
BORDERS RAILWAY – SCOTTISH BORDERS WORK PLAN

Report by Service Director Strategy & Policy

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL

2 April 2015

1 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

- 1.1 **This report sets out the local actions that will be delivered to ensure the area capitalises on the economic opportunities arising from the Borders Railway which will open in September 2015.**
- 1.2 The Borders Railway Blueprint has set a structure for the delivery of the strategic actions along the whole length of the railway corridor. The Scottish Borders Work Plan, detailed in Appendix 1, sets out the local actions that also need to be delivered before the railway opens, and in the medium and longer term.
- 1.3 A wide range of actions are being taken forward, or being proposed. The Council wants to ensure there is good connectivity to and from stations for all users. Actions are identified to ensure the success of the line through effective marketing to local residents. Ensuring local involvement in the opening celebrations is also a priority, as is new tourism product development. A longer term focus is also planned, to ensure appropriate assessment of future impacts and development needs. Finally, actions to spread the economic benefits of the railway are also set out. These local actions are a complement to the strategic actions contained in the Borders Railway Blueprint.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 **I recommend that the Council:-**
 - (a) **Notes and agrees the actions contained in the Scottish Borders Work Plan at Appendix 1; and**
 - (b) **Agrees that further reports on implementation of the Scottish Borders Work Plan will form part of the Executive Committee's regular quarterly monitoring of the Council's Corporate Transformation Plan.**

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The reopening of the Borders Railway is identified in the Scottish Borders Economic Strategy 2023 as a key opportunity and strategic priority. This is the largest investment in infrastructure for the Scottish Borders in a generation and in response the Council and its Community Planning Partnership partners are working to maximise the positive impact for the economy.
- 3.2 Officers have developed a detailed benefits realisation programme working in partnership with the Council's partners. The Borders Railway Blueprint (see previous Item) has set a structure for the delivery of the strategic actions along the whole length of the railway corridor. The Scottish Borders Work Plan detailed in Appendix 1, sets out the local actions that also need to be delivered before the railway opens, and in the medium and longer term.

4 THE SCOTTISH BORDERS WORK PLAN

- 4.1 The Scottish Borders Work Plan is broken down into a range of objectives and specific actions are set out to help deliver each objective. These local actions complement the strategic actions in the Borders Railway Blueprint and in some instances provide a local dimension to those strategic actions.
- 4.2 **Ensure good connectivity**

Officers are working to ensure good connectivity between the new stations and their surrounding areas. This work recognises the range of users that will use the stations and any associated facilities. Users will arrive and depart by bus, taxi, bicycle, and as pedestrians, as well as by car. The needs of disabled users are also a key consideration. The potential for a concessionary card scheme for rail travel is also being investigated.
- 4.3 **Effective local marketing**

Effective marketing to local residents and commuters will be important to ensure there is good use of the new services. The Council will work with the service provider to ensure their marketing activity is appropriately targeted at the Borders' community. The lack of train services in the Scottish Borders over the last 45 years means that there is no culture of rail travel in the area. It will take time for residents to get used to the new travel opportunities that the railway provides. A long term approach to marketing the service locally is required, so that residents' travel habits adapt over time to include regular rail travel.
- 4.4 The newly formed Borders Railway Community Rail Partnership can play a key role in assisting with this marketing and helping to get the message out to local people about the new rail services. The partnership includes the three local authorities, as well as a range of community groups and organisations with transport interests. Their marketing effort will need to target Midlothian as well as Scottish Borders.

4.5 **Opening Celebrations**

The Scottish Government and Transport Scotland are keen to ensure that the opening of the railway is marked by a series of high profile events in order to celebrate its significance. The opening celebrations will be an opportunity to gain National and International press coverage as well as ensuring local involvement with the communities and schools along the line. More information on the opening celebrations is set out in a separate report being considered at this meeting.

