Halcrow Group Limited

Alness & Invergordon Active Travel Audit

Summary Report

December 2010

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Halcrow Group Limited
Camas House Fairways Business Park Inverness IV2 6AA
Scotland
Tel +44 (0)1463 231 707 Fax +44 (0)1463 243 726
www.halcrow.com

Halcrow Group Limited
Camas House Fairways Business Park Inverness IV2 6AA Scotland
Tel +44 (0)1463 231 707 Fax +44 (0)1463 243 762
www.halcrow.com

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Contents

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

1.1.1 Halcrow Group Ltd was commissioned by HITRANS, the Highlands and Islands Regional Transportation Partnership to:

- Develop a methodology to audit existing active travel infrastructure
- Provide baseline information on existing infrastructure provision for active travel
- Recommend priority areas for future investment

1.1.2 The overall aim is to assess where best to apply available funding in order to increase the potential for active travel and ideally to see an increase in the number of people choosing to walk or cycle.

1.1.3 In particular, the key purpose of the audits is to identify:

"A practical network of high quality routes suitable for cycling within each settlement that provides convenient and safe access to all major destinations"

and

"A network of routes for pedestrians focused upon railway stations, bus stations, ferry terminals, major employment areas, local shopping areas, leisure/recreation centres, hospitals and main trip generators."

1.1.4 This document summarises the main findings of the methodology as applied to Alness and Invergordon.

2 Active Travel Methodology

2.1 What is the methodology?

2.1.1 Halcrow has developed a methodology to assess existing and proposed active travel infrastructure. This methodology is based on the following key parameters:

- A desktop study including demographics, travel to work patterns, public transport information and traffic accident data
- Analysis of main trip generators/attractors
- Consultation with the Local Authority and other interested parties
- On site audits
- Application of a 'prioritisation filter'

2.1.2 The prioritisation filter is an analysis tool to identify those corridors where there is the greatest potential for modal shift. The filter encompasses information from the desktop study such as demographic data, trip generators and attractors, planning proposals and the results of stakeholder consultation. The filter also assesses the 'implementability' of a route compared to its potential usage.

2.1.3 On site audits for walking are carried out utilising the Transport Research Laboratory (TRL) Pedestrian Environment Review System (PERS). For cycling, an Institution of Highways and Transportation (IHT) cycle audit is undertaken. Both systems audit the condition of existing facilities for pedestrians and cyclists to identify where proposed measures can be effectively targeted.

2.1.4 The outputs from the application of the methodology are:

- An Active Travel Prioritised Action Plan
- An Active Travel Master Plan

2.1.5 The prioritised action plan identifies areas and potential interventions where there is the greatest potential to achieve modal shift or where there is the greatest need for infrastructure for pedestrians and cyclists. The master plan is a core network for pedestrians and cyclists that provides direct, convenient, safe, attractive and coherent links between journey origins and journey attractors. It should be noted that all the proposals contained within the prioritised action plan and master plan will require further investigation and feasibility work.

2.1.6 Consultation also plays an integral role in the identification of routes for walking and cycling and helps to pinpoint, at a very local level, the barriers to active travel. In Alness and Invergordon the following individuals and organisations were consulted:

- The Highland Council: Access Officer, School Travel Officer, Public Transport Officer, Planning and Development Services and Transport, Environment and Community Services.
- Highland Cycle Campaign

3 Walking and Cycling in Alness and Invergordon

3.1 Overview of current conditions for active travel

3.1.1 The total population of the two settlements is 9076, with 5186 people living in Alness and 3890 in Invergordon at the time of the 2001 UK Census. In both towns there is a relatively large proportion of young people: 26% of the population are under 18 years of age and only 12% and 15% of the population in Alness and Invergordon respectively are over the age of 65. This compares to an average of the Highland Council Area of 23% under the age of 18 and 16% under the age of 65.

3.1.2 Table 3-1 below show comparisons of how people travel to work and study in Alness and Invergordon compared to the Highland region and the whole of Scotland.

