

Report to Partnership Meeting 16 September 2016

RESEARCH AND STRATEGY DELIVERY

Midnight Train to Georgemas

Scottish Internal Sleeper

Purpose of the Report

This report provides members with a discussion paper on the possibility of running a Caithness-Central Belt overnight service.

Background

Some early discussions have been held with Serco Caledonian Sleepers about the feasibility of running an internal Scottish Sleeper service from Caithness (for Orkney) to Central Scotland, greatly improving connectivity for some of the remoter parts of the country. With the retendering of the Northlink contract in 2018, MT2G may provide an alternative way of planning public services.

Sleeper trends

As noted in Sleepers Uncoupled, while Western European sleeper services are on the decline, notably in France and Germany, the UK is bucking the trend with new investment.

Scottish sleeper operations

Northlink operator Serco hold the current 15 year sleeper franchise, from 1 April 2015. New vehicles from CAF are under construction in Spain, and refurbished locos provided by GBRF have been deployed. The Caledonian Sleeper is formed of two cross-border trains in each direction per night, the Lowlander serving Glasgow and Edinburgh, and the Highlander serving Aberdeen, Fort William and Inverness. All trains convey seated portions in addition to berths. The current Mark 3 fleet of sleepers will be redundant in 2018 when the Mark 5 vehicles replace them. CS MD Peter Strachan has already expressed interest in serving Oban.

West of England sleeper

Elsewhere, First run the Paddington-Penzance sleeper as part of the Great Western franchise. This is undergoing a Cornwall County Council sponsored, ERDF funded refurbishment of the existing stock and facilities. The train consists of 4 sleeping cars, 2 seated vehicles and a lounge car hauled by a single refurbished loco.

HITRANS sampled it recently to understand the operation. Paddington-Penzance is 307 miles by motorway and 291 miles by A road with drive times of c5h30. The rail day journey of 326 miles takes c5h05- 5h36, the overnight journey 8h, giving an early arrival in the capital at 0523 and a late departure from it at 2345 (preceded by last departure

1903 arriving 0046) It should be noted that the train also serves intermediate towns and cities such as Bristol, Taunton, Exeter and Plymouth (all of which are well connected with fast day trains) well as the traditional tourist destinations in the far south west. Indeed an inspection of reservation labels in the seated coaches demonstrated the willingness of people to make comparatively short journeys such as Reading-Taunton and Bristol-Plymouth in the middle of the night.

Scottish internal sleeper

What would a Caithness sleeper look like? An overnight service of perhaps 2 sleeping cars, 2 seated vehicles plus lounge car could leave 1930 from Thurso and call at Inverness 2330, Aberdeen 0230, arriving Edinburgh 0530. In the return direction it could leave Edinburgh at 2350, calling at Aberdeen 0300, Inverness 0600 and Thurso 1030 (removing the need for the 0702 Inverness-Wick ScotRail service).

Traffic would be not just be Orkney and Caithness visitors and residents, but also Easter Ross/Inner Moray Firth and Aberdeen City and Shire. Currently Invernessians needing to be in Edinburgh early the next day have a last departure at 2015 followed by an overnight. How does it compare to the West of England sleeper? The Thurso-Edinburgh rail journey of 328 miles takes 7h10, the road equivalent being 263 miles in 5h24.

Mixed views

A key advantage would be for the train to carry freight, providing baseline income for the service all year round. Intermodal traffic was conveyed to Caithness/Orkney for Safeway in the late 1990s/early 2000s. In 1984 containers were carried between Wick and Aberdeen on passenger trains. The ability to carry perhaps 4 x 40' and 2 x 20' boxes on twin wagons would provide welcome revenue with retail products and parcels north, locally produced food south. However freight needs terminals, and while Georgemas can provide crange, the train would have to get out of Waverley shortly after arrival to get to Grangemouth/Coatbridge for freight and somewhere else for sleeper carriage servicing.

Next steps

It is suggested that following further review and comment a brief for an outline business case should be drawn up.

Recommendation

1. Members are asked to consider the discussion paper.

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	√	These project has funding impacts on HITRANS
Equality	-	No impact on equalities issues.

Report by: Frank Roach
Designation: Partnership Manager
Date: 7th September 2016