
CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

FOR DECISION

Title: CNPA Transport Policy

Prepared by: John Thorne, Economic Development Officer

Purpose

To lay out the CNPA's transport actions to date in relation to the National Park Plan and Corporate Plan objectives. To ask the Board what future transport actions the CNPA should undertake to help deliver these Plans.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Board:

- a) Note the actions to date, research, and the Transport Review;
- b) Agree the level of intervention in transport by the CNPA.

Executive Summary

Accessible transport is a key economic and social driver, the National Park Plan identifying significant links to tourism and the wider economy, sustainable communities and access to the countryside.

The CNPA has been delivering transport projects since 2005 with the introduction of the Cairngorms Explorer, and in 2006 the Heather Hopper bus service. Both have been well received, and complement a low-carbon National Park. However, costs are high and deliverables uncertain for both projects. This summer, a review of all CNPA transport actions was conducted with partners and colleagues, the results of which appear in the annex. In October, the CNPA Finance Committee decided to adapt the Cairngorms Explorer to deliver information to the public in different, more cost effective ways. Further projects and options exist for future transport projects, including an electric vehicle already underway and new partnerships delivering information and services for residents and visitors.

CNPA TRANSPORT POLICY – FOR DECISION

Background

1. Transportation produces 25% of all UK greenhouse gases, 80% of which comes from road transport. This has both a major environmental impact on fragile landscapes and on the social and economic well-being of the Cairngorms community. Since the NPP was published in 2007, transport and its effects on Climate Change has become an even more important sector to tackle.
2. The CNPA does not have a distinct transport plan policy, but relies on the NPP with a clear focus on promoting good quality access to the Park. Within the NPP transport appears within the PfA for “Providing High Quality Opportunities for Outdoor Access: Promoting sustainable transport for enjoyment of the Park” which are mirrored in the Outdoor Access Strategy.

NPP Priority for Action	Action taken to date
4a Identify and address gaps in public transport provision in the Park	Re-commenced the Heather Hopper bus service
4b Work towards universal cycle carriage...and greater use of environmentally friendly fuel options	Trailed on the Heather Hopper. Difficult to deliver on a local basis. Work continues with councils and transport operators. Electric Vehicle project started October 2009
4c Promote better provision of public transport to link with popular start and finish points for outdoor recreation routes	Provided practical support via the Heather Hopper, and information on opportunities via the Cairngorms Explorer
4d Develop integrated ticketing...in association with visitor attractions	Park Mega Rider bus tickets for 2010. Work required to combine travel with car-parking & visitor attractions admission
4e Provide more safe routes to school...	Delivered by councils' Schools Transport Officers, supported by the Core Paths Plan. COAT's Strathdon school path
4f Identify roads with low traffic volume...and promote them for recreational and functional use	Road functionality mapping remains an option for future development
4g Manage car parks...to fit with more sustainable modes of transport	We have worked with tourism and land managers to develop fair and appropriate car parking regimes

Issues

3. Transport issues affect our environment, economy and social well-being. Responses to the NPP consultation, along with further research and responses from partners has highlighted the following key issues:
- a) the lack of coordinated travel information, meaning what is available isn't fully used;
 - b) limited access for cyclists and disabled people to transportation, so these people are less active socially and economically, harmful for them and the wider business and social community;
 - c) the high cost of running a vehicle out of necessity, placing financial strain on residents who earn below the national average wage, increasing social exclusion;
 - d) the high environmental impact of transport on the environment, and the need to mitigate visitor, resident and business impact;
 - e) extensive marketing is required for projects, which is expensive;
 - f) partnerships are key in a sector that requires high levels of resources;
 - g) the need to connect across the Park to better deliver the NPP.

The Transport Review

4. The CNPA and partners have identified a wide range of possible transport projects. Improvements to existing projects and potential new ones have been assessed and are outlined below.

Current Projects

Heather Hopper

5. Running May to September each year, the Heather Hopper bus service has been a high profile and publicly popular, though under-used, project. Primarily linking Grantown-on-Spey to Ballater where no service existed, the network has grown to include Newtonmore, Dufftown and connections already exist to the 502/3 Heather Hopper connecting Aberdeen via Glenshee to Perth. It is however expensive and has delivered limited benefits to visitors or residents.
6. Most travellers are local, travelling for pleasure, over 60 and using their concessionary cards. Although this group should not be ignored, there are other leisure activities available to them. We have also been unable to guarantee cycle carriage or access for disabled persons within the available budget and usage has fallen in the last two years:

Year	Travellers per week	Total Cost per traveller
2006	131	£14
2007	131	£18
2008	91	£32
2009	42	£78

Implications for Stakeholders

7. Highland and Aberdeenshire Councils have been co-funders for the Heather Hopper. Due to present budget constraints and the high per-traveller costs involved, both councils are agreed that the Heather Hopper should be discontinued if all partners agree.

