HI▶TRANS
THE HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS TRANSPORT PARTNERSHIP

Report to Partnership Meeting 4 April 2014

PUBLIC TRANSPORT INFORMATION PROVISON

Purpose of Report

To consult Members on a proposal to create a new post with the responsibility for co-ordinating the provision of public transport information across the HITRANS area. The report was initially discussed at HITRANS HITCOG meeting on 4th March and then at the Partnership Advisors meeting on 13th March. The revised proposal takes cognisance of feedback received at both these meetings.

Background

The provision and promotion of accurate timetable information underpins our public transport network. However, it is an area that both operators and public bodies have found increasingly difficult to set aside sufficient staffing resources to meet overall expectations from customers and stakeholders.

This in part is a result of the cyclical nature of the work, which often involves high levels of resource for relatively short periods of time in advance of service changes or the publication of timetable guides. As a consequence some local authorities and operators have found it difficult to meet their obligations for providing the timetable information which is essential for the successful operation of several public transport information systems and websites including Traveline Scotland, JourneyGenie and Real-time bus information.

Following a request from one of our partner local authorities an initial proposal was developed for consideration at the HITRANS Public Transport managers on 4th March 2014.

Current Resources
A&B – Previous position with responsibility for timetable information was vacant for a period of time. Currently experiencing difficulties supplying information to Traveline.

CnES – Currently finding difficulties supplying sufficient information to Traveline.

Highland – Employ a dedicated officer with responsibility for bus information and infrastructure across the Council area. An estimated 30-40% of this post involves provision of timetable information and associated publicity.

Moray – Previous position with responsibility for timetable information not filled following retirement. Information to Traveline previously supplied by Aberdeenshire and has recently been updated by Moray Council but this is not a dedicated role within the PTU team.

Orkney – Majority of bus information supplied by Stagecoach North Scotland from their Inverness office. Other data is not being supplied including for internal ferries and air services which could be included in the system.

Shared Services
The Scottish Parliament's Local Government and Regeneration Committee Inquiry into the Flexibility and Autonomy of Local Government is currently calling for evidence on how local government structures can improve how services are delivered.

Opportunities for shared service initiatives within the 33 Scottish Roads Authorities was explored at a recent Roads Collaboration Event in February which encouraged delegates to discuss the drivers for change, potential barriers to shared services, where collaboration is already occurring and the successes and lessons to be learned from current initiatives. The objective of this engagement was to open a dialogue between authorities to collectively identify new opportunities for working together to achieve better outcomes within roads services.

There is an opportunity to improve the provision of public transport information through local authorities in the HITRANS region working together to provide a more efficient solution and improve delivery of this essential service. Elements of which are outlined below.

Bus Timetable Database Contract – At Stop Information, Traveline and JourneyGenie
Currently each of the HITRANS member Local authorities subscribe to a shared Bus Timetable Database contract on a pro rata basis and has an option for a one year extension later this year at a cost of £21,754. By reducing the number of licenses to a single license there is an opportunity to make a saving in the order of £10,000.

In recent years Traveline Scotland have raised concerns with a number of our local authorities over the availability and accuracy of timetable information provided which feeds the Traveline Scotland and JourneyGenie websites as well as a host of other information portals and systems which are reliant on the source data provided initially to Traveline. HITRANS shares the concerns of Traveline Scotland that significant recent investment in infrastructure and interfaces which provide information is failing to meet passenger expectations.

This same data is also used to generate at stop information at bus stops across the HITRANS area. However, there are still a significant number of strategic bus interchanges which do not have current timetable information available to the public.

Funding from the Inverness Bus Investment Fund project is being used to purchase a high specification printer. This will help automate the process of producing static timetable notices for displaying at bus stops by removing the need to laminate the displays as it can handle waterproof paper. The intention is to provide information at every bus stop in the project area and provides an opportunity to roll this service out elsewhere. For example information displays could be provided at over 90No HITRANS shelters and bus stop poles in the Western Isles and 40No in Orkney.

Real-time passenger Information Maintenance
At the HITRANS Partnership meeting on 7th February 2014 it was agreed that future maintenance of bus real-time passenger information systems be funded through HITRANS meeting 50% of the future operation and maintenance costs with partner local authorities contributing the other 50% on a pro rata basis according to the amount of equipment and infrastructure deployed in their area.

The provision of accurate real-time information is also dependent on the same source timetable information provided for Traveline and static displays as outlined above.

SWIFT (Severe Weather Information For Transport)
HITRANS in partnership with its member Local Authorities have also recently invested in a variety of other infrastructure and software which comes under the banner of Intelligent Transport Systems (ITS). These include recently installed traffic webcams at a number of locations across the HITRANS area and also funding towards the Highland Council's travelhighland.info webpage which hosts these cameras and also real-time information on all bus, rail, air and ferry services.

Future Proposal
There is an opportunity for HITRANS to assist its partner local authorities in delivering a core responsibility more effectively and efficiently than at present.

By combining existing resources allocated to the provision of public transport information there is an opportunity to create a single position with responsibility for this function across the whole HITRANS region which is designed to be cost neutral and resource neutral to the member local authorities and would allow the partnership umbrella already established through HITRANS to facilitate this.

The postholder could potentially be based almost anywhere within the HITRANS area provided the availability of a suitable office given that the majority of the role would be desk based and could be advertised as such. However, there would also be an expectation on the postholder to travel and work closely with each local authority public transport team so as to build up an understanding of their priorities but also base themselves with the team when significant service changes are being implemented.

It is proposed that the post initially be advertised as a two year temporary contract to allow an assessment of the partnership project to be made before any long term commitment is made. Further discussion on the funding contributions would be required but below is an indicative table based on the likely funding required for the position, overheads and equipment / materials.

All – Bus Timetable Database Contract from saving on reduced license fees	10000
ABC	7500
CNES	5000
Highland	10000
Moray	7500
OIC	5000
HIE (contribution towards JourneyGenie)	7500
HITRANS (SWIFT, RTPI, JourneyGenie and additional contribution towards materials / equipment for publicity)	60000

Recommendation

Members are invited to comment on the proposal to create a new 2 year post with the responsibility
for the centralised co-ordination of public transport information provision across the

HITRANS region with a view to progressing a more detailed proposal and specification if there is a consensus on the general objectives contained within this report. The key objective of the project is to provide a strong showcase for a partnership approach to shared service delivery.

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