

Report to Partnership Meeting 14 September 2018

RESEARCH AND STRATEGY DELIVERY

Fort William Pre-Appraisal STAG Study

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To update Members on the progress of work to undertake a Scottish Transport Pre-Appraisal (STAG) for Fort William, introduce the Executive Summary of the report and seek approval for the submission of a joint letter to the Transport Minister seeking agreement for Transport Scotland to lead on the Stage 1 Appraisal and complete the appraisal within 6 months.

Background

At the HITRANS Partnership meeting in November 2017, Members approved a match funding contribution and HITRANS participation in a Project Steering Group to undertake a Scottish Transport Pre-Appraisal (STAG) for Fort William.

The study has been taken forward through a Project Steering Group that includes officers from Highland Council, HITRANS, Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) and Transport Scotland. The Strategic Transport Study was focussed on the preparation of a comprehensive and evidence-based Pre-Appraisal Report in compliance with the Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance (STAG). The appointment of a consultant to undertake the Fort William Strategic Transport Study was announced in January 2018.

The purposes of the Fort William Strategic Transport Study (Pre-Appraisal) were to:

- establish evidence for problems and issues linked to transport in a specific area or corridor – key sources of evidence include data and engagement with stakeholders and the public;
- identify opportunities and constraints that could exacerbate transport issues in the future and influence the development of solutions;
- develop initial Transport Planning Objectives to clarify the aims of any interventions, and to guide the development of solutions; and
- develop a long list of possible options to tackle identified problems, and undertake an initial sifting exercise culminating in recommendations on a shorter list of options for progression towards Initial Appraisal.

Public and Stakeholder Engagement

Placecheck Tool - The Placecheck tool for Fort William was launched in mid-February 2018 and allowed participants to provide comments based on three broad themes; things they liked, things they do not like, and things that need to be worked on. Respondents were asked to provide comments on transport services and infrastructure and places in general. A total of 121 comments were received.

Focus Group (Panel of Fort William Residents) - A focus group was undertaken in Fort William on Wednesday, 28 February, at the Ben Nevis Hotel with eight Fort William residents selected through an established market research approach.

Drop-in Engagement Session - A public drop in session was held on Thursday, 8 March, between 1pm and 7pm at Fort William Library in the town centre. The session provided an opportunity for members of the public to find out more about the study and to provide any comments in relation to transport problems, issues and opportunities within the Fort William and surrounding area. Approximately 40 people attended throughout the day.

Stakeholder Workshop - A stakeholder workshop was held on Thursday, 3 May, 2018 in Fort William. The aims of the workshop were: identify any problems which had not been previously identified as part of the study; identify which themes Transport Planning Objectives (TPOs) should be influenced by; and generate a long list of potential options / solutions.

Fort William Strategic Transport Study Pre Appraisal Report

A very comprehensive report has been produced that covers the full scope of the Study. A copy of the full report is available on the HITRANs website www.hitrans.org.uk. The identification of problems are identified in section 5 of the report and they are covered in a series of subsections with the following headings:

- Journey time variability and seasonal congestion;
- Public transport network – poor bus accessibility and declining Services;
- Public transport network – low use of rail for local journeys and limited Central Belt connections;
- Constraints on active travel; and
- Road Network Resilience

An Executive Summary has been prepared. This is attached at appendix 1 to this report. A 'State of the Town' plan has also been produced as part of the review of the problems and is shown in the Executive Summary.

Transport Planning Objectives

A series of Transport Planning Objectives have been developed at this stage:

- TPO1 To create a transport network that alleviates the economic and social impacts of congestion, particularly journey time variability, for both local and strategic transport users and accommodates future growth in the Lochaber area
- TPO2 To ensure the transport network is resilient in the event of incidents and road closures
- TPO3 To deliver a health-promoting, sustainable and fair transport network that promotes equal access to opportunity
- TPO4 To achieve smarter, more reliable and sustainable movement of goods to, from and through the area
- TPO5 To achieve smarter management of travel demand to reduce seasonal impacts on the transport network

A list of options has been packaged and sifted. These will be taken forward to the next stage of the transport appraisal process for further development and an 'Initial Appraisal' of their performance against STAG criteria of Environment, Safety, Integration, Economy, Accessibility and Social Inclusion, as well as deliverability.

Next Steps

The Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance (STAG) breaks down the process of appraisal into three stages: Pre-Appraisal, Stage 1, and Stage 2. The completion of the Fort William Strategic Transport Study (Pre-Appraisal) allows the process to move forward to a Stage 1 Appraisal.

Given the strategic aspect of the trunk road network (A82 and A830) it is essential that Transport Scotland takes on the lead role for the next two stages of the appraisal process. This is particularly important given the economic vision for the future of Fort William and is particularly timely for the emerging National Transport Strategy and the subsequent Strategic Transport Projects Review (STPR2).

Officers from the local partner organisations consider it necessary to raise the matter of progressing to Stage 1 Appraisal with the new Transport Minister at the earliest opportunity. A collective approach from The Highland Council, HITRANS and Highlands and Islands Enterprise is considered to be the most effective way forward.

Members are requested to approve this approach with the HITRANS Chair jointly signing the letter with the other partner organisations.

Recommendation

Members are asked to:

- i. Note this report;
- ii. Note the contents of the Executive Summary (attached at Appendix 1); and
- iii. Approve the submission of a joint letter from the partner organisations (Highland Council, HITRANS and Highlands and Islands Enterprise) to the Transport Minister seeking agreement for Transport Scotland to lead on the Stage 1 Appraisal and complete the appraisal within 6 months.

Risk Register

RTS Delivery

Impact - Positive

Comment – This work supports RTS Strategic priorities to enhance regional connectivity.

Policy

Impact - Positive

Comment – This work supports several policies set out in the RTS including; improving journey time reliability and network resilience, promotion of sustainable transport options in Fort William.

Financial

Impact – Positive

Budget line and value – N/A

Equality

Impact – Positive

Comment – Improving regional connectivity helps improve the competitiveness of business in the West Highlands and improving journey times in Fort William helps local bus operators provide more reliable public transport services.

Report by: Neil MacRae
Designation: Partnership Manager
Date: 1st September 2018