Table 3-1: Comparison of mode of transport for journeys to work and study – regional and national comparison

Mode of transport	Alness	Invergordon	Highland	Scotland
% taking bus	4.6	18.2	7.7	16.5
% car and passenger	59.9	58	59.6	53
% cycle	1.6	5.2	2.9	1.3
% walk	21.9	18.2	16	23

(Data supplied by SCROL)

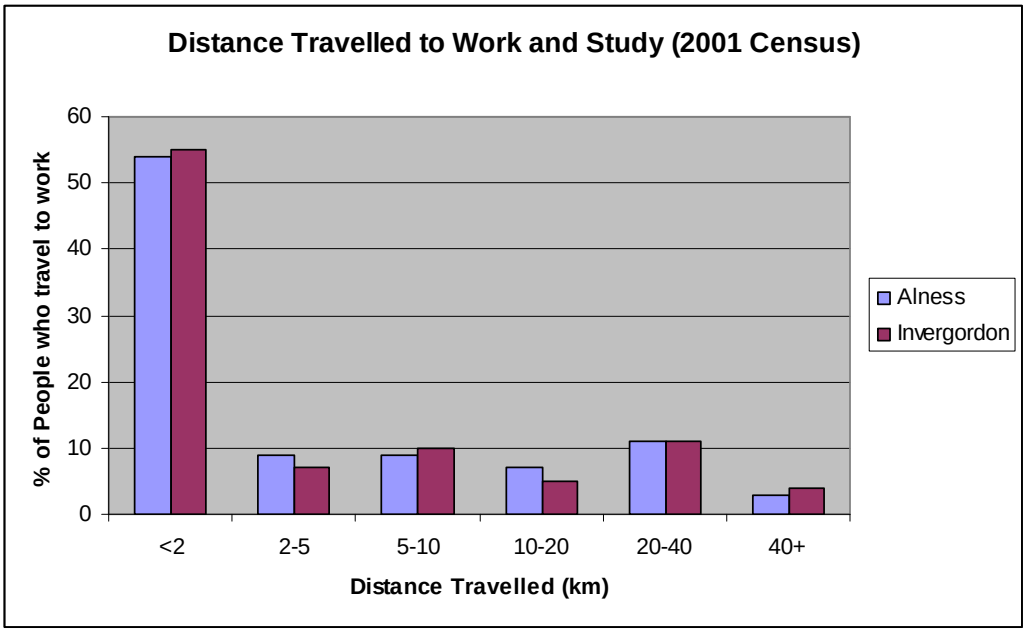
3.1.3 The numbers of people walking to work in Alness and Invergordon is lower than the Scottish average, but slightly higher than the average for the Highlands. In Alness fewer people cycle than the average for the Highlands, but this figure is similar to that of the Scottish average. Cycling to work and study is more commonplace in Invergordon with more than four times as many cycling to work and study than in Alness, as well as the average for Scotland as a whole.

3.1.4 Compared to the national picture, bus use across the Highlands is relatively low, but in Invergordon it is slightly higher than the national average. However bus use is very low in Alness with less than 5% of people using the bus to travel to work and study, which is much lower than both the national and Highland averages.

3.1.5 Travel by car is the same in Alness as the average for the Highlands and is slightly lower in Invergordon, but both of these towns have higher percentages of their population travelling to work and study in a car than the Scottish average.

3.1.6 Census data has also been used to provide a snapshot of the distances travelled to work and study in Alness and Invergordon, and these are shown below in Figure 3-1.

Figure 3-1: Distance travelled to work and study



3.1.7 Out of those travelling to work in Alness and Invergordon 54% of people travel less than 2km and 8% between both 2-5km and 5-10km. This indicates that there is considerable potential to encourage cycling and walking as modes of transport to work and study. 2km is deemed an acceptable walking distance, taking 30 minutes at a comfortable speed, and 6km is considered a comfortable 30 minute journey by bike.

3.2 Study Area

3.2.1 The study area can be divided in two separate parts, firstly the larger town of Alness, located to the north of the A9, and secondly the smaller industrial harbour town of Invergordon. Whilst being located approximately four miles apart, the two towns are interconnected in terms of services and facilities and movement between the two is significant. For this reason the two towns should be studied as a whole rather than separated and regarded as disconnected locations.

