

Cairngorm Mountain – death of a ski resort

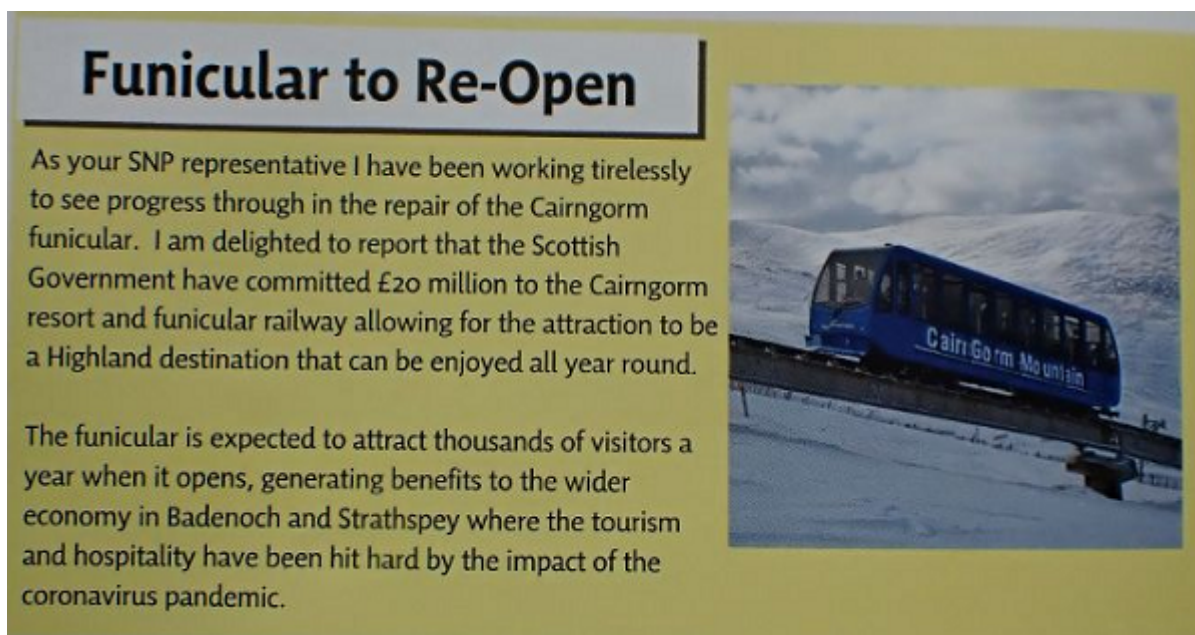
Description

Since the involvement of Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) with the Cairngorm ski resort and the construction of the funicular railway, the mountain business and its skier/ boarder capacity has gone downhill faster than G.B's olympic skiers ever did. The folly is continuing with HIE deciding to have the funicular repaired at any cost and, with the demolition of other viable uplift, we could now be witnessing the death of what was once Scotland's and the U.K's greatest skiing asset.

On Tuesday 23/03/2021 the U.K. Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) confirmed what many of us have suspected for a long time, that the SARS Coronavirus 2 is going to be with us for an indefinite period and that a third wave may hit us this summer as a result of new variants! Leading to a fourth next winter, triggered by the waves of international dignitaries attending the Climate Change summit in Glasgow?

So what has this to do with HIE, Cairngorm and Cairngorm Mountain Scotland Ltd (CMSL)?


HIE and CMSL had appeared to be working under the assumption that once the funicular is repaired then it will then be in a position to carry its full capacity of 120, +1 persons, the +1 being the carriage attendant. But more recently, Mr Dave Macleod, HIE's Head of Property and Infrastructure told the Aviemore and Glenmore Community Trust AGM that the capacity would be only 100 passengers! That possibility is now becoming more remote every day.



Funicular to Re-Open

As your SNP representative I have been working tirelessly to see progress through in the repair of the Cairngorm funicular. I am delighted to report that the Scottish Government have committed £20 million to the Cairngorm resort and funicular railway allowing for the attraction to be a Highland destination that can be enjoyed all year round.

The funicular is expected to attract thousands of visitors a year when it opens, generating benefits to the wider economy in Badenoch and Strathspey where the tourism and hospitality have been hit hard by the impact of the coronavirus pandemic.



