

Report to Partnership Meeting 8th April 2011

STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

Conon Bridge Station

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To provide Board Members with an update on the project to re-open Conon Bridge Railway station.

PROJECT HISTORY

1. Commuter rail services began in 1998 with the Inverness - Dingwall Commuter service, after development work by the Highland Rail Partnership (HRP).
2. In 2000 the service was extended back to start from Tain.
3. Beauly station was re-opened in 2002 at a cost of £250k, funded by the Strategic Rail Authority £99k, Highland Council £45k, Inverness and Nairn Enterprise £30k, Railtrack £69k, HRP £8.8k. Usage was estimated at 7500 passenger per annum.
4. To further develop the network, Highland Council on behalf of HITRANS and Highland Rail Partnership, funded a feasibility study into Conon Bridge re-opening in April 2004. Further work was carried out in 2005 to determine the optimum location at Conon - this was found to be the original site.
5. In Dec 2005 'Invernet' was launched, creating peak hour journeys to/from Inverness. This was locally funded for 3 years via Highland Council through the Scottish Government sponsored Public Transport Fund, HIE and HRP.
6. In 2006 HRP funded a Transport Economic Efficiency Analysis (TEE); a 4 car platform costing £760k had a benefit:cost ratio of 1: 2.99 (based on the post Dec 05 Invernet timetable) with Year 1 ridership predicted at 20000 rising to 35000 in Year 10.
7. In 2006 consultants Delta Rail were funded by HRP to produce Sectional Running Times for the Dingwall-Muir of Ord section with a stop at Conon. This was used for later timetabling analysis and performance modelling.
8. In 2007 Conon Bridge station was included in the list of proposed projects in the Delivery Plan associated with the draft HITRANS Regional Transport Strategy. HITRANS anticipated being able to fund the reopening from within its then Capital Budget .
9. In 2007 a TEE analysis was carried out for the planned North Highland Lines timetable recast. The scenario for the Conon Bridge Station/4 trains to Kyle variant produced

benefit:cost ratios of 1:12.25 optimistic to 1:5.45 pessimistic. This included a half hourly peak service into Inverness from Conon with a likely increase in potential Year 1 usage.

10. Highland Council submitted the scheme for planning permission in 2008. This was approved by Scottish Government.
11. In Dec 2008 the recast Far North Lines timetable was introduced following extensive work by HRP, Transport Scotland, First ScotRail and Network Rail included a time allowance for stops at Conon Bridge in 75% of services. This service improvement was funded by Transport Scotland.
12. In 2009 Highland Council entered into discussions with Network Rail to work up the 4 car platform option project with an estimated cost of c£1.1m with optimism bias.
13. Transport Scotland have agreed to cover the station access charges until the franchise change in 2014 when they will be subsumed into the next ScotRail franchise.
14. The Dec 2008 timetable recast has yielded impressive passenger growth figures- over the past five years Beauly 92%, Muir of Ord 137%, Dingwall 127%, Alness 110%, Invergordon 152%. In 2008-9 Beauly usage was over 52000 compared with the original estimate of 7500.
15. The proposed Kessock Bridge works will cause extensive road congestion on the corridors serving the communities north of Inverness during two summer periods.
16. In 2010 Highland Council earmarked £100k in its capital programme towards road/car parking costs at the station. HITRANS granted £20k from its budget to the Highland Council towards the next stage of the station development, costed at £120k.
17. In September 2010 a meeting was held at the Highland Council attended by Transport Minister Stewart Stevenson, Highland Council members and officials, Conon Community Council and HITRANS. The Minister agreed to see if Government could find funds to help reach the £120k target.
18. HITRANS wrote to Mr Stevenson's successor, Keith Brown when he became Minister regarding the project. In March 2011 he responded to HITRANS:

I am writing in relation to your meeting of 10 September with Stewart Stevenson MSP and Highland Council, in which you requested a contribution towards the costs for the detailed design work for the re-opening of Conon Bridge Rail Station.

I note the potential benefits that the re-opening of the station could bring to Conon Bridge and the surrounding area. Indeed, investing in transport that is focused on making better connections across Scotland assists in encouraging sustainable economic growth.

My officials have fully investigated potential funding sources and I am pleased to offer you a contribution of £96,000 towards the cost of the design work. Officials will be in touch should you accept this offer of a grant. However, I would expect the remaining stages of the project to be taken forward using local/regional funding sources.

Officials from Transport Scotland will continue to provide assistance in the development of the project.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Members are asked to note the report and to approve HITRANS continuing to work closely with Highland Council and Network Rail to contractualise to 'ready to go to tender' stage.

Risk	impact	comment
RTS delivery	√	Provision of a station at Conon Bridge is identified in the draft Delivery Plan as a project to be delivered in the short term
Policy	-	
Financial	√	Funding for completion of the design element of the project is now confirmed with input from HITRANS and Transport Scotland
Equality	-	

Report by: Frank Roach
Designation: Partnership Manager
Date: 30th March 2011