Alness

3.2.2 Situated on the banks of the River Averon, Alness was originally a small crofting community. The main expansion of Alness took place in the 19th Century and the old town centre was developed in a traditional grid pattern. Major expansion took place in the 1970s associated with industrial development in Alness and surrounding areas, particularly the building of the Invergordon Smelter. Thus the town grew with the development of modern housing estates stretching out of the town centre to the east and west. The closing of the smelter in 1981 brought with it high levels of unemployment and community hardship.

3.2.3 Today the town of Alness is the largest settlement in the Ross & Cromarty area. The town is now a key employment centre for Easter Ross and substantial areas of land to the south of the railway line is dedicated to business and industrial development. New developments at the Alness Point Business Park are the result of efforts by Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) to encourage new business into the area and Caplich Quarry still provides a source of employment. The Alness Initiative was formed in 1995 when a group of community and business representatives came together to raise the profile of the town. This involved the redesign of the High Street funded by the Highland Council together with Ross & Cromarty Enterprise.

3.2.4 The town centre itself is pleasant and well maintained with wide footways, public toilets and off street as well as on street car parking. Alness Environmental Group is a voluntary

organisation established with the aim of transforming the town centre and has carried out work such as the installation of hanging baskets and plants on the High Street. The town has been a 'Britain in Bloom' winner for a number of years and has also won the World in Bloom and the Dynamic Place award. Local people take part in environmental renewal and recycling schemes and a number of voluntary residents associations have been established taking forward their own projects to improve the environment and develop new facilities such as play parks and other community facilities. The High Street appears vibrant with a high demand for retail space.

3.2.5 The topography is relatively gentle on the whole, but is fairly hilly to the north west of the town. Facilities within the town include:

- 3 Primary Schools
- High School
- Leisure centre
- Supermarket
- High Street shopping
- Industrial area
- Business Park
- College

3.2.6 A number of walking and cycling routes already exist within the town, including safer routes to school paths and National Cycle Network Route 1, but signage and promotion of these routes could be improved. Modern residential developments appear not entirely pedestrian friendly and there are opportunities for encouraging active travel.

3.2.7 A traffic free cycle route links the town of Alness with Alness Point Business Park alongside the River Averon. This path requires localised improvements: there is an issue with headroom clearance under the A9 bridge with signs directing cyclists to dismount. The alternative route to the business park from Alness town centre would follow the B817, turning left at the roundabout towards the A9. There are no facilities for pedestrians and cyclists to cross the A9 and there are no footway facilities linking the A9 and B817 despite the presence of bus stops. These facilities are shown in Figures 3-2 to 3-7 below.

Figure 3-2: Alness High Street

Figure 3-3: Typical street in Alness housing estate

Figure 3-4: One way traffic system in operation in old town centre, pedestrian links through lanes to Alness High Street.

Figure 3-5: Alness Point Business Park

Figure 3-6: Cyclists dismount at A9 bridge.

Figure 3-7: No pedestrian facilities on road linking A9 and B817.

Invergordon

3.2.8 Invergordon is the smaller of the two towns; founded in the 1780s, it expanded from a planned estate village into a major industrial town. The Cromarty Firth was recognised as a good anchorage for ships since the early 1700s and the Royal Navy has had links with the town of Invergordon since the beginning of the 19th Century. Invergordon was used as a base for coaling in the middle of the 19th Century and the town became an official base for the Royal Navy in the early 20th Century. In World War I Invergordon operated as a full scale base for the Royal Navy providing fuel oil, water and dockyard repair facilities. The hospital to the east of Invergordon was also built during this period and the tank farm was constructed along with Admiralty pier.

3.2.9 In World War II the Moray Firth became a base for flying boats with three squadrons of aircraft based in the town and with a maintenance yard at Evanton and training base at Alness demonstrating the historical connections between the towns of Alness and Invergordon. In 1971 the British Aluminium smelter was constructed in Invergordon as well as the pier at Saltburn providing employment to the town and generating migration to the area. During the oil boom of the 1970s an oil platform construction yard was established in the town and the Port area was expanded by the Cromarty Firth Port Authority.

