

Item:

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Report to Partnership Board 25 April 2025

RESEARCH AND STRATEGY DELIVERY

Regional Rail Update

Purpose of Report

To inform Board Members on rail matters across the area.

Policy

Route and Branch

HITRANS will soon be seeking a consultant to develop a HITRANS Rail Strategy which will form a daughter document to the Regional Transport Strategy. It will identify improvements to the network to increase mode shift as we journey to Net Zero, focussing on

- journey time
- frequency
- scheduling
- route capacity
- route capability
- terminal capacity
- integration with other modes
- access
- rail freight

We anticipate a budget of £40-£50k will be required.

Great British Railways

The DfT is consulting on 'A Railway Fit For Britain's Future'. It aims to establish Great British Railways (GBR), a single 'directing mind', bringing together responsibility for the rail network itself, and for the publicly-owned passenger services that run on it. This will be a new organisation with a new customer-focussed culture, responsible for the day-to-day operation of the network, and directly accountable for improving its performance.

On Scotland, the document states:

The Scottish Government is the commissioning body for ScotRail and Caledonian Sleeper services. It also funds rail infrastructure in Scotland and will continue to do so. Scottish ministers will therefore continue to have a separate High-Level Output Specification (HLOS) and Statement of Funds Available (SoFA). The government will engage the Scottish Government on ensuring the relationship it has with Network Rail is transferred to GBR, once established, and delivering Scottish infrastructure on behalf of Scottish ministers.

The government will work with the Scottish Government to put in place strong joint working arrangements between GBR and ScotRail, building on the existing alliance between Network Rail and ScotRail that has delivered improved performance and cost savings.

The government intends to legislate in a way that enables the relationship between GBR and ScotRail (and between UK and Scottish ministers) to evolve. We have recently passed the Public Ownership Act, which requires Scottish ministers to secure passenger services from public sector bodies owned by themselves (such as Scottish Rail Holdings), the Secretary of State for Transport (such as GBR) or jointly owned by the two governments. Where relevant railways legislation will need to be further amended to establish GBR, we will preserve the effect of these provisions. This would enable a successor to the existing alliance between Network Rail and

ScotRail to be established between GBR and ScotRail, while preserving options for UK and Scottish ministers to agree deeper integration of track and train.

The government will continue to engage with the Scottish Government on future arrangements set out in this consultation to ensure that Scotland benefits from rail sector transformation and the establishment of GBR.

Rail Services Decarbonisation Action Plan

An updated version from Transport Scotland is anticipated soon. A re-profiled timetable for greener rolling stock replacement may be the outcome, meaning that fleets operating across the HITRANS area will be retained for longer. The Class 170 Turbostars (1999-2005) are comparatively young compared to HSTs (1975-82), 156s (1987-89) and 158s (1989-92). The first procurement tranche of new trains will be for East Kilbride, Fife (Levenmouth) and Borders.

Projects

Inverness Station Masterplan

Consultants Austin Smith Lord are developing proposals for the reconstruction of the bus station and the multi-storey car park. Workshops have been held with representatives from Highland Council, HITRANS, Network Rail and the bus industry. There will be wider stakeholder engagement as we move towards the end of the project.

Faslane

Following completion of QS estimation for the rail station further discussions are being held with the base.

Oban Link

Following widespread agreement from stakeholders about the poor walking and wheeling route from the rail station to the ferry terminal, bid for ATIF funding has been submitted. The preferred route goes through the railway car park, avoiding potential conflict with the oil terminal delivery lorries, but entails the loss of some car park spaces.

Glenfinnan

Deputy First Minister Kate Forbes has been chairing a series of meetings to solve the Glenfinnan question of large numbers of people converging on the village to see steam trains cross the viaduct. As a further development arising from Fort Transit, the project to make Fort William a centre of rail tourism and at the same time take pupils to Lochaber by rail and improve ferry connections, HITRANS has engaged timetabling specialists to identify paths for Fort William-Glenfinnan additional services.

Services

ScotRail timetable

ScotRail TT changes from 18 May 25

Pass of Brander fixed- Oban times revert to as before

0924 Inv-Glq now goes to Edb

0718 Elg-Inv removed

First Kyle moves to 0545

Lairg starter now 0702 arr Inv 0850

1209 ex Kyle has 3 min dwell at Attadale for visitors to gardens

2312 FSO Inv Tain returns

Altnabreac

The station reopened on Sunday 7 April, following upgrades to the platform and passenger facilities carried out the previous weekend.

Freight

Electric Freight

HITRANS has been working with SSEN's Spittal-Loch Buidhe pylon line contractors on opportunities for the railing in of aggregates, steel and other components to Lairg and Georgemas Junction meeting transport efficiency, environmental and legacy objectives.

West Fraser

The company formerly known as Norbord is preparing lodged a planning application in February for the creation of a terminal at Morayhill, taking advantage of the connection put in as part of the Dalcross station project. It will consist of two sidings and a gantry crane, plus container storage.

Fort William

Alvance British Aluminium has signed a new 10-year leasing agreement for VTG wagons with iWagon technology. The wagons are expected to be used by Alvance from June 2025, carrying alumina powder from the port of Blyth to Fort William. The 10-year lease agreement includes a full-service maintenance contract. iWagon provides real-time monitoring and predictive maintenance capabilities, with axle lock detection and wheel flat prevention.

RISK REGISTER

RTS Delivery

Impact –Mode shift, integration, economy, resilience

Policy Impact –Transport efficiency, economic development, rolling stock decarbonisation.

Financial Impact – The Rail Strategy Route and Branch will be funded from HITRANS own resources- estimate £40-£50k

Equality

Impact – Access to the network for all

Recommendation

1. Members are asked to note the report,
2. Members are asked to approve the expenditure on the Rail Strategy.

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