

Report to Partnership Board 8th November 2024

RESEARCH AND STRATEGY DELIVERY

Demand Responsive Transport App – ‘Moove Flexi / m.connect’

PURPOSE OF REPORT

This report provides members with an update on the Demand Responsive Transport App currently being deployed by HITRANS to help support the operation, booking and marketing of non-scheduled transport services across the Highlands and Islands.

BACKGROUND

In December 2021, HITRANS awarded Liftango an initial three year contract to deploy a DRT platform consisting of a user application, operators platform and a driver platform. The deployment of this system will:

- Provide a single point where locals and visitors will be able to book a number of different non-scheduled transport services through the one app.
- Provide both the passenger and operator with the information on the vehicles position and individual journeys in real-time with passengers informed if their service has been delayed.
- Enable services to be more efficiently utilised especially where there is more than one vehicle involved in providing a service.
- Includes features such as driver duty management and extensive reporting modules.
- API to facilitate integration of the solution with the HITRANS GO-HI MaaS platform.

PROGRESS UPDATE

The contract with Liftango has been extended until December 2027.

A summary of the services involved and work to date for each Local Authority is as follows:

Highland

1. Ferintosh

The Ferintosh Wee bus daytime, DRT service was replaced earlier this year by a scheduled service operated by the Highland Council. This was due to CSI Ross-Shire withdrawing from the delivery of the DRT service. This means Moove Flexi is currently not being used but this may be reinstated in Spring next year once another organization takes the DRT service on. After using the system for 1.5 years however, the service saw a considerable increase in the number of bookings which has provided evidence of how beneficial the booking system can be. Please see appendix 1 for passenger total data.

2. Wheels in Nairnshire

WIN are in the process of expanding their service with new staff and vehicles, and are receiving support from the Highland Council to enable this. They are currently waiting for funding to come through to progress with the expansion but are still very much looking to be part of the Moove Flexi project.

3. The Garve & District Development Company

As part of the Connecting Communities Transport Project, the Garve and District Development Company are in the process of setting up a CT service operated with a 9-seater vehicle which they should be receiving this month. Liftango have started setting them up on the system so they are ready for training once they have their vehicle.

Moray

Moray's m.connect Dial a Bus operates 14 vehicles across Moray using a zonal based fare structure. The service began using the system for a 6 week soft trial at the end of June 2022, where bookings were made by the call centre staff via the operations portal on the system, and drivers used the in-vehicle tablets to receive their bookings. Following this trial period, the m.connect app was developed and launched on the 2nd May 2023. Since then, use of m.connect has been increasing steadily and positive feedback has been received. Please see appendix 1 for passenger total data.

Argyll and Bute

A number of local operators attended the initial webinars. Unfortunately the Tiree Ring and Ride service was withdrawn last year so they will no longer be joining the project. However, HITRANS are currently in discussion with West Coast Motors who have recent experience of the benefits of similar DRT platforms and the passenger growth it can deliver. It is hoped that additional routes operated by West Coast Motors can be incorporated onto the platform next year.

Orkney

Following a presentation at a community transport event in Orkney at the beginning of July, multiple services within Orkney have been interested in joining Moove Flexi, and Liftango have already held an in person training session with these services. The training took place at the beginning of October where a representative from each of the following services attended:

- South Ronaldsay
- North Ronaldsay
- Shapinsay
- Sanday
- Stronsay

Most of these services have already started getting setup on the system and South Ronaldsay will be the first to launch once they have received their new EV, hopefully this side of Christmas.

Western Isles

Previous discussions with the council identified two services that could make use of the system: Barra public bus and the Benbecula local service. More recently, a proposal to introduce a Uist focussed pilot has been suggested which would enable schools to use Moove Flexi for making school related journeys e.g swimming lessons, and tap into the U22 Free Travel Scheme. A handful

of schools who could participate in this pilot have been identified and further discussion will take place with local operators and Liftango to progress.

Perth & Kinross

The Liftango contract provides the option for it to be utilised by other Councils or RTP's outwith the HITRANS area. Glenfarg Community Transport which is based in Perth & Kinross and was established by the local community council has taken up this opportunity.

Glenfarg Community Transport

Glenfarg have been using a simple version of Liftango's platform which allows users to track the bus, but not make bookings. This is due to Glenfarg's service being semi-flexible, which the current software isn't compatible with. However, Liftango are working on developing a product set to launch next year which will allow services that operate semi-flexibly to access a full booking system.

PUBLICITY

HITRANS have been working with the Community Transport Association to identify opportunities to promote the app to prospective community transport operators within the region. Data and feedback from operators currently using the system will continue to be shared with CTA members to encourage participation.

RISK REGISTER

RTS Delivery

Impact - Positive

Comment – Local bus services support a number of RTS priorities relating the Public Transport and access to employment, education, healthcare and social inclusion.

Policy

Impact – Positive

Comment – HITRANS report on the Rural Bus Service Support and Funding (March 2021) sets out the variety of challenges facing local bus services not just in the Highlands and Islands but across rural Scotland. One of the actions it identified was the 'Investigation of the potential for more regional collaboration on Public Transport and DRT management and operations.'

Financial

Impact – Neutral

Comment – HITRANS has successfully received a range of external funding to support the roll out of the app until December 2027.

Equality

Impact – Positive

Comment – Local Bus services help improve access to many of the most vulnerable groups within the area and also provide what can be described as a lifeline service to those communities where the local bus service is the only form of public transport available.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Partnership is asked to:

1. Note the report

Report by:	Rebecca Purvis
Designation:	Transport Integration Manager
Date:	29/10/2024

APPENDIX 1 – MOOVE FLEXI AND M.CONNECT PASSENGER TOTALS