3.2.10 The oil industry continues to be a key sector in Invergordon, although industry has now diversified to a wider business and industrial base whilst Admiralty Base is now used as a

berth by visiting cruise liners. The harbour area remains active and there is a heavily used dock as well as a distillery within the town. There is also an industrial estate and leisure centre in Invergordon but residents must travel to Alness for a supermarket. The town has two primary schools, an academy and a hospital. The topography is hilly to the west of the city, and the town centre is compact, with streets in a grid system consisting of fairly narrow one-way streets.

3.2.11 Invergordon faces a number of problems including a static population, unemployment at higher levels than the national average, fluctuating activity associated with the oil industry (currently experiencing a downturn) and empty shops in the town centre. However a number of opportunities and strengths include high quality port facilities, good supply of business and industrial land, good communications and a skilled workforce. This provides potential for business and technology expansion, promotion of port facilities, expansion of the tourism sector linked to the town's maritime history, improving the environment and encouraging commercial investment within Invergordon.

3.2.12 A significant barrier to movement within Invergordon is the now disused Seabank tank farm within the centre of town. There are no formal paths through this land (although people do seem to use the short cut by cutting through a hole in the fence) and pedestrians and cyclists are forced to take a considerable detour around the area. This issue is also outlined within the Draft Core Paths Plan for the area.

3.2.13 The new community hospital in Invergordon is an example of a development where access on foot and bicycle does not seem to have been considered a priority. The hospital is on a steep site to the rear of the car park and the footway from Cromarty View follows the winding access road. A more direct footway would have improved access for pedestrians considerably. Once pedestrians reach the car park they are directed along a narrow footway which is often narrowed even further by vehicle overhang. Bollards have been installed to try to prevent this. There is a pedestrian/cyclist only access from Grosvenor Street with an informal crossing point. Figures 3-8 to 3-14 illustrate some of these issues in Invergordon.

Figure 3-8: Oil rig at Invergordon Port

Figure 3-9: Narrow streets in Invergordon old town

Figure 3-10: Invergordon High Street

Figure 3-11: Typical residential street in Invergordon

Figure 3-12: Informal access to short-cut path through Seabank Tank Farm near Invergordon Academy

Figure 3-13: Informal path through Seabank Tank Farm

Figure 3-14: Main pedestrian access to hospital

3.2.14 Both Alness and Invergordon have railway stations, and are fairly well connected by bus services. There is no footbridge at Invergordon Railway Station and passengers have a considerable detour upon arriving in the town to reach the other platform and retrieve vehicles and bikes that may have been parked at the station entrance.

3.2.15 The most direct link between Alness and Invergordon and the most heavily used link by vehicle traffic, is the B817 through Dalmore. The road is relatively narrow and on site observations indicated significant levels of traffic including HGVs. There are sections of the road with no pavement provision or segregated cycle facilities for pedestrians or cyclists. The pavement terminates at the southern edge of Dalmore where pedestrians have no choice but to walk within the carriageway. The speed limit changes to 50mph at this point (having been reduced from the national speed limit in 2009). At one particular section of the B817, the road passes over a small bridge with a retaining wall on the landward verge of the road and another wall on the opposite side. This section is a major pinch point and pedestrians and cyclists would experience potential difficulties when passed by vehicles.

3.2.16 A separate footpath has recently been constructed along part of the northern verge of the B817 towards Invergordon. There have been a number of accidents on this road, including one pedestrian fatality taking place in recent years. Figures 3-15 to 3-22 show conditions on the B817. The new cycle track appears to be unfinished with no wearing course and no dropped crossings. In addition, the track ends at Belle Port just short of Alness. The B817 also carries a significant number of HGVs due to deliveries at the dock in Invergordon many of which are abnormal loads associated with wind turbines.

