

Item:
10



Report to Partnership Meeting 15 November 2019

RESEARCH AND STRATEGY DELIVERY

Midnight Train to Georgemas

Overnight service using sleepers

Transport Scotland responded to the four reports commissioned by HITRANS (Feasibility, Economic, Rolling Stock and Timetabling) for the MT2G original version-overnight sleeper train to Caithness using Mk3 sleeper vehicles. £2.5m pa subsidy, £4.2m benefits.

TS raised concerns about demand, subsidy, rolling stock condition and refurbishment costs, compliance with PRM TSI and other safety requirements and depot access.

MT2G Remix

HITRANS developed an alternative overnight service proposal. This provides the same connectivity but at lower cost and allows the trains to be utilised for other duties and is also informed by poor performance of the old Mark 3 sleeper stock which is life expired.

The Remix version proposes an HST operation- a cheaper option providing the same connectivity benefits: HST plus 4 cars, 3 x First Class layout (or reseat with reclining seats), one vehicle for bikes/sports equipment (as per 153) and parcels, some catering and some seating.

It builds on Inter7Cities success, using known, standard to ScotRail rolling stock, and would be operated by ScotRail- no requirement for 3rd party operator, full integration, no non-standard training required. It brings benefits of HSTs to the periphery (cf Sunday Edb-Obn) and removes need for 153 deployment.

It would provide luxury seating only, no sleeping berths and therefore reduced housekeeping costs. The CS seats are very popular and competitively priced, and people are far more used to sitting up travelling overnight or in the wee hours on flights. Inside, the existing GW leather seats could be retained. Dimmed lights needed, and curtains/blinds.

The trains could be serviced at Haymarket and/or Inverness, meaning that they would terminate at Edinburgh having run via Glasgow. Possible timings: THS 1930, INV 0022/0032, GLQ 0632 EDB 0748. EDB 2323 GLQ 0031 INV 0535/0642 THS 1030. Wick may also be the terminus. It would connect with inbound Northlink Orkney ferry all

year, outbound summer only, but outbound and inbound connection possibilities via Gills Bay Pentland Ferry all year.

The operation provides 'Scenic Trains' possibilities, removes need for 158 on 0700 Inv-Wick; could do another daytime duty eg Wick-Helmsdale (Flow Country Express)-Wick, and exchange pax with 158 on Inv-Hms-Inv. It gives early win for FNLRT, but no capacity increase required. It could run via Abd to pick up in Moray/Aberdeenshire/City population vice Strathspey/Perthshire (compare the catchment).

At £79 for single fare Caithness-Edinburgh potential for good revenue

It provides second all year round FNL Sunday service northbound only at 1200 for positioning move (connection from Central Belt) and additional FNL southbound only Saturdays Only at 1400 ex Thurso/Wick

The benefits remain as per the sleeper operation: island and remote mainland connectivity to Central Belt for local residents, tourism (NC500, LEJOG, 300k pax on Pentland crossing pa mode shift), cycle capacity. It creates good connectivity for international flights ex EDI, avoiding overnight costs

HSTs and vehicles are available. Servicing can be carried out at Inverness and Haymarket. No local facilities required. RETB fitting required. One power car could be switched out north of Inverness to save fuel but provides redundancy and avoids running around.

HSTs are RA5, vehicles C3- no infrastructure requirements or gauging clearance. No stabling issues in Caithness.

Tanking would need to be considered locally, with fuelling in C Belt

The alcohol watershed may need to continue to avoid the 1980s experience recurring.

The stock could be used on Edb-Obn-Edn summer Sundays and on a run to the Borders or Leuchars for St Andrews.

Reaction

Informal views received noted the following points:

1. Simpler than the sleeper, and hits a number of markets, if product can be got right.
2. Issues with rules of the route overnight engineering access, but that requires refocus anyway.
3. Good parcels option, but note we lose the freight capacity. Opportunity for the "overnight mixed"?
4. HSTs are not cheap to operate – though they can be bought cheaply at present!

5. Some wider thought being given to HSTs as part of the Scenic Railway offering, so this might fit as part of a wider package.
6. Big plus for cycle capacity – important for John o' Groats issue.
7. Emissions from HSTs will become an issue over time.

However...formal response from TS

Transport Scotland has reviewed the report produced by Systra on 23 August 2019 and has concluded that whilst there is some merit, at a conceptual level, in having an overnight connection between the North of Scotland and the Central Belt the proposals as presented generate a number of substantial issues regarding patronage, subsidy level and a range of operational risks consequent on using older rolling stock and accordingly the Agency is not in a position to support the proposition as presented.

RISK REGISTER

RTS Delivery

Impact – RTS compliant

Policy

Impact – Mode shift, connectivity

Financial

Impact – Requires subsidy

Equality

Impact – Provides access from periphery to the centre

Recommendations

1. Members and Advisors are recommended to note the report and consider whether to continue with development work on the project.

Report by: Frank Roach
Designation: Partnership Manager
Date: 4th November 2019