

Oban - Dalmally Train Service - School Transport

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report provides members with an update on the successful implementation of the enhanced Oban-Dalmally Train service, which has been used to transport pupils living along the Dalmally corridor to Oban High School since the beginning of the school session in August 2014.
- 1.2 The report details the trial train journeys which took place in June 2014, involving the school pupils who were eligible to travel on by train from August 2014. The trials were completed successfully, without incident, and enabled train and road safety measures to be explained to the pupils.
- 1.3 The report also reviews the full implementation of the school train transport in August 2014. In addition it outlines the impact on the enhanced service for the general public provided by the extra train journeys.

1.4 Recommendations

- 1.4.1 Members are asked to note the content of this report.

Oban-Dalmally Train Service - School Transport

2.0 INTRODUCTION

2.1 This report provides members with an update on the successful implementation of the enhanced Oban-Dalmally Train service, which has been used to transport pupils living along the Dalmally corridor to Oban High School since the beginning of the school session in August 2014.

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 Members are asked to note the content of this report.

4.0 DETAIL**4.1 Introduction**

4.1.1 In February 2013 the Scottish Transport Minister announced that First ScotRail was funding a major enhancement to the train service between Glasgow and Oban. Due to this, from a service of three trains a day, the frequency of service increased to six trains a day from 18 May 2014.

4.1.2 Following the announcement of the enhanced train service, discussions took place amongst the Council, HiTRANS and First ScotRail concerning the detail of the timetable and ScotRail invited the Council to consider the option of using rail to transport pupils.

4.1.3 On 8th May 2013 a report detailing the proposal was presented to the Oban Lorn and the Isles Area Committee Business day and on 27th June 2013 the Council approved the transfer from bus to rail transport for most of the Oban High School pupils entitled to free transport who live between Dalmally and Connel. Pupils who do not have safe walking routes to the station in Taynuilt continued to be transported by bus.

4.1.4 Presentations on the option of train transportation for pupils were made in September 2013 to Connel Community Council, to an open meeting under the auspices of Glenorchy and Innishail Community Council in October 2013 and to Taynuilt Community Council in December 2013. Contact has been maintained with all Community Councils since then and this resulted in a follow up meeting with concerned parents from Loch Awe and Dalmally in March 2014. In addition a joint presentation was made by the Council and HiTrans to the Oban Lorn and the Isles Community Planning Group on 11 December, 2013.

4.1.5 Arising from these meetings, the Council considered all issues raised and, in partnership with HiTRANS, ScotRail and BEAR put in place measures to address parental concerns.

4.2 Enhanced train service - May 2014

4.2.1 The introduction of the enhanced service on 18 May 2014 has provided new journey opportunities for local residents with an increase in passengers into Oban for work and a daily commute from Loch Awe to Glasgow. There has also been an increase in visitor passengers and ferry user passengers. Performance and reliability has been good, with just one road traffic incident causing a delay.

4.2.2 For the future, the London sleeper operator, Serco, plans to get the sleeper train to Crianlarich early to connect with the 0520 Glasgow to Oban journey, providing a link through from London. Developments on this service will be reported as information becomes available.

4.2.3 Station facilities have also been improved, with new shelters at Dalmally and Taynuilt, and new access lighting at Loch Awe.

4.3 Trial School Train journeys – June 2014

4.3.1 As plans were being finalized for the trial school train journeys, regrettably, on 30 May 2014, a serious accident occurred on the A85, resulting in the road being closed north of Oban for several hours. ScotRail responded by allowing all pupils affected by the road closure to travel home on the train without charge.

4.3.2 The trial itself commenced on Monday morning, 2nd June, as arranged by the Council's Integrated Transport Team. This involved Primary 7 students who would be moving to Oban High School in August 2014 being given the opportunity to make the journey by train, and on both Tuesday 3rd June 2014 and Wednesday 4th June 2014, all pupils eligible for train transport from August 2014 were given the opportunity to travel.

4.3.3 This was seen as a good way to introduce the train service and a chance for a Constable from the British Transport Police to carry out awareness sessions at the stations in Dalmally and Taynuilt.