3.2.17 Another route to connect Alness and Invergordon has been discussed in the past. Transport Scotland, the Highland Council and local cyclists have identified a potential route along the A9 from Obsdale on the north east of Alness to Achnagarron where a minor road connects to the B817 to Invergordon. There is evidence of this route already being used as shown below, however to formalise this route an informal crossing point across the A9 would be required.

Figure 3-15: End of footway at Dalmore where the speed limit increases to 50mph

Figure 3-16: New footway on northern verge of B817

Figure 3-17: New footway on northern verge of B817

Figure 3-18: Cyclist making use of footway along B817 near Invergordon

Figure 3-19: No dropped kerbs on new cycle track on B817

Figure 3-20: Poor quality surfacing on new B817 cycle track

Figure 3-21: End of cycle track on B817

Figure 3-22: Desire line on A9 towards Achnagarron

3.2.18 There are part time 20mph zones outside all of the schools in both settlements except Bridgend Primary School in Alness. Furthermore, there were no specific problems with regards to congestion as school opening and closing times. At Alness Academy, the footbridge over the railway is a well used route from the town to the school although the steps make access by bicycle difficult.

Figure 3-23: Stepped bridge over railway in Alness

3.2.19 In both settlements there is no shortage of free car parking. Both High Streets have free on street parking and there are also car parks to the rear of the shopping areas. There is plentiful car parking at the leisure centres and libraries as well as a large car park at the supermarket in Alness.

Figure 3-24: Car park to rear of shops in Invergordon

Figure 3-25: Car parking in Invergordon High Street

3.3 Existing provision for cycling

3.3.1 National Cycle Network Route 1 (NCN1) linking Aberdeen and John O'Groats passes through the town of Alness. NCN Route 1 is well used by touring cyclists as it eventually ends at John O'Groats and is a well known route for people taking the challenge to cycle

from 'End to End' of the UK. Apart from a very small section on Novar Road and past the cemetery, all of NCN1 in Alness comprises of a signed, on road route. The traffic free section terminates at the western extent of the town of Alness, where the route proceeds on-road along the relatively busy B817 where there is a pinch point on the bridge over the River Averon. The route follows northwards out of town along Ardross Street and through Alness Golf Course and proceeds on-road in the direction of Balnaguisich to the north east of Alness. Signage of the National Cycle Network route is shown in Figure 3-26 and Figure 3-27 and there are very few specific cycle facilities to aid cyclists through the town.

3.3.2 There are two other cycle routes in Alness: the riverside path to Alness Point Business Park, and a route (with a cycle counter) from the Academy to Crawl Park. The route to the Business Park is in need of maintenance. The Alness Partnership are currently in the process of developing more cycle routes in Crawl Park; firstly a new route on the east side of the river to link to the A9 with a new pedestrian/cycle bridge to link east to west and a category red mountain bike route in the steepest section. There a number of road closures that allow access for pedestrians and cyclists (Figure 3-29) and also advisory and part time 20mph zones. A traffic free shared use route also connects the high school to the supermarket although the informal crossing on the B817 could be made more direct for vulnerable users. To further complement the cycle facilities in the town, a project to refurbish and sell unwanted bicycles is in operation at the high school. The project also provides bike maintenance for the public and is run as a social enterprise by past and current students.

Figure 3-26: Signage for National Cycle Network Route 1 on Novar Road (B817)

Figure 3-27: NCN Route 1 on-road signage on Alness High Street at Alness Bridge

Figure 3-28: Signage for riverside route to Alness Point Business Park

Figure 3-29: Pedestrian/Cycle link through road closure at Obsdale

Figure 3-30: NCN signage on approach to Alness

Figure 3-31: NCN on road route into Alness

3.3.3 Despite levels of cycling in Invergordon being higher than both Alness and the national average there are no cycle facilities in the town, no routes are signed but there is cycle parking located throughout the town. During the audit there were a number of pupils cycling to school via the paths in Saltburn Woodland and along a very narrow and poorly surfaced track from Golf View Terrace to Seabank Road that was extremely popular despite its condition.

