

ISSUE DATE: MONDAY 12 DECEMBER 2005

LAUNCH OF NEW COMMUTER RAIL SERVICES

The Highland Council along with its partners, the Highland Rail Partnership, HiTrans and Highlands and Islands Enterprise has welcomed the introduction of 11 additional rail services in the Highlands by First ScotRail. Under the new Invernet services, launched today (Monday 12th), there will be an additional commuter rail services to and from Inverness from Lairg, Sutherland, via Tain and Invergordon in Ross-shire and two additional services from Kingussie, Strathspey, to Inverness.

The new Invernet services will make commuting by rail a realistic option for many people who work in Inverness, but choose to live outside the city. The new timetable will, for the first time, allow people from Lairg and Kingussie to arrive in the city by train before 9am.

Funding for these new ScotRail services has been provided by the Scottish Executive (£1,003,000), The Highland Council (£350,000), the HIE network (£200,000) and the Highland Rail Partnership (£4,000).

Councillor Charlie King, chairman of The Highland Council's TEC Services Committee as well as the Highland Rail Partnership and HiTrans, said: "We welcome these important new services which will enable increased commuter rail travel in the greater Inverness area and Argyll. The Highlands and Islands have very ambitious plans for improving transport infrastructure and services both locally and nationally - rail will play an important part in the overall mix of services and this new Invernet timetable is a great step towards achieving our goals."

Frank Roach, rail development manager with the Highland Rail Partnership, said: "We are sure that these new services will prove to be of huge benefit to the communities of Sutherland, Easter Ross and Strathspey. Along with First ScotRail, we will be monitoring the passenger levels on these new services over the next few months, and are looking forward to real growth in numbers as awareness grows amongst the travelling public. We are sufficiently confident of success that we are already looking to implement new commuter services into Inverness from the East."

Stuart Black, chief executive INBSE, said: "Inverness is growing as a city region and as such it is vital that good commuter transport services are in place to link the city with its surrounding communities. These new rail services will enable people to travel to and from Inverness during peak hours, which will bring a range of benefits to the business community, as well as increased opportunities for leisure travel. We are delighted to have been able to work together with First ScotRail, the Scottish Executive and our other partners to introduce these key additional services."

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