

**Report to Partnership Meeting 26 April 2013**

**EUROPEAN PROJECTS**

**Journey Genie (Giant Puffin)**



**Purpose of Report**

To provide Members with an update on HITRANS itinerary and journey planner which can be found at [www.journeygenie.co.uk/home.php](http://www.journeygenie.co.uk/home.php). It is designed to work on recent versions of browsers.

**Background**

TRANSTOURISM-Sustainable Transport in Rural Tourism Areas is a Northern Periphery Programme project with partners in Sweden, Iceland, Scotland, Eire and Northern Ireland. The project runs from 01 September 2010 until 30 September 2013.

The project delivers two key priorities:

- Promoting innovation and competitiveness in remote and peripheral areas
- Sustainable development of natural and community resources

As part of this programme, HITRANS is leading a major project aimed at promoting public transport based tourism across the Highlands and Islands through the development of a new web and mobile based journey-planning portal. The project has secured the financing and partner support necessary for delivery.

**Project Synopsis**

Journey Genie (formerly Giant Puffin) aims to help visitors discover the many places they can visit by public transport, then help them plan their specific trip with ease and confidence. It pulls together all the public transport information that will allow them to discover their trip is possible, practical and offers sufficient interest to their needs. It takes existing transport feed information that is framed in terms only locals understand, and repositions it in terms that the visitor will understand. The goal is to help them realise there is an alternative to bringing or hiring a car, thereby supporting the future viability of many public transport routes.

The outputs will consist of a website with static and user generated content, a database driven application to search, plan and save journeys, and register for updates to those journeys – and a

widget version of the application hosted on key partner websites. A mobile application will also be developed.

This project aims to relieve the constraints of current Highlands and Islands tourism/travel sites (either mode specific or simply very patchy in the information given) in order to provide visitors to the area with the opportunity to travel by public transport for a full multi-modal trip.

Currently, comprehensive single mode timetables provided by transport operators do not facilitate the creation of individually tailored itineraries taking in attractions/locations of choice, and are often too detailed for the visitors needs. This project also aims to take the current timetable data feeds – primarily [Traveline Scotland](#) - one step forward, by “translating” them into a format that will be understood by someone unfamiliar with the area. A set of business rules will need to be developed that will filter the information flow presented through Giant Puffin.

Journey Genie builds on existing transport data feeds, but combine and provide a layer of interpretation onto existing data resources. It will present information in such a way that allows visitors who are unfamiliar with place names and specific stops, to query public transport journeys based on what they want to do.

It should be noted that this isn't simply a case of taking an existing data feed and pulling it directly into a new website – existing travel data needs to be combined with input from the tourism sector and made usable and understandable to a new target audience.

The system will be interactive, allowing the user to plan trips around specific landmarks and destinations and register to be informed if their journey changes prior to their planned travel dates. While the application interface may be hosted on other websites, the project will also have its own website which will include itinerary information, recommended routes, advice for travelling in the Highlands and at a later phase a social media aspect that will feature user feedback and content relating to trips.

The opportunity to provide real time updates to itineraries in the event of disruption etc would also be explored as part of the later phase of the project. This would enable the portal to take feeds from the real time information systems that have been introduced in Highland, Moray, Orkney and Argyll and Bute as well as any data feeds that could in time be made available by ferry and rail operators.

As the mobile phone technology available for information dissemination develops, there will be an opportunity to use the portal to give location aware information and real time journey planning information to people while they are on the move – though this is unlikely to be attainable in phase 1 or 2 of the project. This would prove very welcome in providing information to travellers in the event of missed connections or service disruption.

While the project has a role in helping to drive new ticketing options, it will not be a transactional website and visitors will still – at present – need to buy tickets through the transport partners.

Academic partners at Aberdeen University Rural Economic Digital Hub have agreed to monitor the project and then research mobile applications that would further enhance tailored visitor choice. In turn they could subsequently develop the project further in partnership with HITRANS as real time technologies improve.

## **Project Objectives**

The project objectives are to help inspire visitors to plan and make trips by public transport with confidence – even though they don't know the area, let alone the specific names of bus stops or stations. This will thereby increase public transport usage, increase sustainable travel particularly to remote areas and facilitate easier getting about in the Highlands and Islands - particularly for visitors. The project portal, offsite app interface and mobile apps will:

- Encourage public transport usage (though it will not sell directly, the transport partners will do this)
- Provide confidence/inspiration that public transport is a viable option when visiting the area
- Interface with commercial transport operators – it is not being delivered in competition, but partnership with existing provision
- Promote public transport as valuable experience for visitors
- Deliver reliable well used search engine for public transport which will produce:
- More users on public transport
- Scope to influence public transport provision & protect vulnerable links

The project needs to demonstrate benefits to both tourism industry and transport operators – it must support existing activities rather than compete against them.

The project's scope covers the Highlands & Islands including Shetland and Arran/Cumbrae. An implicit goal of the project is that it will drive more visitors to Scotland and the Highlands and Islands once it becomes clear the area is a well-connected place. A further goal is to facilitate visitors in getting off the beaten track and encourage modal shift of transport in busier parts of the region.

## **Project funding**

HITRANS has received Euro 242k, to match our own contribution of £60k and HIE's contribution of £20k.

## **Project Partners**

The lead partner is the Swedish Transport Administration.