Figure 3-32: Existing route through Saltburn Woodland

Figure 3-33: Route from Golf View Terrace to Seabank Road

3.4 Existing cycle parking

3.4.1 Cycle parking provision is relatively good within the town centres of Alness and Invergordon. Public cycle parking stands are available on both Alness and Invergordon High Street, and at both railway stations, although the lack of a bridge at Invergordon station means that cyclists parking their bike and returning to the other platform have a considerable walk to retrieve their bicycle. The use of CCTV would enhance security of bicycle parking at the railway stations. Bicycle parking within the town centres of Alness

and Invergordon were not well used, however the weather was very poor on a number of the days of surveying and heavy rain is likely to have reduced the numbers of people cycling.

Figure 3-34: Cycle parking on Alness High Street

Figure 3-35: Cycle parking at Invergordon Railway Station

Figure 3-36: Cycle parking on Invergordon High Street

Figure 3-37: Cycle parking in use at Invergordon Academy despite unfavourable weather conditions

Figure 3-38: Cycle parking at Invergordon Community Hospital

Figure 3-39: Cycle parking at Invergordon Leisure Centre

3.5 Traffic flow and accident data

3.5.1 The Road Safety Plan for Highland (The Highland Council) has adopted National Targets for accident reduction and is on course to meet the 2010 targets. The Scottish Government has set out road safety targets in their latest Road Safety Framework to 2020 as follows:

- Reduce adult deaths by 40% and reduce the number of serious injuries by 55%
- Reduce child deaths by 50% and reduce the number of serious injuries by 65%

3.5.2 Accident data from the Alness and Invergordon areas was obtained from The Highland Council. The data covers the period 2005-2009 and Figures A-1 and A-2 in Appendix A show accidents involving pedestrians and cyclists in Alness and Invergordon. A total of 11 accidents between vehicles and pedestrians were recorded in Alness, one of which was a fatal accident in which the pedestrian died as a result of the accident, one pedestrian suffered a serious injury, six were slight accidents and three were damage only. Most pedestrian/vehicle accidents have occurred while pedestrians were attempting to cross the road. Only one damage only cycle accident was recorded in Alness.

3.5.3 In Invergordon two serious pedestrian accidents were recorded, one slight pedestrian accident, one slight cyclist accident and one cyclist damage only accident.

3.5.4 A cluster of accidents appears on Alness High Street where a number of damage only and slight accidents have taken place over the five year period. In particular, accidents occurred at Alness Bridge as well as in the vicinity of the controlled crossing on the High Street. Two accidents took place at the uncontrolled zebra crossing, at which drivers are alerted to the presence of the crossing by flashing belisha beacons. With four accidents taking place at the site of pedestrian crossings it can be suggested that perhaps pedestrian prioritisation is not adequate on Alness High Street and that drivers are neglecting the fact that the High Street is the main shopping street in Alness and is therefore a key centre for many social activities and is not just a through route for vehicular traffic.

3.5.5 A pedestrian fatality occurred on the B817 linking Alness and Invergordon and a slight pedestrian incident also took place relatively close to the site of the fatal accident. It is notable that no pavement exists at this point presenting significant danger to pedestrians.

3.5.6 Similarly to Alness, the majority of accidents in Invergordon took place on the High Street, with two serious pedestrian accidents occurring close to Station Road. A damage only cyclist accident occurred at the junction of High Street and Munro Street. A slight cyclist accident occurred at the junction of Saltburn Road and Golfview Terrace and a slight pedestrian accident occurred on Golfview Terrace itself. A bus stop is located on Golfview terrace at the site of the accident; however, there is no pedestrian crossing facilities for those alighting from a bus at this stop.

3.6 Public Transport

3.6.1 The towns of Alness and Invergordon are served by both bus and rail services which provide links with Inverness, surrounding areas and the northern centres of Thurso and Wick. Bus services are reasonably frequent during daytime hours between Monday and Saturday between Alness and Invergordon. Both Alness and Invergordon lie on the Inverness to Thurso and Wick rail line and have relatively frequent services during peak times, however there are no services between approximately 11:30 and 14:30 and passengers should be aware that at certain times Alness is a request stop. Bikes can be carried on trains but must be booked in advance.

