

Report to Partnership Meeting 15 November 2019

RESEARCH AND STRATEGY DELIVERY

Corran Narrows STAG Study

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To update Members on the progress of work to undertake a Scottish Transport Pre-Appraisal (STAG) of the Corran Narrows in Lochaber.

Background and Context

Funding has been allocated within the HITRANS Business Plan for 18/19 to undertake STAG based appraisal of transport connectivity across the Corran Narrows that is currently linked by a Council operated ferry with the second highest volume of vehicles carried by a ferry service in Scotland.

The Corran Ferry STAG Appraisal carried out by PBA, Mott MacDonald and WSMD Associates in 2018 was focussed on capital options and delivery models which could ensure the short to medium-term sustainability of the ferry service. The study developed and costed options in relation to vessels, infrastructure and delivery methods. The nature of the service was essentially unchanged in all these options so the study did not estimate the benefits associated with the options (other than those implicitly being the continuation of the service). The study was also not scoped to address the more general question as to whether a ferry or fixed link across the Corran Narrows is the most appropriate, value for money long-term solution. This is the primary issue which The Highland Council, HITRANS and Highlands and Islands Enterprise are seeking to explore in this commission, with a view to feeding a submission into the Strategic Transport Projects Review 2 (STPR2).

It is therefore important to ensure that the study output is proportionate in terms of the requirement to input into the STPR2 process. Whilst outline feasibility & costing for any fixed link work would be required, the level of detail in e.g. the Stromeferry STAG Appraisal would be excessive at this stage. Indeed, it is envisaged that, at the end of the study, any fixed link option would still be subject to full optimism bias (66%) and key uncertainties should be identified.

The ferry-based options have been developed to a certain level within the work undertaken to date. The purposes of this new piece of work will be to:

- develop the fixed link options to a level where there is a greater understanding of the costs and feasibility; and
- compare the ferry and fixed link options in terms of cost to government, benefits etc.

As such, this piece of work can be considered as an Option Development exercise in the STAG context, but taken beyond the level normally associated with a Pre-Appraisal, more in line with an outline feasibility study. In essence, the purpose of this is to establish enough information to

determine whether the fixed link option is a credible one which should be taken forward for further analysis, without embarking on nugatory or excessive technical work.

In order for a fixed link to be meaningfully considered within STPR2 (and indeed in the context of the ferry service), it will be important to establish:

- the engineering feasibility in broad terms for both bridge and tunnel-based options;
- the deliverability of the option in terms of e.g. land ownership and environmental constraints;
- the potential scale of cost, caveated with key risks and uncertainties and optimism bias; and
- the scale of Transport Economic Efficiency (TEE) and associated impacts which would result, and by implication the benefit-cost ratio.

This analysis will therefore establish, at a relatively high-level, the scope and scale of costs, benefits and impacts of a fixed link solution vis a vis a ferry-based solution. The Client Group will then be in an informed position with respect to submitting (or otherwise) the option for further consideration in STPR2.

Next Steps

Projects partners have appointed Stantec (formerly Peter Brett Associates) to undertake the commission with an inception meeting scheduled for 6th November. The costs of the study are being shared equitably by the three project partners – The Highland Council, HITRANS and Highlands and Islands Enterprise

Reporting

The final reporting for this task will:

- set out the main options for a fixed link, i.e. tunnel / bridge, locations and the associated alignments;
- sift this to a set of 'core' options;
- set out in broad terms the engineering characteristics of each option and associated high level costs, thus determining the net cost of a fixed link over a ferry option;
- determine the scope and scale of benefits and impacts associated with a fixed link over a ferry option; and
- set out the main technical, feasibility and environmental issues which would have to be addressed to take these options forward if required.

This will allow THC, HITRANS and HIE to take a more informed decision on the future of the Corran Narrows and the prospects of progressing a fixed link option via STPR2.

Recommendation

Members are asked to note this report;

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.

Financial

Impact – Positive

Budget line and value – A budget allocation of £17330 has been allocated within HITRANS 19/20 Business Plan

Equality

Impact – Positive

Comment – Improving connectivity across the Corran Narrows will provide improved access to services and employment opportunities for those living in Ardnamurchan, Morvern and also Mull.

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