Presentational Implications

8. The Heather Hopper will be missed by users and it is difficult to cut this service. However, costs have been high, demand low and we can target funding far more effectively through alternative projects, such as a school/groups fieldtrip fund, at a lower cost.

Financial Implications

9. To continue the Heather Hopper would cost £35k, matching a similar amount from the councils, and extensive marketing would be required, at least £10k. Although council match funding is attractive, we feel we can lever in council support for other projects.
10. A pilot school/groups fieldtrip fund would cost around £10k in 2010/11, and we would seek match funding from councils.

Recommendation

11. We should continue to support people getting out into the Park sustainably to enjoy its special qualities, to promote social inclusion, lessen our impacts on the environment, and to help support the economic and social well-being of the Park.
12. The best transport projects ensure that every Pound is spent in a focused manner. However, the Heather Hopper does not provide value for money and should be discontinued. It has always been the intention to run the Heather Hopper for several more years to allow the service to 'bed-in'. However with the current decrease in budgets, the low usage numbers and the un-targeted manner of funding, we can only recommend that funding for the service is withdrawn. Cancelling the funding for the Heather Hopper does not mean it will automatically cease, Stagecoach may continue parts of the service commercially.
13. A school/groups fieldtrip fund should be established, allowing us to target funding, making sure resources are spent effectively. Match funding would be sought from councils and parental contributions. Intervention levels would differ depending on how each fieldtrip helps meet the Aims of the Park, through a simple application process.

Cairngorms Explorer

14. The Cairngorms Explorer delivers many Park messages and provides timetable information, costing around £35k per year. Hitrans and nestrans contributed until they lost their funding in 2008, and it is now 100% CNPA funded. Research has shown it is well known and used, but it's unknown how much it changes transport behaviour. Visitor Information Centres use the CE to convey timetable information,

but this is already available in council publications which we could re-brand with the Park logo.

15. Both the messages and transport information could be delivered in different ways. The Internet is the best way to obtain timetables which are liable to change at short notice, for example at www.travelinescotland.com. Since the first publication of the Cairngorms Explorer access to the Internet has become available on mobile phones, in libraries, workplaces and in most homes and there is less need to publish all timetables in a booklet. The councils' bus timetables within the Park could also be branded with the Park brand.
16. The Finance Committee decided on 30 October 2009 to discontinue the present Cairngorms Explorer, but to replace it with bus and cycling information in a leaflet, or longer-term as part of another publication, such as Parki or What's On. Since then, Forestry Commission Scotland have agreed to co-fund the CE, incorporating their messages into the leaflet.

Implications for Stakeholders

17. FCS will become a key partner, and the Cairngorms Explorer will continue to carry other partners' messages, including Cairngorms Farmers Market, Ski areas, Cairngorms and SYHA hostels, walking festivals, countryside rangers, access guidance, Sustrans, John Muir Award, Cairngorms on a Shoestring, Traveline Scotland, and sleeper & operator information.

Presentational Implications

18. The replacement of the Cairngorms Explorer with a cycling and public transport map, and additional information in sister publications, will still deliver many of our messages, and information for services is available online and in other printed formats, which will be promoted in the leaflet.

Financial Implications

19. A revised format Cairngorms Explorer is likely to cost around £10k in 09/10, subject to being tendered, and Forestry Commission Scotland have confirmed that they will contribute to this revised format. Inclusion of information within Parki or What's On is also being considered.

Recommendation

20. The Cairngorms Explorer should be adapted to a leaflet A2 folded to 1/3 A4, as per the decision at Finance Committee on 30 October. We should take space within Parki or What's On subject to cost. This arrangement will be reviewed in Autumn 2010.

Electric Vehicles

21. In October, Badenoch & Strathspey Community Transport Company (B&SCTC) started using the Vauxhall Astra car that has been converted to electric power. Their volunteer drivers will be road-testing it until early 2011 in a project funded by the EU, CNPA, Community Energy Scotland, Hitrans, Climate Challenge Fund and with partners including local schools and colleges.

22. Scottish and Southern Energy (SSE) have agreed to fund green energy meters for the electric vehicle, and electric vehicle recharge points should follow in Summer 2010. SSE have in principle agreed to buy-out the EV in 2011 so it can continue to be used by B&SCTC.
23. We could help to deliver more electric and alternative powered vehicles. Highlands and Islands Enterprise are working with the Northern Periphery Programme on a possible Park project. SSE are keen to see new EVs being used to link the Strathspey Railway to central Grantown, Linn of Dee to Braemar, or a demand responsive service. There is also scope for the CNPA to have their own pool electric vehicle using grant funding from agencies such as CENEX who will fund the gap between the cost of a petrol car and an EV version.