3.6.2 Stagecoach operates service 25 between Inverness, Dingwall, Alness, Invergordon, Seaboard and Tain, which runs at 20-60 minute intervals with more limited services on Sundays. Service 25X also runs between Inverness and Dornoch passing through both towns at 30 minute intervals, and 6 Scottish Citylink services X99 between Inverness and Thurso run every Monday and Saturday with 5 services on Sundays. School bus service

225 serves Invergordon and service 425 serves Alness. Table 3-2 outlines bus service provision in Alness and Invergordon.

3.6.3 Bus services stop at the following bus stops (with the exception of express services which make fewer stops in each town):

Alness:

- Coulpark West
- High Street Royal Bank
- Alness Academy
- Milnafua
- Cadboll Wood.

Invergordon:

- South Lodge
- Invergordon Academy
- High Street (2 stops)
- Inverbreakie Drive
- Health Centre.

3.6.4 Figures 3-40 to 3-43 below show some of the public transport facilities in the area.

Figure 3-40: Bus stop with shelter on Alness High Street

Figure 3-41: Bus stop with shelter at Coulhill Road in Alness

Figure 3-42: Well used bus stop on Invergordon High Street

Figure 3-43: Bus stop provision at hospital in Invergordon

Table 3-2: Bus and rail services in the Alness & Invergordon Study Area

				Weekday		Saturday		Sunday		
Route	**From**	**To**	**Via**	**Daytime**	**Evening**	**Daytime**	**Evening**	**Daytime**	**Evening**	**Notes**
Stagecoach 25	Inverness	Tain	Dingwall, Alness, Invergordon, Seaboard, Tain	20	60	20	60	5 services		School bus services weekdays am and pm
25X	Inverness	Dornoch	Evanton, Alness, Invergordon, Saltburn, Tain	30	1 service after 5pm	30	-	4 services		
X99	Inverness	Thurso	Evanton, Alness, Invergordon, Tain, Wick, Thurso	6 services		6 services		5 services		
-	Inverness	Thurso / Wick	Alness, Invergordon	4 trains	4 trains	4 trains	4 trains	3 trains	2 trains	No trains between approx 11:30 and 14:30 Alness occasionally request stop only
-	Thurso / Wick	Inverness	Alness, Invergordon	6 trains	3 trains	6 trains	3 trains	4 trains	1 train	No trains between approx 11:30 and 15:30 Alness occasionally request stop only

3.7 Local Transport Strategy

3.7.1 The Highland Council Local Transport Strategy (LTS) is currently in draft form and is under consultation. The final strategy will set the framework for transport and guide decision making in Highland for the following three years. The LTS sets out objectives for how The Highland Council wants to see transport develop in order to serve communities.

3.7.2 Issues and trends identified within the LTS which affect the Highland area include it being a large area with a low and dispersed population, many of whom live in remote communities, as well as a disproportionate concentration of development around Inverness.

3.7.3 Socio-economic problems experienced within Highland communities include a lack of employment opportunities, difficulty in connecting to other areas, an ageing population and a general decline in economic activity with a direct impact upon employment opportunity. In transport terms the lack of sufficient connections to other locations, for all modes, is the main issue for remote and rural areas.

3.7.4 The headline issues for walking and cycling identified within the Draft Local Transport Strategy include:

- The need to protect and maintain high levels of active travel in key areas
- Road safety problems and overcoming the perception of danger
- Lack of routes for walking and cycling in both urban and rural areas
- Lack of pedestrian space on town centre streets, including a dominance of vehicle traffic.

3.7.5 The core policies were developed in response to the analysis of issues and problems identified, and through the consultation procedure and to seek to support and reflect Local Transport Strategy objectives.

3.7.6 Further encouragement of cycling and walking is seen as a particularly valuable part of the transport strategy development, and is reflected in Core Policy 4 within the Draft Local Transport Strategy.

