

HIE's case for funding the repair rather than the removal of the Cairn Gorm funicular

Description



Highlands and Islands Enterprises (HIE) last month released estimates for the costs of removal and repair of the Funicular Railway ([see here](#)) which was taken out of operation 15 months ago after concerns were raised about the safety of the structure.

The “high end” estimate for removal is £13.3M, with a provision of £9.6M in HIE’s 2018/19 accounts towards the cost of repair. Notice that the costs being quoted by HIE are loaded against removal. We do not know what the cheapest cost of removal could be or the “high end” cost of repair. [Remember when the Funicular was built the early estimates were for a cost of £9.39M to HIE which subsequently increased by over 100% to £19.6M.]

This post shows how seriously flawed the current two estimates are based on HIE’s response to two Freedom of Information requests.

The costs of removing the funicular

Graham Garfoot

From: Team - Customer Service <customer.service@hient.co.uk>
Sent: 29 October 2019 15:18
Subject: 067 2020 FOI to HIE

Dear Mr Garfoot,

Thank you for your request for information dated 3rd October 2019.

You requested the following information in relation to the costs for removal of the Funicular at Cairngorm Mountain, (response in **bold**).

(1) The time scale for complete removal.

We estimate that the timescale to dismantle the railway would be between 2 and 3 seasons, depending on weather conditions.

(2) The cost of removing associated buildings, ie the bottom station and the tunnel.

We have not yet estimated these costs, so do not hold this information.

(3) How many quotes were received for each stage of removal

We commissioned one high level estimate for the cost of dismantling the railway and reinstating the hillside.

(4) The depth that the support pillars would be removed to, e.g. as in the removal of the Coire Na Ciste chairlifts to surface level, 300mm as recommended by the "Working with the Environment at Cairngorm" paper by Mr. K Bryers or total removal.

The high level estimate assumed that the piers would be cut at foundation level.

(5) Was removal by helicopter or a fixed wire lift advocated.

Cable crane is the recommended equipment.

(6)(a) the expected residual or second hand value of infrastructure worth selling or

(b) it's scrap value if nothing was sold.

These values are not known at present.

(7) Whether or not alternative uses have been examined for the bottom station, e.g. for use as the base station for a chair/ gondola uplift.

We have not examined alternative uses for the bottom station.

Under FOISA you have the right to request a review of the way in which this request has been processed. Should you wish to exercise this right, you will need to contact us within 40 working days of receipt of this e-mail. If you remain

Commentary

(Q1) The time scale for complete removal.

“We estimate that the timescale to dismantle the railway would be between 2 and 3 seasons, depending on weather conditions.”

Comment. As far as I am aware in the legal agreement that requires the funicular to be removed if it ceases to operate, there is no stipulated time requirement for this to happen. So, if alternative uplift in the form of a chair/ chair/ gondola hybrid is built first, customer confidence will return, Cairngorm Mountain Scotland Ltd (CMSL) will start making a profit which will then help towards the cost of the Funicular removal.

(Q2) The cost of removing associated buildings, ie the bottom station and the tunnel.

“We have not yet estimated these costs, so do not hold this information.”

Comment. Why not? After all if they are to be removed then that should be part of the “high end estimate”. I did not include the cost of removing the mid-mountain stop in my FOI request either and HIE’s response suggests that may not be included either.

(Q3) How many quotes were received for each stage of removal

“We commissioned one high level estimate for the cost of dismantling the railway and reinstating the hillside.”

Comment. The only reason I can see for that is to tip the scales in favour of repair.

(Q4) The depth that the support pillars would be removed to, e.g. as in the removal of the Coire Na Ciste chairlifts to surface level, 300mm as recommended by the “Working with the Environment at Cairngorm” paper by Mr. K Bryers or total removal.

“The high level estimate assumed that the piers would be cut at foundation level”.

Comment. Parkswatch has covered the effect that the Funicular build may have had on subterranean water courses ([see here](#)), so total removal as proposed by HIE could alter them again, doing more damage to the mountain environment.



Photo of support pillar courtesy of Save the Ciste

The photo above may result from such a change in a water course. Removing the pillars to foundation level also increases costs as material to infill the holes left behind will have to be brought in from other areas. The sensible option is therefore to remove piers to sufficient depth, about 300mm, for easier ground re-instatement at a greatly reduced cost.

(Q5) Was removal by helicopter or a fixed wire lift advocated?

“Cable crane is the recommended equipment.”

Comment. Finally a little bit of common sense! I believe that this method of removal of materials will be best and minimise impact on the environment.

(Q6)(a) the expected residual or second hand value of infrastructure worth selling or (b) it's scrap value if nothing was sold.

“These values are not known at present.”

Comment. (6a) It could be expected for the Funicular to have a residual value to some organisation or business although at this time it would probably only be a guesstimate. I seem to recall someone trying to sell it on Ebay a few years ago. Can anyone remember how much it made?

