

CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

EXPENDITURE JUSTIFICATION

1. Title

Heather Hopper 2009 and 2010

2. Expenditure Category

Operational Plan goal	19	Code	8390201	Project	
19: Improved accessibility and Quality of Public Transport				Grant	✓
Core or Project spend		Code	74404000	Consultancy	

Is this spend to be funded from an existing budget line, existing line with additional funds or is it a totally new spend?	2009/10 £32,150	Existing budget	✓
		Additional budget	
		New budget	

3. Description

- Brief overview of project/activity
- Specific elements for which support is sought (if not whole project/activity)

The project represents the fourth and fifth years of operation for the Heather Hopper. Running from Grantown to Ballater, the service provides an important cross-Park bus link.

The Hopper is awarded under two contracts, one each by Highland and Aberdeenshire Councils. The service will be fully reviewed for usage and value for money at the end of 2009.

A summer service, the Heather Hopper launched in 2006 and ran for 13 weeks. From 2007 this rose to 20 weeks, running from mid-May to the end of September. It also increased from 6 to 7 days a week operation. This service level will be continued.

The service will run a similar timetable to years 2006 & 2007 fitting within school runs to keep costs down. Buses leave Grantown and Ballater in the morning and afternoon giving two departures a day.

Prohibitive costs mean newer and DDA (Disability Discrimination Act) compliant vehicles and guaranteed cycle carriage are not, as yet, an option. However Coopers, who have won one of the two contracts, do operate with a bike trailer as required, and Stagecoach aim to operate with a DDA compliant bus when available.

CNPA will fund 50% of the cost of each contract. The contract price has risen by 3.5% on 2007, as per standard council contracting.

Usage for 2006 was 1,769 passengers, or 136/week, of whom around 60% were concessionary card holders. Survey work showed visitor use was low, due to the very short lead-in period before the project started. Usage for 2007 was 2,471 passengers, or 130/week. Although more passengers were carried, numbers per week were static, probably due to short-lead in times for the launch of the service and therefore restricted marketing.

Usage in 2008 was lower, at around 91 passengers per week. This is disappointing, but bus services do need several years to 'bed-in'. Additional marketing work will be done with partners in 2009 (See below for further information). Surveying will take place in both 2009 and 2010 to feed into the major service review at the end of 2010. Stagecoach remain committed to the service and have plans to expand their routes in the Park in 2011 using the Heather Hopper as a base to the extended service.

Funding for the 501 Heather Hopper service has had added value benefits. From 2006 Stagecoach, who won the contract for the Aberdeenshire service, has put on a commercial service. The 502 Heather Hopper connects with the 501 service and runs Banchory-Ballater-Braemar-Glenshee-Pitlochry.

The Heather Hoppers will be marketed in the Cairngorms Explorer which is available in 350 locations in, around and beyond the Park in shops, travel termini, libraries etc., and by press release. We will work with community councils, the business community, Parki and the Cairngorms Visitor Guide. Councils and operators will also market the route in their material and press releases. We will place Heather Hopper information on community notice boards, in local shops, and at bus stops. In 2008, we worked closely with Cairngorms Hostels Association who represent 19 hostels in the Park, to market the service. This will be expanded on in 2009/10.

There are plans to produce a 2009 local produce map, which will include the Heather Hopper route, Creative Cairngorms arts and crafts members, and Cairngorms hostels locations.

4. Rationale and Strategic Fit

- Objectives/intended beneficiaries
- Evidence of need and demand
- Fit with National Park Plan/Corporate Plan/other relevant strategies
- Linkages to other activities/projects

The original Heather Hopper was axed due to spending cuts in council budgets. From the late 90s the only option for travel by public transport between the east and west Cairngorms was a long round-trip via Inverness and Aberdeen, or south via Perth, Dundee and Aberdeen. The re-introduction of the Heather Hopper has reconnected the National Park across the central route and increased public transport availability for a number of communities. This reconnection is seen as vital to help join the park within one identity.

This project helps deliver the CNPA transport/access strategy, through providing better access, raising awareness & understanding of the Park, and offering a social & economic link for communities on the route.

The Visitors Survey 2003 found that only 6% of all visitors arrive in the Park by public transport, and 62% feel that public transport provision is poor or very poor in the Park. SNH have previously stated in their report *Transport, Tourism and the Environment in Scotland (2001)*, the potentially major negative impacts on the environment of the private car. As a body promoting conservation, it is a clear priority for the CNPA to encourage travel to and within the Park by means other than that of private cars. As well as providing better information on accessible public transport, and linking environmentally friendly modes of transport, increased bus route provision especially for recreational use, is key.

The first aim of the Park is met by running a service which helps reduce environmental impact from cars; the second as resources are better conserved; the third as more people can enjoy and understand the special qualities of the Park, and the fourth an improvement to transport infrastructure promotes social and economic development.

The NPP guiding principles include a commitment to make the Park a Park for All, and the Heather Hopper helps bring accessible, affordable transport to those without a car. These are often our social target groups – the young, disabled people, people on low incomes, and also the elderly. It also helps sustainable development, taking cars off the road. It adds value, encouraging councils to put back a service axed some time ago.

The NPP contains a Strategic Objective to:

“Encourage and support improvements to public transport quality and accessibility to better meet demand and increase use.”

and Priorities for Action (mirrored in the Outdoor Access Strategy) to:
**address gaps in service provision (4a); and
to link recreational points better (4c)**

The Sustainable Tourism Strategy states in action 8c that gaps in provision must be identified and filled to allow visitors the choice to travel by public transport.

