

Report to Partnership Meeting 3 February 2017

PARTNERSHIP

Far North Line Review Team

Purpose of the Report

This report provides members with information on the establishment of the Far North Line Review Team.

Background

1. Rural Economy and Connectivity Cabinet Secretary Fergus Ewing announced the establishment of the Far North Line Review Team at the HITRANS Rail stakeholder conference in Inverness on 16 December 2016.
2. The inception meeting was held in Inverness on 25 January 17.

"It is essential we make the most of this important asset for passengers, for sustainable freight transport, and for the communities and businesses along the whole route." Fergus Ewing, 16 December 2016

Purpose

The Far North Line Review Team exists to provide assurance to the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Connectivity that realistic plans are in place to improve performance and journey time on the line and to identify rail related initiatives that seek to exploit the economic and social value of the line to the communities it serves. The intention is to ensure that the best possible return is secured from the significant funds committed to the operation, maintenance, renewal and development of this railway.

Terms of Reference

In specific terms the Review Team will principally

- Identify timetable improvements and works, such as those at the level crossings, that can be implemented in 2017 to improve performance and journey time.
- Review line speed along the length of the route, seek the reasons for the current limits and identify opportunities to raise them.
- Identify opportunities, using existing funds, to improve passenger facilities, such as waiting rooms and shelters that can be implemented during the years 2017 to 2019.
- Consider infrastructure options and subsequently promote appropriate projects for the investment period 2019 - 2024.

In addition, the Review Team will

- Identify and promote with other stakeholders how the railway line can sustain and grow the rural economy which it serves.
- Examine opportunities and challenges of integration with other modes of transport, including bus and ferry services.
- Identify opportunities for rail access for charter, tourist and heritage trains to exploit the tourist potential of the line and the communities it serves.
- Identify opportunities and associated infrastructure requirements for the shipment of fish, forestry and agricultural products by rail.
- Consider options for how railway assets could be exploited to support the Scottish Government's digital connectivity agenda and the enhanced rollout of broadband and mobile telecommunications coverage for the benefit of passengers, freight shippers and communities proximal to the line.
- Identify and promote the use of redundant or underused railway buildings by local enterprises or communities.
- Identify and promote opportunities for station adoption and Community Rail Partnerships along the line.

Membership

Transport Scotland
Network Rail
ScotRail
HITRANS
HIE
Highland Council
FoFNL
Caithness Transport Forum/Caithness Chamber of Commerce

Participation

The Review Team will be led by Transport Scotland also providing the secretariat for meetings and picking up any venue costs.

Products

The Review Team shall:

- ensure the production of a revised timetable in 2017
 - produce a programme of line speed improvements
 - produce a schedule of station works for implementation during Control Period 5
 - produce business case(s) for works for Control Period 6
- The Review Team Lead shall:
- provide the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Connectivity with a progress update at least every four months.
 - provide all organisations participating in the Review Team as well as Community Councils and representative business organisations and associations proximal to the Far North Line plus any other body, organisation, business or association that the Review Team deem appropriate with an Annual Report of the Team's activities.

Feedback

Members will receive a verbal report on the FNLRT on 3 February.

RISK REGISTER

RTS Delivery

Impact – Positive.

Comment – Fixes performance short term. Considers interventions to increase capacity and to reduce journey times.

Policy

Impact – Positive.

Comment – This may be the template for Transport Scotland's approach to other rural routes .

Financial

Impact – Positive

Budget line and value – This item may have financial costs.

Comment – HITRANS may fund research/feasibility costs as required for the project through the CP5 Rail budget line.

Equality

Impact – Positive

Comment –No equalities issues.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Members are asked to note the report.

Report by: Frank Roach
Designation: Partnership Manager
Date: 24th January 2017