4.3.4 Throughout the trial, the behaviour of the pupils was first class, both at the stations and on the train, where Council staff were able to answer questions and show the pupils how to alight properly from the train. Staff from the Council, HiTrans and ScotRail were available both on the platform and on the train to observe the students travelling. Pupils were observed socialising, and studying on the train, listening to music and reading. Students were asked their thoughts about the train service, and expressed satisfaction with it.

4.3.5 It is unfortunate that the train ran late on the Monday 2nd June, due to problems in Central Scotland. However, contingency arrangements were put into action, including updating the school Facebook page and issuing information on Oban FM. This helped to ensure that pupils and parents were aware of the delay before they left home.

4.4 Full implementation of school train transport – August 2014

- 4.4.1 The use of the train to transport pupils to Oban High School commenced with effect from 14 August 2014. Council officers travelled on the trains both morning and afternoon for the first week and on the first morning staff from HiTrans and two British Transport Police officers were present. One police officer travelled from Dalmally and the other supervised the pupils at Taynuilt.
- 4.4.2 A Council Officer escorted pupils as they walked from the station to Oban High School on Thursday and Friday and it was observed that on exiting the station, the pupils crossed Shore Street and Albany Street where the traffic stopped for them. It was noticeable that throughout the area around the school, motorists are very considerate to all school pupils.
- 4.4.3 Once again, staff travelling on the train reported pupils were socialising, using their electronic devices, studying. In the afternoon numbers travelling on the train appeared to be lower as some pupils attend after school activities and travel home on a later train. Staff spoke directly to senior pupils during this initial period who expressed satisfaction with the train service.
- 4.4.4 As agreed with ScotRail, both British Transport Police and Council staff have been making occasional trips on the train to monitor pupil behaviour on the journeys.

4.5 Train disruption – September 2014

- 4.5.1 As previously referred to in section 4.3.1, on 28 September 2014, ScotRail contacted Oban High School at 3.30 to advise that the 1611 train had been cancelled. This was as a result of a completely unforeseen incident wherein a lorry hit a bridge and ScotRail had to wait on safety checks being carried out.
- 4.5.2 Under normal circumstances wherein a service is withdrawn, ScotRail have provided assurances that they would deploy buses as a means of alternative travel. Due to the short notice and nature of the incident on this occasion, the deployment of buses would have taken just as long as waiting for the 1811 train.
- 4.5.3 In the circumstances, the Head Teacher of Oban High School immediately arranged for a text message to be issued to all the parents of affected pupils, advising them of the delay, and a senior teacher was deployed at the railway station to wait with the pupils until the next train arrived. In the interim, however, having been made aware of the incident, many pupils were picked up by their parents.
- 4.5.4 This delay, although unfortunate, enabled the Council and its partners to make use of the contingency arrangements which are in place for such an event, and all pupils arrived home without incident.
- 4.5.5 Members are reminded that the safety of pupils is of paramount to the Council, and as a consequence of this service disruption, the contingency arrangements have been subject to a post incident review in order to further improve them.

5.0 CONCLUSION

- 5.1 The introduction of the enhanced train service and related school transport, in the Oban area, has proved to be a success and popular with pupils.
- 5.2 Pupils safety is of paramount importance to the Council so arrangements for the service are subject to ongoing review with partner agencies to deliver improvements.
- 5.3 The extra journeys which have been put in place are also popular with the wider travelling public, as confirmed by the increase in passengers both locally and those visiting the area.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Policy – The enhancement of the Oban train service increases opportunities for social and economic activity within the communities served. Its use for school transportation also ensures that pupils get to and from school safely and on time and have greater opportunity to participate in after school clubs and employment.
- 6.2 Financial – Annual savings of approximately £58,000 have been made as a result of pupils being transported by train.
- 6.3 Legal – The use of the train service for pupil transportation fully addresses the Council's legal obligations.
- 6.4 HR - None
- 6.5 Equalities - None
- 6.6 Risk – The new school train service has been subject to full risk assessment by the Council and its partner agencies.
- 6.7 Customer Service – The improved train service has been warmly received by pupils and fare payers alike.

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10 November 2014**

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APPENDICES - none