5. Option Analysis

- Are there other ways in which the above objectives could be achieved?
- If so, why is this the preferred option?

The preferred option is for the best possible service we can achieve within VfM. This allows for the provision of more weeks and a full weekly service, but not the guaranteed use of a DDA-compliant bus, or guaranteed cycle carriage. These would be available, but at considerable extra cost.

Various options exist to reduce, or increase, the cost of the preferred option.

External cycle carriage is possible, but problematical, as cycle racks are both expensive, difficult to fit to rotating fleets, and their electronics, framework and use are unreliable, placed as they by law are at rear of buses – both for access and maintenance due to salt and dirt. Carriage inside the bus cabin may be possible and preferable, and this is being explored by CNPA, councils and operators. If not available this year, future buses may be retro-fit with cycle storage behind the driver. Coopers used a basic bike trailer last year and will repeat its use in 2009.

DDA-compliant buses are an option, but at higher cost, and councils would not fund this. Compliance is due by law by 2015/6, and Aberdeenshire hope for all services to be fully compliant before this date.

6. Risk Assessment

- Are there risks to the CNPA in funding this project/activity?

- Are there risks in the project/activity not being delivered to required timescale/quality?
- Comment on the likelihood of such risks occurring, their potential impact, and (where appropriate) any action that would be taken to mitigate the risks.

Operationally, the risks are low as both councils and operators have widespread experience of providing bus services, and councils have led in the tendering process. The councils carry the risk for the tender.

Reputationally, the risk involves the take-up of the service. We will work more with partners to increase usage in 2009. There is also a reputational risk with partners and the public if we decide to drop the project.

Financially, our commitment is until 2009.

7. Costs and Funding

- Detail the financial costs of the project/activity
- Detail the sources of funding
- Detail any non-monetary costs to the CNPA (such as Member or staff input)

Estimated costs for the preferred option, 7 days, 20 weeks, bus 28-53 seater for 2009/10 and an illustrative cost for 2010/11 are shown below,

COSTS			FUNDING	
	2009/10	2010/11	2009/10	2010/11
THC contract	£34,800	£36,000	THC	£17,400
£18,000				
AC contract	£25,500	£26,400	AC	£12,750
£13,200				
Survey	£ 1,000	£ 1,000	CNPA*	£32,150
£33,200				
Advertising	£ 1,000	£ 1,000		
Total	£62,300	£64,400		£62,300 £64,400

Figures are based on standard 3.5% increase in contracted prices
 Draw-down will be in one lump-sum each in November 2009 and 2010

* The CNPA contribution is 50% of both contracts.

8. Deliverables/ Impact Assessment

- What end products/outputs will be delivered?
- How will success be measured?
- How will the project be monitored and what will be the feedback to the CNPA?

The project will deliver a cross-Park service that will be a high-profile partnership project and will improve visitor and residential access to transport. This will be measured by counting users using operators' ticket data and an on-board CNPA passenger attitude survey.

The project will increase accessibility to transport for several groups, including visitors, those who might not otherwise come to the Park, car users who switch modes for environmental reasons, residents shopping and travelling for leisure reasons, and more young people, disabled people, those on a low income, and elderly people.

9. Value for Money

- In view of the costs, do the deliverables appear to offer value for money? (consider cost of comparable projects, where available).

The project was placed out to tender to all local operators around Aberdeenshire and Highland region within operational distance of the Park. Operators bid for what subsidy they will provide the service for, with the lowest offer being accepted. Operators then keep additional money generated through fares. The tenders are offered, as is standard within councils, without any demand predictions.

Contract costs vary depending on who is available locally to bid, and how much revenue they expect to generate.

VfM will depend on passenger use, which will be maximised through early marketing of the service. Success will be measured by achieving a significant increase in numbers from the levels achieved in 2006 and 2007 with a reasonable expectation of achieving a weekly average of 150 by 2010.

10. Exit or Continuation Arrangements (where applicable)

- If this is not a discrete, time-limited, project or piece of work, what are the exit/continuation arrangements for when CNPA support ceases?

To be successful the Heather Hopper must be seen as a permanent fixture so partners, businesses and communities can market and build the service up. If we fund the project up to 2009 this will give us four years of usage data to allow a full service review.

11. Additionality

- Does this work/project substitute for or duplicate work being carried out or proposed by others?

- What would be the effects of the CNPA not supporting the project?
Would it proceed without CNPA support?

Councils cannot prioritise services with a large recreational element and several services have recently been cut. CNPA funding enables councils to support this service which serves visitors and residents. The service would not exist without the support of the CNPA and is therefore fully additional. The project lever in financial support from councils and meets the costs of the service in partnership with them.

12. Stakeholder Support

- Have the organisations and/or communities that would have an interest in this work/project been involved, and are they supportive?

Councils remain supportive. HITRANS and nestrans are supportive but unable to assist financially.

13. Recommendation

It is recommended that the project is approved for:

2009/10	£32,150
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Name: John Thorne Signature: _____ Date: _____

14. Decision to Approve or Reject

Programme Manager

I recommend the approval of this one year grant with a condition that a review be undertaken of user numbers which will aid determination as to whether there should be any future funding.

Name: Bob Grant Signature: Date:

Head of Group

I recommend approval.

Name: Murray Ferguson Signature: Date:

Chief Executive

Name: Signature: Date:

Finance Committee

Name: Signature: Date:

Board

Name: Signature: Date:

SEERAD

Name:

Signature:

Date: