

Item:
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Report to Partnership Meeting 15 June 2012

RESEARCH AND STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

Conon Bridge Station

Purpose of Report

To provide a brief update for Members on Conon Bridge Station reopening.

Progress

1. After a number of years of feasibility work, business case analysis and timetabling the project is now closer to fruition.
2. HITRANS signed a Basic Services Agreement with Network Rail in March 2012 enabling them to procure a GRIP5 detailed design for a 96m long platform. This provides a ready to go to tender programme with costs at +/- 10%. Following discussions at a senior level between First ScotRail, Network Rail and the Office of Regulation the specification was varied to include the option of a 15m long Beaulieu type platform. This approach is a demonstration of the new alliancing initiative between infrastructure manager and rail operator and fits in with the post McNulty world of appropriate infrastructure standards, helped in part by the existence of the safety regime in place for Beaulieu and ten years of incident-free operation.
3. HITRANS has paid Network Rail £99880 in order for the work to be carried out, using funds that were made available by the Transport Minister in March 2011, while the access road and car park design is being carried by Highland Council, with £20000 transferred to them by HITRANS in March 2012. Highland Council already has allocated £100k towards the capital works for the roads element.
4. It is hoped that funds may become available from other sources including Kessock Bridge mitigation. If this is forthcoming construction could start in the autumn with opening in February 2013.
5. Growth on local Invernet rail services continues to rise with growth to the year ending March 2012 of 20% at Dingwall, 19% at Muir of Ord, 9% at Beaulieu, with cumulative increases over the last 8 years of 188%, 206% and 106% respectively.

Project Background

1. *Commuter rail services began in 1998 with the 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, HC £45k, INE £30k, Railtrack £69k, HRP £8.8k. Usage was estimated at 7500 passenger pa.*
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 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 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 12.25 optimistic to 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 were in 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 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 These works are currently programmed to be undertaken two tranches between February and June 2013 and the same period in 2014.*

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, costing 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 awarded HITRANS £96k towards design work.*

Recommendation

1. Members are asked to note the report.

Risk	Impact	Comment
RTS delivery	√	This project fits well with a number of RTS Horizontal themes.
Policy	√	This project has integration and environmental benefits.
Financial	√	This project is fully funded
Equality	-	No impact on equalities issues.

Report by: Frank Roach
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