

Report to Partnership Meeting 24 April 2020

CONSULTATION

NATIONAL PLANNING FRAMEWORK 4

Purpose of Report

This report invites Members to approve HITRANS response to the National Planning Framework (NPF) 4 Call for Ideas which is attached as an appendix to this report.

Background

The National Planning Framework is a long-term spatial plan for Scotland that sets out where development and infrastructure is needed to support sustainable and inclusive growth.

As reported to Members at HITRANS Partnership meeting in February, The Scottish Government has started work to prepare the fourth NPF (NPF4) which will look to Scotland in 2050. This will guide spatial development, set out national policies, designate national developments and reflect regional spatial priorities.

It is envisaged that NPF4 will differ substantially from its predecessor with a longer time-horizon, fuller regional coverage and improved alignment with wider programmes and strategies, including on infrastructure and economic investment. In particular, NPF4 will need to align with the outcomes in the National Performance Framework; respond to the shift to inclusive growth; improve health and well-being for the people of Scotland, improve equalities and eliminate discrimination; provide a spatial planning response to the Global climate emergency; provide a renewed focus on rural development including rural repopulation; and give a stronger steer on housing delivery and diversification including the setting of targets on land for housing.

NPF4 will for the first time incorporate Scottish Planning Policy (SPP) and will take on enhanced status as part of the statutory development plan. Research on the operation and effectiveness of the current SPP will be published shortly.

NPF4 will also take into account regional spatial strategies which will be prepared by local authorities.

National Planning Framework 4 – Call for Ideas

The Scottish Government have launched a Call for Ideas to help encourage individuals and organisations to highlight their priorities. HITRANS have engaged with partner Local Authorities and helped provide evidence in support of their responses. A copy of HITRANS draft response is attached in Appendix A.

Appendix A - HITRANS response to National Planning Framework 4 Call for Ideas

Priorities for HITRANS Area

The overarching ambition and priorities which the Scottish Government sets out for NPF4 are welcome including the following; *fuller regional coverage and improved alignment with wider programmes and strategies, including on infrastructure and economic investment; need to align with the outcomes in the National Performance Framework; respond to the shift to inclusive growth; improve health and well-being for the people of Scotland, improve equalities; provide a spatial planning response to the Global climate emergency; and provide a renewed focus on rural development including rural repopulation.*

In responding, HITRANS are keen to highlight several of the key themes and priorities which the Partnership has advanced in updating our Regional Transport Strategy and also proposed through recent responses to consultations such as the National Transport Strategy and Infrastructure Commission for Scotland. These include;

- Seeking increased devolution of decision making, budget and resourcing of strategic transport governance and operation to a regional and / or local level (please see reference to recent report to HITRANS Partnership Meeting 6th February 2020 outlining how this can support improved outcomes in the Transport context - [https://hitrans.org.uk/Documents/Item_6 - Local Governance Review..pdf](https://hitrans.org.uk/Documents/Item_6_-_Local_Governance_Review..pdf))

In responding to the challenges and impact of Covid-19, NPF4 provides an excellent opportunity to strengthen local networks and supply chains, and put our economy on a more sustainable base. With more fundamental recognition of transport as a derived demand when planning the things that everyone needs – food, transport, heat, power, health & social care, childcare, digital connectivity, social connection, services, houses should lead us to developing more resilient communities where demand can be met more locally wherever possible. There is strong evidence from other EU countries demonstrating the benefits of devolving significant elements of transport planning and delivery from the national level to more regional and local levels of government.

- The National Planning Framework offers an excellent opportunity to demonstrate benefits of the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018. The recently published Key Findings Report for the Infrastructure Commission of Scotland fails to make any meaningful reference to islands outwith the context of energy supply. However, there is an opportunity to address this by island proofing NPF4. This could be achieved through the development of ambitious Low Carbon Island Connectivity Plans which seek to ensure that digital, energy and transport connectivity within and to our islands is coordinated to deliver an effective response to the climate emergency whilst also tackling rural depopulation, development and Inclusive Growth. It should be highlighted that rural depopulation is something which affects many mainland areas of the HITRANS area as much as islands.
- In assessing the case for investing in strategic new transport infrastructure in the region, the recently published National Transport Strategy and supporting Strategic Transport Projects Review recognise the important objective of *'Increasing competitive transport access to key domestic and international markets, by reducing costs and improving journey time reliability for business and commercial transport, with an additional focus on facilitating a viable working day in the Central Belt, by public transport'* (STPR2- Highlands and Islands Case for Change report, March 2020)

To achieve this HITRANS believes NPF4 needs to reflect the prioritisation of multi modal investment in the strategic transport corridors on which all freight, wider business and visitors into and from our region depends. By embedding hydrogen, electric and Connected and Autonomous Vehicle CAV infrastructure and services at the heart of these improvements to ensure that the improved connectivity the region's economy can be achieved through carbon neutral solutions.