(6b) The scrap value is easy enough to estimate. The weight of the track could be estimated, if not actually known, multiply that by the current value of scrap steel, hey presto!

(Q7) Whether or not alternative uses have been examined for the bottom station, e.g. for use as the base station for a chair/ gondola uplift.

“We have not examined alternative uses for the bottom station.”

Comment. If a chair/ gondola hybrid is built it should be possible to adapt the Funicular bottom station, the mid stop of the Funicular could be used as a middle station and, if the tunnel was then collapsed in on itself, a top station could be built on top of it.

The longer term costs of the funicular

Virgin Media Mail 069 2020 FOI to HIE Printout

<https://mail2.virginmedia.com/appsuite/v=7.8.4-58.2>

Team - Customer Service <customer.service@hient.co.uk>

1/11/2019

The information contained within this e-mail and in any attachments is confidential and may be privileged. If you are not the intended recipient, please destroy this message, delete any copies held on your systems and notify the sender immediately. If you have received this email in error, you should not retain, copy or use it for any purpose, nor disclose all or any part of its content to any other person. All messages passing through this gateway are checked for viruses but we strongly recommend that you check messages using your own virus scanner as Cairngorms National Park Authority is not responsible for any damage caused as a result of virus infection.

Dear Mr Garfoot,

Thank you for your request for information dated 4th October 2019. Your request was for information about Cairngorm Funicular Railway.

In response to your request I can confirm that this information is not held in accordance with section 17 of the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002.

Under FOISA you have the right to request a review of the way in which this request has been processed. Should you wish to exercise this right, you will need to contact us within 40 working days of receipt of this email. If you remain dissatisfied on completion of the review, you have the right to appeal to the Office of the Scottish Information Commissioner - <http://www.itspublicknowledge.info/home/ScottishInformationCommissioner.aspx>. Thereafter you may appeal to the court of session on a point of law only.

Regards,

HIE Customer Service Team

REUSEW REQUE
SENT 3/11/19
COPIED TO MSPS

FOI response (069 2020)

Virgin Media Mail 069 2020 FOI to HIE Printout

Kind regards.

HIE Customer Service

From: [REDACTED]

Sent: 04 October 2019 12:33

To: Team Customer Service <customer.service@hient.co.uk>
[REDACTED] MSP@parliament.scot; [REDACTED] msp

Subject: Cairngorm Funicular Railway.

CAUTION: This email was sent from outside of the organisation.
recognise the sender and know the content is safe.

Good afternoon.

Could you please supply the following information and treat as an

(1) The cost of upgrading the now obsolete control gear and cables
the repair schedule,

(2) The projected running costs of the Funicular for the next 5 & 10

(3) The projected maintenance costs for the same timescale,

(4) The projected passenger numbers, with separate estimates for
customers,

I asked seven questions (see above) to which the response was:

"I can confirm that this information is not held".

Comment. All seven questions relate to the whole life costing of the Funicular and yet HIE are preparing a business case to present to the Scottish Government without knowing the answers! What that implies is that the second paragraph of my post about repair costs escalating would appear to be correct in that HIE haven't included major future expenditure which will be incurred sooner or later.

Conclusion

Before HIE presents their case to the Scottish Government for funding, all of these questions on costs of removal and of longer terms costs, and maybe a few I haven't asked, should be answered. If HIE are still working on some of the estimated costs then they are leaving it a bit late to finalise their case! Without answers this could be another "open-ended cheque book" which was of such a concern to the Scottish Parliament's Audit Committee back in 2009.

The Funicular has never been liked by the majority of skiers/ boarders and even the SE Group report paid for by HIE implied that it is not fit for purpose, so maybe now is the time for it to be removed. Looking at comments on Facebook and a falling market share there are a lot of skiers/ boarders saying they will not return to Cairngorm as long as there is a continued lack of decent uplift.

Given that HIE and CMSL have not undertaken any public consultation, which they have always maintained that they would, on their preferred "Masterplan", or the repair or removal of the Funicular, and that it is public money at stake, HIE's case to the Scottish Government for funding should be published and subjected to public scrutiny.

Many people will think it amazing that HIE is still allowed to present business cases based on flimsy evidence such as that obtained through these FOI requests. It appears HIE is unlikely to be held to account unless all interested parties now overcome their differences, organise a forum/ conference in Aviemore and join forces to present a united front demanding this. This is probably best lead by the Aviemore & Glenmore Community Trust if the local community wish to gain control of the hill business, with an agenda to build suitable uplift, remove the Funicular, rebuild the hill's fortunes and the Strathspey winter economy. We must act as one to show HIE what skiers, boarders, outdoor recreationists and the local community want.

Category

1. Cairngorms

Tags

1. Cairn Gorm
2. Freedom of Information
3. HIE
4. natural environment

5. Scottish Government

Date Created

November 11, 2019

Author

graham-garfoot

default watermark