4.6 **Tourism Offer**

A key challenge is to ensure that the tourism 'offer' from the area is co-ordinated. There will be opportunities for increased visitor numbers for attractions such as Abbotsford and Melrose Abbey, but the real gains will come from making wider links and connections. For example, a 'Sir Walter Scott Trail' has been developed by the Council working with a number of local attractions and sites of historical interest with a link to Scott, who has an international appeal. It is expected that new events will also be developed because of the travel connections provided by the railway. The Area Tourism Partnership will work with local tourism businesses to ensure this co-ordination

4.7 **Long term impacts**

There are longer term actions included in the Workplan to ensure that future traffic and land use planning gives due consideration to the requirements and impacts arising from the railway. There is also a need to monitor and evaluate the impacts of the railway over the long term in order to demonstrate its value to the area.

4.8 **Economic Benefits**

The Work Plan highlights the need to spread the economic benefits of the Railway across the Scottish Borders, particularly through tourism related activity. Consideration has also been given to maximising the benefits in the towns around each of the stations. In Stow, as well as being a commuter stop, officers envisage the station having a role as a stop for activity tourists who are aiming to cycle or walk in the Scottish Borders. The appropriate maps and signage to make this effective are being developed. It is hoped that this will also provide opportunities for local tourism and service businesses.

4.9 In Galashiels, the Council has made a major investment, supported by EU funding, in the Transport Interchange and associated business space. The Council has also put in place a Town Centre Coordinator, who is working with Energise Galashiels and other local groups to identify initiatives to help make the town centre more vibrant. The aim is to ensure that the town is able to take advantage of the opening of the railway and to fulfil its function as a 'gateway' to the Scottish Borders. There is a good opportunity at the Borders Campus to make use of the recent investment in student accommodation and education facilities to create a conference venue.

- 4.10 In Tweedbank, the station will have an important role in relation to potential 'charter' trains and onwards links to key tourist attractions across the Scottish Borders. The Council will work with the train operator to make sure that good visitor information is available at the station. It is expected that there will also be opportunities for local tourism and service businesses in the vicinity of the station.

4.11 Programme Monitoring

Delivery of the Scottish Borders Work Plan is an important part of the successful opening of the railway in September and an important contributory element for its medium and long term success. Consequently monitoring delivery of the Work Plan will be important and so it is recommended that further reports on implementation of the Scottish Borders Work Plan will form part of the Executive Committee's regular quarterly monitoring of the Council's Corporate Transformation Plan.

5 IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Financial

The activity set out in the Scottish Borders Work Plan will be funded from existing base budgets wherever possible. There will be some instances where the funding allocated for delivery of the Railway Blueprint Action Plan will be utilised to support delivery elements of the Scottish Borders Work Plan. At this stage no additional funding is being sought beyond that set out in other reports being considered by Council.

5.2 Risk and Mitigations

The key risk in relation to the Scottish Borders Work Plan is the ability to deliver a successful opening of the Borders Railway at the start of September 2015. This risk is being mitigated by clear planning at the strategic level, through the Railway Blueprint Action Plan, and at the local level, through the Scottish Borders Work Plan. Additional resources have also been identified to ensure the successful delivery of actions in the Blueprint and local Work Plan.

5.3 Equalities

There are no adverse equality implications. The railway and train services will be accessible to disabled people.

5.4 Acting Sustainably

No decision is required that has economic, social or environmental implications. The reopening of the railway will have a positive economic impact on the Scottish Borders and help to make our economy more sustainable in the future.

5.5 Carbon Management

No decision is required that has an effect on carbon emissions. The opportunity for commuters to shift their mode of travel to rail should also help to reduce the overall carbon footprint for the area.

5.6 Rural Proofing

This report does not propose a new or amended policy or strategy.

6 CONSULTATION

6.1 The Chief Officer, the Monitoring Officer, the Chief Legal Officer, the Service Director Strategy and Policy, the Chief Officer Audit and Risk, the Chief Officer HR, the Service Director Interim Capital Projects and the Clerk to the Council have been consulted and their comments have been incorporated into this report.

Approved by

David Cressey

Service Director Strategy & Policy

Signature

Author(s)

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|---------------|--|
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Background Papers: Not applicable

Previous Minute Reference: Not applicable

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