Strategic transport corridor investment for NPF4:

- Completion of A9 dualling and upgrade of Highland Mainline (an STPR1 commitment) including electrification, reduced journey times, increased service frequency and freight opportunities (please see link to recently commissioned report by Systra which highlights the current inadequacies and poor performance of the route between Inverness and Perth and onto Glasgow and Edinburgh [https://hitrans.org.uk/Documents/Item_10 - HML_Unfazed.pdf](https://hitrans.org.uk/Documents/Item_10_-_HML_Unfazed.pdf))
 - Completion of A96 dualling and improvements to Aberdeen – Inverness rail line including opening of Inverness Airport Station and associated park and ride which were both commitments in STPR1.
 - Upgrade of A82 which serves as a lifeline route to much of the West Highlands and Islands with priority given to Tarbet – Inverarnan (Transport Scotland, DMRB Stage 3) and the section through Fort William (AECOM, Case for Change, 2019 and subsequent work).
 - Investment in the West Highland and Far North Lines as reflected in the recent working groups established to address current performance issues and increase frequency of services on these lines for freight and passengers.
 - The delivery of a number of other location specific strategic transport schemes would also greatly benefit from recognition in NPF4. These include – Realignment of A83 through the Rest and Be Thankful, an alternative route for the A890 at Stromeferry, a fixed link or upgraded ferry service across the Corran Narrows.
- The new National Planning Framework can help promote the adoption of an integrated approach to improving Active Travel in the region through support for investment in prioritised stepchange infrastructure in and around urban settlements while also upgrading and expanding the strategic active travel network in the Highlands and Islands that will deliver improved local sustainable travel choices. This will also but also capitalise on the huge opportunity for the region to be at the forefront of significant growth in the cycle tourism sector. This requires existing sections of the National Cycle Network to be fit for purpose and for the establishment of a suitable Route to the Isles as identified in the Regional Transport Strategy (2018/19).
 - While HITRANS obviously advocate the need for investment in transport infrastructure and services per se, it would be of particular benefit for NPF4 to ensure that the region's busiest transport interchanges remain fit for purpose and able to offer a suitable gateway into and from the region for the growing numbers using them. This requires investment and delivery of masterplans at Inverness Airport, Bus and Rail Stations and a multi modal interchange in Oban (Various supporting documentation available on request). HITRANS will continue to work with both local and national partners to advance ambitious projects at these locations which form important placemaking as well as transport projects.
 - The Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund has enabled welcome investment at a number of high profile attractions which have been impacted by the recent significant growth in visitor numbers. However, an integrated approach to managing tourism growth is required to ensure that there is less dependence on the private car than at present and the area's

wider transport infrastructure is brought up to a suitable standard. HITRANS Regional Transport Strategy identifies the availability of three return public transport journeys from every community to its regional centre as a core objective. Delivery of this basic level of service which enables people without access to the private car to access employment, education, health and leisure facilities within their communities will also encourage visitors to use more sustainable forms of transport when travelling in the region.

- HITRANS are currently working with both Local Authorities, suppliers and Transport Scotland to implement our Regional Electric Vehicle Strategy. There is now an impressive number of demonstrator electric vehicle public transport projects underway in the Highlands and Islands. However, there is a role for NPF4 to help ensure that the delivery of Electric vehicles and supporting infrastructure is integrated across the public sector and all aspects of the economy.
- HITRANS welcomes the recent Programme for Government commitment to make the Highlands and Islands the world's first net zero aviation region. We are working with local partners including HIAL and local authorities to both secure lifeline air services to our island and remote mainland communities, and also implement trials of electric planes in the next couple of years. Continued Scottish and UK government support for these trials is crucial to ensuring to achieving the net-zero ambition and has the potential to revolutionise the economics as well as the de-carbonisation of domestic aviation. This is vital in the HITRANS area where air services often offer the only means of delivering competitive connectivity to areas currently served by scheduled flights as well as those where routes are under threat such as Wick or required as in Skye.
- Given our dependence on maritime transport for intra-regional connectivity and for extra-regional trade, port development is of great importance. We must look to optimize our port and harbour infrastructure where appropriate, building on the region's successful oil and gas activity and food/drink and forestry sectors, and move towards decarbonization.
- Orkney Islands are currently at the national forefront in utilising renewable forms of energy to enable low carbon transport solutions but also other sectors including clean hydrogen as an alternative fuel source and are the first area in Scotland to adopt a Hydrogen Strategy (2019) setting out their ambitions. Current projects include the use of hydrogen to reduce fuel consumption of strategic ferry services and are in the process of developing a hydrogen ferry to operate on internal services to their outer islands. Other areas including the Western Isles are looking to exploit the potential of Hydrogen within their communities.

HITRANS are currently developing the business case for piloting either electric or hydrogen alternatives to diesel for local rail services in the Highlands (<https://hitrans.org.uk/Corporate/Research/Rail>) which will fit well with Government's 2035 Rail Decarbonisation Plan. HITRANS are also working with various local, national and EU partners to implement Connected and Autonomous Vehicle pilots in the Highlands and Islands through an Eu Inter Reg project PAVe for which we are the Lead partner

NPF4 can assist this transition to low carbon in the transport sector by helping to develop and support innovative pilots that would otherwise be difficult for any single local authority or other public body to advance.

RISK REGISTER

RTS Delivery

Impact - Positive

Comment – The National Planning Framework will for the first time incorporate Scottish Planning Policy (SPP) and will take on enhanced status as part of the statutory development plan. It therefore offers a vital opportunity to establish key RTS priorities within wider policy context.

Policy

Impact – Positive

Comment – NPF4 will help shape planning policy and infrastructure investment in the coming years and decades. This offers an opportunity to make a case for the key policies and that can deliver a fairer Scotland where the Highlands and Islands performs to its potential.

Financial

Impact – Neutral

Equality

Impact – Positive

Comment – A fairer and more inclusive Scotland are priorities for NPF4. We have highlighted the importance for NPF4 to recognise the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018 and by extension ensure that the challenges faced by remote rural areas are also addressed.

Recommendation

Members are invited to:

1. Consider the priorities identified in the draft response to the National Planning Framework 'Call for Ideas' attached in Appendix A of this report
2. Approve the submission of HITRANS response by 30th April subject to any amendments agreed by Members

Report by: Neil MacRae
Designation: Partnership Manager
Date: 15th April 2020