Kyle and Broadford have finally been ordered and will be installed at the end of October. NADICS are continuing to progress their programme of installing 12 variable message signs. The target date for installing all these signs is the end of the year.

The situation with Fort William Transport Interchange remains the same as reported to the 1 August meeting. This project is planned for completion by 31 March 2004, land access is subject to Network Rail consent and will not be possible before January 2004.

2. WAITING SHELTER INSTALLATION

During the summer Transolutions Group Limited have concentrated their installation programme in the island authority areas. This minimises the risk of time being lost by staff being storm bound in the islands.

During September Transolutions Group Limited commenced the installation of the first 21 shelters in Orkney. These shelters include six with solar roof panels to power the light and are amongst the first in Scotland to utilise this technology.

Base works have been undertaken for a further 24 bus shelters in the Western Isles. These shelters are to be located in: Barra (7), South Uist (3), Benbecula (3), North Uist (4), and Lewis (7). Transolutions will also deliver the eight shelters that are being included in the upgrade of Stornoway Bus Station during October. When fitted these shelters will take the Western Isles shelters to a total of 52.

Transolutions have appointed Pat Munro (AIness) Limited as a sub contractor for the installation of shelters in the Highland Council area. This will help meet the target of installing 40 shelters in Highland by the end of 2003/04. 13 shelters have been fitted to date.

Transolutions will utilise their in-house installation team for the majority of the Argyll and Bute shelters. Many of these shelters cannot be installed until work to provide bus bays is completed. 10 shelters have already been fitted in Argyll.

3. VARIABLE MESSAGE SIGNS

The installation of the 12 variable message signs at locations in Highland and Argyll and Bute has not progressed as initially indicated by NADICS. However base works are now progressing

with civil engineering work being undertaken by Pirie Construction. Techspan (the sign manufacturer) are proposing to commence installing the signs when all the foundations have been completed. Representations have been made to at least try to get some signs installed in time for the Royal National Mod, which is being held in Oban this year.

The situation with these signs is most unsatisfactory as HITRANS were led to believe that the 3 signs being funded through the Transportation Project would be in place for winter 2002/03 instead they are now expected to be installed a full year late.

4. VARIABLE MESSAGE BOARDS

Variable Message Boards have now been installed in Lochmaddy and Tarbert. These signs will act as an early warning when there is a disruption to the Sound of Harris service. As the signs are variable they can also be utilised to provide any information deemed useful by Caledonian MacBrayne.

5. FERRY INFORMATION SIGNS

The Scottish Executive approved the application to erect Non-Prescribed Traffic Signs in July. Scrimsigns Micro Electronics were awarded the contract to supply these signs.

Discussions with Caledonian MacBrayne aimed at establishing a system for controlling the information displayed on the signs took longer than anticipated however agreement was eventually reached with CalMac and the signs were ordered on 9 September.

The Highland Council plan to install the signs before the end of October.

6. RAILWAY STATION CYCLE PARKING

The introduction of the commuter train departing from Tain at 0716 has greatly enhanced the opportunities available for travelling to work by train. Increasing numbers of people are opting to “park and ride” at stations between Tain and Inverness. This trend includes a number of people who are, or would be willing to, complete part of their journey by bike. Unfortunately existing cycle parking at stations is limited.

HITRANS and Highland Rail Partnership have surveyed stations between Tain and Inverness and identified a range of improvements that can be made to enhance railway station cycle parking in order to meet the commuting needs of cyclists. This will involve siting eight lockers and ten additional cycle stands at stations between Tain and Inverness to service the commuter market. The stations where improved cycle parking will be provided are: Fearn, Invergordon, Alness, Dingwall, Muir of Ord and Beaully.

Before this proposal can be progressed it will be necessary to establish land ownership at each proposed site. Where possible alternatives to railway land have been identified as security considerations might prevent the siting of lockers at the preferred locations.

Highland Council must be consulted in order to establish a system for distributing locker keys. The best method of eliminating misuse of the lockers is if keys are distributed on a contract basis. The most obvious way of doing this is through the excellent Council Service Point network with cyclists applying to use a locker.

7. FORT WILLIAM TRANSPORT INTERCHANGE

The Chairman wrote to Jim Bellingham of Network Rail after concerns were raised at the last meeting that the Fort William transport interchange development was being hampered by Network Rail. Network Rail responded to this letter but only to confirm that it was impossible to allow early access to the Network Rail land. Therefore the projected timescale for this project remains restricted to an earliest possible start date of January 2004.

ScotRail has supplied plans showing a potential refurbishment of the station building that would provide two additional retail/office units. These units would be available to transport companies and Shopmobility Highland at a rent to be agreed with ScotRail. The total estimated cost of this work is £128,000. The estimated cost of the external works currently amounts to £325,000 with a total available budget of £355,000. As such it seems highly unlikely that we will be able to include the changes to the internal layout of the station within the project budget. However transport operators were contacted to gauge whether they would be interested in establishing a travel centre in Fort William. Caledonian MacBrayne and Rapson's Group have responded by expressing an interest in principal to the proposal, a more detailed appraisal of costs must be undertaken before any operator can make a firm commitment to the project.

8. INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS

Agreement has been reached with the Scottish Executive that they will undertake project design for bus bays located at points on the trunk road network in Argyll and Bute. This will allow the development of a partnership approach with HITRANS meeting the capital cost of each project and the Executive meeting the design costs. This scheme will enable HITRANS to engage Bear Scotland Limited to carry out the work at the contract rate they have agreed with the Scottish Executive. The Council will also be asked to provide a price for each contract to ensure best value is achieved.

The walking route between Inverness Railway Station and Inverness Bus Station is being greatly enhanced. A zebra crossing of Strothers Lane is being provided and this will be complimented through the provision of clear pedestrian signage that will define the safest route. Improved lighting has already been provided along Strothers Lane and this will compliment any aspirations to develop permanent bus stops at Strothers Lane. The Highland Council is progressing the provision of two CCTV cameras to cover the route, this will hinge on whether the revenue costs of the cameras can be borne by the Inverness City CCTV system as HITRANS can only fund their capital cost.

The proposed refurbishment of Stornoway Bus Station remains a key objective of the transportation project during the current financial year. Eight new bus shelters are being included within this project and these will be delivered to Stornoway before the end of October. Work is planned to proceed later this year.

The Highland Council are currently developing projects that will include the provision of bus turning areas at Cromdale, Lybster and Thurso Business Park.