This is a screenshot from the election leaflet of Mr. Fergus Ewing, the Scottish Government Secretary responsible for HIE, and shows exactly how he and HIE are failing to understand the Coronavirus

pandemic! Note first that the 2nd paragraph has been proved to be innaccurate so many times we are left to wonder what planet Mr Ewing is on!

Using information on the repair of funicular provided by the COWI report ([see here](#)):-

Standing surface: 0,2 m² per person

This is the space required by each person in a fully loaded carriage of 120 persons, equating to a total standing area of 24 square metres.

Now let's assume that physical distancing rules of (a) 1m. or (b) 2m will apply for the foreseeable future because of Covid:

(a) In this case the radius (r) of a circle around each person will be **0.5m**. Using the formula for the area of a circle as $Area = \pi \times r \times r$, that gives a standing surface of.....**0.79sq.m.** per person;

(b) In this case, the radius of a circle around each person will be 1m. Using the same formula this gives a standing surface of.....**3.14sq.m.** per person.

In scenario (a) the maximum number of passengers will be 30 single persons and in (b) the maximum will be 8 single persons.

The situation becomes more complicated if some of the visitors are in household groups who are allowed to stand close together. How on earth are CMSL going to manage that one out unless they mark positions for the different scenarios on the floor?

But, almost as importantly if Covid continues, the COWI report said that the funicular could have been operating safely with a maximum of 30 passengers. Therefore, while it has been closed since Autumn 2018, it could actually have been operating and been providing a reduced income to CMSL. This is similar to what will happen if Covid restrictions continue but saving £16.16m on repairs ([see here](#)).

But this is not the whole story.

Dr. Ivan Luvanti, at the Swiss Federal Laboratories for Materials Science and Technology (EMPA), has carried out research into the risks of airborne transmission of SARS Coronavirus 2 droplets on different ski lifts at the Engleberg – Trubsee – Titlis ski resort in central Switzerland. The following is an excerpt from the report ([see here](#)):

The federal government has not fixed any limits on the number of visitors allowed into resorts. But all enclosed ski transport, like gondolas and trains, are limited to two-thirds capacity, and cantons have a duty to monitor compliance. In recent weeks, the police

Notice the word ENCLOSED. In Switzerland a funicular with a 120 person capacity would be allowed

to carry 80 persons but, as we have different rules, for that to happen at Cairngorm the figure would need to be changed by government. The report also, however, finds that the more people in the funicular, the higher the risk of catching Coronavirus. It also presumes that no matter what the weather conditions, all windows would need to be open to allow that capacity. In the following photo you can see just how small the opening windows on the Cairngorm funicular actually are.



Each compartment has a pair of small hopper windows that can be made out between the doors

The implication from the EMPA research is that “T” bars, Poma and chairlifts should be able to operate at their normal capacities, as there is minimal risk to users, but confined uplift is far more problematic. If in 2017 HIE hadn’t been in such a hurry to demolish the Ciste chairlifts, especially as they had already been warned that the funicular was in trouble, the chairs could have easily been brought back into use before the 2018/19 winter season. And had the Scottish Government also supported outdoor activities for the ordinary person and not just the professional footballers during the pandemic, CMSL, and the other ski areas, could have been operating unenclosed uplift at full capacity and making money.

If SAGE is correct in their assumptions about Coronavirus and the implications that come with that, the capacity of the funicular will have to be vastly reduced if it is to operate in future. The consequences for snowsports at Cairngorm Mountain will be disastrous. Reduced capacity, longer queues and customer dissatisfaction resulting in fewer skiers/ boarders and inevitably poor economic returns.

What needs to happen.

(1) The Scottish Government should now be looking at how skiing/ boarding and other outdoor activities which depend on sharing infrastructure/facilities can be operated safely when the virus and physical distancing returns. There are scientists who are researching possibilities as they are well aware that we are not out of the woods yet. The Scottish Government and HIE should be engaging the services of Dr Luvanti, or another research scientist with the relevant knowledge, to assess the Covid safe carrying capacity of the funicular if it is to be allowed back into operation

(2) HIE and CMSL should be planning for a coronavirus future. Forget about repairing the funicular and get suitable Corona safe uplift built as soon as possible.

Unless this happens, CMSL will never be an economically viable business! Hence the title of this post.

Category

1. Cairngorms

Tags

1. Cairn Gorm
2. Covid-19
3. HIE
4. Scottish Government
5. Tourism

Date Created

March 30, 2021

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