

Cowal Fixed Link Working Group

BUTE AND COWAL AREA COMMITTEE

UPDATE PAPER

24/05/16

Cowal Fixed Link Working Group

Purpose of this paper

This paper is presented to the Bute and Cowal Area Committee to request their support to the Cowal Fixed Link project, prior to support being requested from the full Argyll & Bute Council later this year.

Introduction

The Cowal Fixed Link Working Group (CFLWG) is an ad-hoc group of county councillors, community councillors and business people who live in Cowal and Rosneath and who have been considering, since late 2013, options for a fixed link to connect Cowal to the Central Belt, with some of those options also involving Rosneath. This project was given impetus by the information and poor economic forecasts presented to the Argyll & Bute Economic Forum in October 2014.

Fixed Link Project

A number of fixed link options have been agreed by the Working Group. These can be accessed at:

<http://www.domaindesignagency.com/clients/maps/Routes.pdf>

These route options are illustrative at the moment, and will need refined through an engineering feasibility study to determine the best cost / benefit result. Note that crossing 4A also has the added benefit of providing a bypass to both the A82 north of Tarbet and the A83 Rest and Be Thankful.

The project is in two sections, each of which would be initiated in parallel:

1. Feasibility / Cost / Benefit of each proposed link.
2. A project to realise the economic benefit that can be provided to Cowal and Rosneath (Crossing Options 3 and 4 apply to Rosneath). This would be realised by establishing a properly funded Cowal Development Corporation, with at least a committed five year budget, to drive / oversee the actions needed. While no targets would be set, the intent would be to triple or more the current population of Cowal.

Planned Actions

The following actions are currently in place:

1. Through the Inverness based Interface program, contact has been made with Strathclyde University to initiate an economic benefit analysis of the impact a fixed link could provide and the actions need to achieve this.

Cowal Fixed Link Working Group

2. The local MSP – Michael Russell – and the Highlands MSP – Donald Cameron – have committed to two political objectives:
 - a. A Parliamentary petition supporting the project being presented within the next few months.
 - b. A statement in Parliament that the Scottish Government supports this project within the life of the current Scottish Parliament.
3. A public consultation to gain support for the project and a first view of which option is preferred. This action is supported by the Argyll & Bute Economic Forum Report of February 2016.
4. A press and publicity campaign to accompany the public consultation.
5. After obtaining formal Council support, establishing a charity modelled on the Borders Railway Campaign to seek funds and to take the project forwards.