The other partners are: Municipality of Harjedalen (S) Destination Lofsdalen (S), Destination Funasdalen (S), Icelandic Tourism Research Centre, **HITRANS**, University of Ulster, Clare County Council, Action Renewables (Co Down NI).

Our local associate partners are: HIE, University of Aberdeen, Destination Loch Ness, Cairngorm Business Partnership, First ScotRail, CalMac, Stagecoach, VisitScotland, Traveline Scotland.

## **Progress**

Our web developers Steer Davies Gleave are finalising the site.

Details of recently resolved and outstanding issues appear below. Arrangements are now being drawn up by our PR contractor Incentive Media for the launch, which is planned for 15<sup>th</sup> May in Edinburgh, with a well-known figure from the travel world and a politician likely to be featuring.

The site will be in both full and mobile form for smartphones and tablets. Social media is a key component of the project both to enable sharing of experiences with friends and for feedback on the site. This will be handled through social media specialist Clear View Returns, with email contact with HITRANS should that be required.

A maintenance agreement will be contractualised with Steer Davies Gleave to ensure issues can be dealt with promptly. This will set out a service level agreement that will provide continuity of service and resilience.

### **Recent Product Development**

The list below details a number of recent product developments that have been completed ahead of the 15 May site launch:

- The main website is almost ready including the mobile (>=2G) version
- Profile page for saving itineraries added - and saves searched for items
- Facebook login completed
- Print option added
- Highlands and Islands are geo ring fenced in a way that allows trips from within to without the region but not within other Scottish regions.
- Start point redesigned.
- Logos disappear after home page
- Mobile site front end done
- VisitScotland data - dynamic data still unavailable so we will go live with the current data
- Pre launch page for Facebook
- Some recommended itineraries completed
- Journey Genie travel planning widget- in progress
- Coverage: transport data seems to be working OK for most of the area, but Uists bus services are still not in Traveline so prevent any journeys beyond the ferry ports.
- Blank space on pages left by logo removal have been taken out.
- Searching / Exploring- it is difficult to search for some obvious geographic, natural features, e.g. Loch Ness, Cairngorms, beaches. In order to overcome this key words have been added to the database
- Common misspellings have been added in
- Error message amended when you put in start date beyond 3 months.
- I'm sorry response provided if the system can't find an easy way of locating nearest transport point and a walking route to these locations, and asks if they wish to submit information about location they're trying to get to + date/time so we can build up a record of such requests.
- ShareThis button enabled to share itineraries with others

### **Issues/to do**

The following items are being progressed with a view to completion in time for the official site launch:

- Can an option be provided to switch to Google Maps search to identify locations not in the current database? It already does this, but the limitations of the API mean that we need to be zoomed to the area to get focused results.
- More trips to be included including trips starting in Glasgow/Edinburgh, day trips, weekend trips, castles, whisky
- New pages to be added: About Journey Genie – background info & what it does/General advice re using public transport in the H&I/Information on cost of travel and buying tickets

- including Travelpass and rover options/Links to main transport operator's and local authority transport websites./Technical help and option to report a problem
- Consideration of user account settings feature – i.e. manage log-in options, email contact preferences, option to delete/remove account?
  - Provision of a default itinerary name rather than just a blank when saving.
  - Tool for administrator to add itineraries.
  - User generated content requires moderation.
  - User for confirmation that they wish to delete a stopping point (undo)
  - Social buttons on itineraries
  - Video clip
  - Easy option to change start point for an itinerary
  - Widget completion
  - Feedback form on website- it is easy to start building up your list of attractions / stopping points before realising you haven't properly selected start point. At the moment the only way you can do this is to add a new stopping point to end of itinerary, drag it to the start, and delete existing start point.
  - System seems to forget how long user has selected for each point when updating itinerary – keeps reverting to 1 hour. This also means that overnight stops disappear.
  - When choosing journey options (under the view details option), you don't always get the one you clicked on for some reason.
  - For some journeys – e.g. between mainland and Orkney/Shetland islands only getting options which involve flying because ferries are less frequent. Flights will need to be removed. (cf Traveline uncheck box)
  - Warning pop up on entering start date and choosing date within range, with a reminder to update/check itinerary nearer the time.

#### **Tried but currently ruled out**

The following list highlights a number of areas that the developers have investigated and currently ruled out as not being feasible:

- Traveline proposal to overlay real bus routes onto the Google maps- not currently possible.
- The Google taxi search for locations beyond public transport access ineffective. TrainTaxi was considered but currently doesn't suit.
- Option to share saved itineraries from the My Genie box? Not possible at the moment.

#### **Project Completion and Final Conference**

HITRANS will be meeting our Northern Periphery Programme project partners at the next TransTourism steering committee meeting in Sweden in May. This will provide an opportunity to review progress across Transtourism and to discuss preparation for the final conference. The final conference is scheduled to take place in Mallaig on Tues 24 / Wed 25 September 2013.

The steering group meeting will also include discussion on a preparatory project that is being developed by the group of partners under the working title of Transtourism 2. We hope this will see a strong project developed for submission in the next call for NPP projects that will follow on from the god work started in TransTourism..

#### **Recommendation**

1. Members are asked to note the report.

<b>Risk</b>	<b>Impact</b>	<b>Comment</b>
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  
**Designation:** Partnership Manager  
**Date:** 17<sup>th</sup> April 2013