Recommendation

24. We should explore further electric and other alternative fuel vehicles, working with partners to deliver demonstration projects within the Park.

Policy Context

Delivering Sustainability

25. Falling under the PfA “Providing High Quality Opportunities for Outdoor Access” projects help deliver sustainable travel opportunities, providing the infrastructure to deliver sustainable development, helping to reduce our impact on the Park.

Delivering A Park For All

26. Accessible transport actively delivers a National Park for All, allowing greater inclusivity and participation in the Park.

Delivering Economy, Effectiveness and Efficiency

27. Our transport actions have attracted co-funding and helped add to what partners such as the councils and regional transport partnerships already deliver. This paper recommends ways in which we can be more effective and efficient in our project delivery.

CNPA Corporate Plan

28. Emphasises the link between increased recreational travel and the Park, stating “There will be more effective connections between public transport and places with outdoor access opportunities”.

Next Steps

29. It is recommended that:
- a) The Heather Hopper is discontinued due to the high per-traveller subsidy;
 - b) Funding is redirected by both CNPA and councils into a schools fieldtrip fund;
 - c) The Cairngorms Explorer is published in a smaller format without timetables;
 - d) We work further on ultra-low carbon projects, involving electric vehicles.
30. If agreed as recommended, negotiations will start with councils concerning the school/groups fieldtrip fund, and the rebranding of council timetables. We will explore future electric and alternative fuel projects with partners.

John Thorne

January 2010

johnthorne@cairngorms.co.uk

ANNEX - CNPA Transport Actions Review Summer 2009 Executive Summary

1. The CNPA has been delivering transport projects since 2005 with the introduction of the Cairngorms Explorer (CE), and the Heather Hopper bus service (HH) in 2006. Both have been well received, and sit well with the principle of a Low Carbon National Park, and the Heather Hopper attracts match funding from councils.
2. Members of Community Planning Groups and transportation agencies have been asked their opinions on the projects and how they see the CNPA delivering transport actions in the future. The CNPA Board working group considered the option table below on 4th September 2009. A range of recommended actions was taken to the Finance Committee on 30th October, where a decision not to continue the Cairngorms Explorer in its current form was taken.

Heather Hopper

3. The 501/4 Grantown-Ballater route remains the only subsidised section, with the service additionally running commercially between Newtonmore and Grantown-on-Spey, with Tomintoul to Dufftown added this year. The 501 service carried 130/week in 2006 and 2007, 91/week in 2008 and 42/week in 2009.
4. The commercial (unsubsidised) 502/3 Heather Hopper operates from Aberdeen via Ballater to Perth, started by Stagecoach upon winning the 501 contract and effectively cross-subsidised by the 501 service. When these commercially-run services are taken into account usage increases to 5,100 passengers and reduces the subsidy to £12 per traveller across the network. This is still excessive for a rural bus service. 90% of users were concessionary card holders, which strengthens the case within councils for continued support, who cover 50% of total cost. There remains scope for increasing visitor usage, though more marketing is required.

Cairngorms Explorer

5. The Cairngorms Explorer is well received by users and information providers, though it is difficult to prove it has changed traveller behaviour. 35,000 copies were distributed in 2008 to 350+ locations in and around the Park, and a PDF was available online. CE lost partner funding in 2009 when Regional Transport Partnerships Hitrans and nestrans lost their ring-fenced funding.

Options Analysis

6. Below is a list of options derived from discussions with colleagues and partners. Some of these projects might be taken forward. There is also an option to undertake no transport projects.

Option Analysis

Heather Hopper

Option	Cost	Probable Effectiveness	Anticipated cost to CNPA	Pros. How this helps deliver NPP outcomes.	Cons
Continue HH as it attracts 50% council match funding and has led to a route network building up despite low traveller numbers	High	Medium	£35k p.a.	High profile, good leisure resource for local people. Possibility to expand visitor use. Good CO2 saving? (to be researched)	Costly per person. Poorly targeted. Mainly used by concessionary card holders for days out. Presentational difficulties in cutting the service.
Extra Heather Hopper marketing & research	Medium	Medium	£10k+ p.a.	Essential if the service is continued, might increase usage	Additional cost to costly project
Online 'viral' work to promote HH, initiate feedback and raise awareness with walkers/cyclists	Low	Medium	Staff time	Targeted, and possibility to grow awareness quickly	Would need staff time to monitor and contribute to websites
Discontinue Heather Hopper	None	None	£0	Releases funding for other areas	Removes a popular service; doesn't allow service to bed-in; Bad for a Low Carbon Park

