

Report to Partnership Meeting 26 April 2013

RESEARCH AND STRATEGY DELIVERY

Rural Transport Solutions

Purpose of Report

To update Members on a proposed pilot or pilots involving innovative solutions for the provision of public transport in rural areas and on routes where long distance coach services are failing to meet the needs of local users. Options are currently being considered and Board Members are invited to input on those aspects of service provision which should be prioritised for assessment or trial.

Identifying the issues

In the current difficult economic climate there is an increasing need for Local Authorities to develop innovative and sustainable rural transport schemes and services that both reduce the cost of providing these services but continue to tackle issues such as social exclusion and enhance the vitality and sustainability of sparsely populated areas.

It is proposed that a pilot study or studies be developed to help provide solutions to the issues identified below and are applicable in similar forms across the HITRANS area.

- Problems arising from where the provision of a skeletal rigid local bus service that follows fixed routes and often provides the only form of public transport for many large rural areas in the Highlands and Islands is increasingly failing to meet the needs of the local residents which it serves.
- Issues relating to a lack of available capacity on interurban or long distance coach services for those passengers wanting to make short local journeys en-route. Examples where this has been reported is on the Ullapool to Inverness and Thurso to Inverness services.

Within the HITRANS area there are a number of existing schemes involving the provision of Demand Responsive Transport in both rural and semi-urban areas. This includes a variety of Dial a Bus and subsidised taxi services that have been used to varying degrees of success. The Highland Council is currently in the process of developing a pilot for in the Lochalsh area but it is clear that there is scope to develop similar schemes elsewhere.

Funding

An allocation of £10,000 has been identified in the HITRANS 2013 / 2014 Research and Strategy Delivery Plan to investigate the issues presented in providing transport provision in rural areas.

Proposal

HITRANS Officers will work with Permanent Advisers and Board Members in order to identify a suitable study or pilot that will help provide a better understanding of specific rural transport issues with a view to developing innovative solutions that may be applied in various contexts within member Local Authority areas.

Recommendation

1. Members are asked to note the report and invited to support the proposed allocation of the £10K from the HITRANS Research and Development Budget. A further update will be provided at a future Partnership meeting.

Risk	Impact	Comment
RTS delivery	√	This work supports several strategic objectives of the RTS.
Policy	√	This work supports the development of Policies H27 and H33 as set out in the RTS Delivery Plan
Financial	-	Funding is identified in the 2013/14 Business Plan
Equality	-	Development of innovative rural transport solutions helps reduce social exclusion by improving access to employment and services for those living in our most remote areas.

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