
CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

FOR DECISION

Title: **Extension of the Strathspey Railway**

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Purpose

This paper considers the implications of the planned extension of the Strathspey Railway and seeks the Authority's approval to the principle of the extension in order to lend weight to funding applications being made by Strathspey Railway Company Ltd.

Recommendations

That the Board agree support, in principle, for the planned railway extension, without prejudice to the detailed consideration of any future planning applications related to the development.

Executive Summary

For a number of years Strathspey Railway Company Limited has been pursuing the reinstatement of the railway line to Grantown-on-Spey. Currently the track runs from Aviemore, via Boat of Garten to Broomhill. They already have detailed planning permission and are currently preparing an application for the Light Railway Order. The Company have formally approached the CNPA seeking a letter of support for the scheme in order to help them secure the necessary funding package. On balance, the planned extension would appear to be positive in relation to the Park's aims and so it is recommended that a letter of support should be forwarded.

EXTENSION OF THE STRATHSPEY RAILWAY - FOR DECISION

Background

1. Strathspey Railway Company Limited is as a not-for-profit company established in 1971 to buy, restore and ultimately operate the line between Aviemore and Boat-of-Garten primarily by steam traction.
2. The section from Aviemore to Boat-of-Garten, where the track had remained in situ, was re-opened in July 1978. The next stage to Broomhill, near Nethy Bridge, and approximately half way to Grantown-on-Spey opened in June 2002. The Railway is currently home to seven steam and six diesel locomotives out with the normal operating days, trains can be provided on a charter basis.
3. Currently the track runs from Aviemore, via Boat of Garten to Broomhill and for a number of years, the company have been pursuing the re-instatement of the railway line to Grantown-on-Spey.
4. A number of major Civil Engineering works between Broomhill and Grantown-on-Spey will be required in addition to re-laying the track and the creation of a new station.
5. Detailed planning permission for the reconstruction of the railway line and the erection of station building and ancillary works was granted by The Highland Council on 31 January 2003 (Ref. No. 02/00238/FULBS). It is likely, though, that the final design for the terminus building will change and that a revised planning application will be submitted for that element of the overall scheme.
6. In August, the Authority received an approach from Strathspey Railway seeking our in principle endorsement of the proposed extension. It is anticipated that such support will lend weight to funding applications for the scheme.

Consultation

7. The detail of the proposed scheme was discussed at a meeting between one of Strathspey Railway's directors, John Partridge and staff from the Authority's Economic and Social Development, Natural Heritage, and Planning and Development Control Groups. The proposal to seek Board endorsement on the principle of extending the railway line was then discussed by the Authority's Management Team.

Policy Context

8. The project would contribute towards the aims and objectives of the draft Park Plan, contributing to 'Living and Working' and 'Enjoying and Understanding' themes. An enhanced Strathspey Railway operating to Grantown on Spey will be a major boost

to the local tourism economy, opening up options for combined walk / cycle and train trips and linking with the Speyside Way long distance walking route. It is likely to help stimulate tourism activity at both ends of the line.

9. The Strathspey Steam Railway has been a significant tourism asset for the area and one that helps meet CNPA objectives in the draft Park Plan, in particular:
 - a) improved range of tourism experiences;
 - b) encouraging dispersal of visitors throughout the Park.

While clearly not covering large distances, encouraging movement of visitors out of Aviemore to smaller settlements will help achieve the latter objective.

10. In general terms, additional rail services, even ones designed primarily for tourism markets such as this can have major positive impacts. 'The Case for Rail in the Highlands & Islands' prepared by HIE in 2004 provides useful support for this scheme. In it, several benefits of rail are noted:
 - a) Substantial contribution to tourism economy
 - b) Underpins business viability
 - c) Encourages inclusion in providing access without requirement for access to a car
 - d) A more sustainable form of access for many people.

Delivering Sustainability

11. The Strathspey Railway will contribute to delivering sustainability across a number of areas. Rail travel is often cited as a more sustainable option to car use and the CNPA are keen to encourage a range of non-car options (cycle, walk, horse ride etc) for exploring and enjoying the park as part of the Sustainable Tourism Action Plan. Of course it can also be argued that the use of fossil fuel, i.e. coal, to power steam trains is not environmentally sustainable. On balance, though, the benefits would appear to outweigh this drawback.

Delivering A Park for All

12. One of the benefits of rail as highlighted in the 'Case for Rail' report was in encouraging a more inclusive approach to transport and access.

Delivering Economy, Efficiency and Effectiveness

13. An enhanced operation will also help the viability of the Strathspey Railway Company and create spin off benefits for other tourism businesses in the area.

Implications

Financial Implications

14. Strathspey Railway have made it clear that they are not asking the Authority for funding, but rather for a letter of support to assist in securing a finance package. In offering such support in principle, we should make it clear that this does not imply any commitment to help fund the scheme. The Authority would, in any case, not be

in a position to offer any significant level of grant support in the context of the high capital costs involved.

Presentational Implications

15. It should be made clear that the Authority is supportive of the principle of the rail extension only. This would be without prejudice to the consideration of the detail of any future planning applications.

Implications for Stakeholders

16. It is not envisaged that there will be any implications for specific stakeholders. The proposed extension already has a strong degree of support from relevant partner organisations.

Recommendation

17. **It is recommended that the Board agree support, in principle, for the planned railway extension, without prejudice to the detailed consideration of any future planning applications related to the development.**

Next Steps

18. If the above recommendation is agreed by the Board, a letter of support for the proposed extension will be forwarded to the Strathspey Railway Company.

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