Cairngorms Explorer

Option	Cost	Probable Effectiveness	Anticipated cost to CNPA	Pros. How this helps deliver NPP outcomes.	Cons
Merge CE into another publication (such as What's On or Parki) in a 10 page Advertorial, losing timetables, but keeping sample timetabled trips and walks, Park messages and "Cairngorms on a Shoestring"	Medium	High	Under £10k p.a.	More cost effective than CE now	Would lose timetables
Keep but charge for the CE, around £1.50	Low?	High	Could be neutral cost	Keeping CE	Would compete with free timetables and online services. Risky, a risk CNPA would carry. Also costs associated with selling publications and collecting income.
Change CE to a cycling and public transport fold-out A2 map, but able to retain messages & sample timetables/walks	Medium	High	Under £10k p.a.	Delivers on key issues of cycling and public transport use	Lose detailed timetables, but these are better delivered online
Insert cycle/bus leaflet into all visitor bedroom folders. Distribute around self catering units etc.	Low/ Medium	High	Under £5k p.a.	Good targeting of visitors. Well-read.	Only targets visitors
Highlight transport messages and sample transport timetables in the Visitor Guide	Low	High	Under £5k p.a.	Cost-effective	Wouldn't fit with VisitScotland's ideas for the Guide?
Discontinue the Explorer	None	None	£0	Releases funding for other areas	Lose popular, recognised publication; Bad for a Low Carbon Park

Other Possible Projects

Option	Cost	Probable Effectiveness	Anticipated cost to CNPA	Pros. How this helps deliver NPP outcomes.	Cons
Co-fund electric bus to fill specific	Medium/	High	£15k-20k+	Would link railway to	Ongoing cost

Option	Cost	Probable Effectiveness	Anticipated cost to CNPA	Pros. How this helps deliver NPP outcomes.	Cons
transport gap, e.g. Broomhill Station to Grantown (and eventually Grantown Railway Station to Grantown). Or Braemar-Linn of Dee. Or demand responsive service around a Park village	High			central Grantown. Other areas such as Linn of Dee have no public transport and would benefit from a service. Would attract funders.	
Work with partners such as Northern Periphery Programme to establish EV pilot projects in the Park	Medium	High	£10k+	Would deliver innovative transport projects to visitors and residents	Quite costly.
Consider Active Travel Planning (ATP) pilot, surveying households to discover true latent demand and help plan away from car journeys	High	Low/ Medium	£30k+ of £100k project	Match funding available. High profile	Other areas have shown limited improvements in transport use. ATP is expensive
Travel Diaries. Have a representative sample look at their travel habits and plan services/projects around it	Medium	Medium	Around £10k	Cheaper version of ATP. Targeted, good results in other areas. Could work with eco-schools	Still fairly expensive, would need match funding
A travel fund for School fieldtrips and other groups to bid into	Medium	High	Around £10k p.a.	High profile, 100% targeted, could prioritise groups of people. Could substitute for the lose of the HH	Could be over-subscribed quickly.
Co-fund better motorway style services signage on trunk roads to encourage travellers to stop and boost village economies	Medium	High	Around £10k	Promote by-pass village economies.	Expensive. Transport Scotland may not agree. Would take long time to get agreement?
Fund B&SCTC car scheme & scooters to offer travel to visitors (restricted to local community at present)	Low	High	Under £5k p.a.	Could be charged back on a per trip basis, with a maximum fund value. High profile, low cost	Would depend on marketing the scheme
Back of car-park ticket bus promotion and	Medium	Medium	Under £5k p.a.	Good publicity even if	Low profile/ impact/ uptake?

Option	Cost	Probable Effectiveness	Anticipated cost to CNPA	Pros. How this helps deliver NPP outcomes.	Cons
discounts. Might include Park messages too				discounts are not taken up. Chance to switch people away from cars	
Offer new home owners 'welcome pack' of transport information	Low	Low	Under £2k p.a.	Targeted information to new home-owners/ renters. Could extend to promote local businesses and other Park messages	Would need estate agents on board, targets low number of people
Funding weekly Summer bus services into areas like the Glens & Linn of Dee	High	Medium	£30k+	Allow access into Glens and Linn of Dee for first time by regular public transport	High cost, not targeted.
Encourage hitch-hiking by formalised lay-bys where hikers can wait for cars. Perhaps a pilot at Braemar and Linn of Dee	Medium	Medium	£20k+	Cheap alternative to providing bus services	Perceived danger of hitch-hiking and liability issues
Bike hire or electric bike scheme, pilot in Aviemore, same idea as Paris or London bike rental scheme	High	High	£30k+	Work with local bike shops and groups, should be good match funding	Would it work in a rural area? Costly (has had problems in trial areas such as Paris)
Provide lit bus stops, powered by PV cells or wind turbines, which could later provide energy for real time bus information boards.	Medium	Medium	£20k+	Would make bus stops safer and easier to use in the Winter months.	Should be provided by councils? Fits well with any future information boards project

JT 2009