3.7.7 Good quality pedestrian and cycle networks are recognised as a critically important part of the transport network, offering significant health benefits as well as environmental and sustainability benefits. Choosing active travel modes helps to reduce congestion and the development of high quality walking and cycling networks contributes to an improvement in road safety and a reduction in accident levels. The priority focus of the Local Transport Strategy will be to facilitate trips to work and education, however all improvements to pedestrian and cycle networks will help to encourage more trips by the most sustainable modes of transport, helping to achieve the Scottish Government's target for 10% of all journeys to be made by bicycle by 2020.

3.7.8 The Highland Council will seek to improve pedestrian and cycle facilities through a number of strands of work, including:

- Safer Routes to School
- Core paths network access strategy
- Design requirements/standards for new developments
- Improvement schemes in town/city centres to include good design for pedestrians and cyclists
- SUSTRANS cycle routes
- Increased cycle parking facilities

3.7.9 Of the nine objectives within the draft Local Transport Strategy for the Highlands 2009-2012 (LTS), five have a direct impact on the encouragement and increase of walking and cycling:

- Social Inclusion: Facilitate travel to enable economic/social involvement and improve access/travel choices to essential services for those without access to a private car
- Environment: Manage/reduce the impacts of transport on the natural and built environment
- Health: Increase levels of cycling and walking to promote health improvement and modal shift
- Personal Safety: Address issues of perceived safety and personal security particularly where they are a barrier to walking, cycling and public transport
- Traffic Reduction: Where appropriate consider targets for reducing traffic, although noting the variation in conditions and requirements between rural and urban areas.

3.7.10 In addition, the LTS also incorporates local outcome 10.1 of the Highland Council's Single Outcome Agreement, "to increase the number of children walking and cycling to school."

3.8 Local Plan

3.8.1 Adopted in 2007, the Ross and Cromarty East Local Plan outlines priorities for future development and action covering an area of 2400km^2 from Achnasheen and Beinn Dearg in the west to the Dornoch Firth and Tarbat Ness in the northeast. Around half of the 44,000 population of Ross and Cromarty East live in the five main towns of Alness, Dingwall, Invergordon, Muir of Ord and Tain.

3.8.2 Overall the Council's vision for Ross and Cromarty East is one of a growing population, a robust and expanding economy, improved communications and services coupled with strong safeguards for the environment. The Council aims to encourage a network of strong and distinct local communities and more competitive and sustainable places.

3.8.3 The following key issues have been identified for Ross and Cromarty East:

- Population change
- Impact of expansion of Inverness
- Commuter pressure
- Housing needs
- Affordable housing
- Access to services
- Fragile areas (declining and ageing population, greater distances from services, insufficient public transport)
- Employment prospects
- Skills
- New technology
- Primary sector (agriculture, forestry)
- Renewable energy
- Natural heritage
- Built & Archaeological heritage
- Tourism
- Infrastructure

3.8.4 The Ross and Cromarty East local plan indicates that expansion of Alness is constrained by the railway line, the A9 and the quarry and forestry areas to the north of the town. The most suitable expansion areas highlighted within the plan are the eastern and western margins around Milnafua and Ballachraggan.

3.8.5 A number of sites around Alness have been identified for residential developments, the largest of which are Milnafua Farm South, Dalmore, Obsdale Road and Obsdale East. Whitehills, Crosshills and Milnafua Farm North are identified for the longer term housing development requirements of the town. A Dalmore Development Framework outlines plans for housing, amenity and special use developments in this area and business and industrial development areas outlined within the Local Plan include Teachnich, Alness Industrial Estate and the Waste Water Management site at River Drive. A further 4.2 hectares of land at Invergordon Road East is identified for retail use.

3.8.6 The core development priority in the town of Invergordon is the reuse of the Seabank tank farm land. This land offers a redevelopment opportunity to create a new neighbourhood consisting of housing, open space and community facilities as well as providing cross-town links. The plan identifies potential of investment from both public and private sectors, with particular reference to the cleaning up of contamination of the site.

3.8.7 Expansion to the west of Invergordon is constrained by the golf course, but opportunities exist for housing development to the north and west margins of the town, particularly around Invergordon Mains Farm and the former golf course land at Birchwood. Within the Local Plan, land is designated for housing development at Cromlet, Seabank Road and the former golf course and coal yard. Land set aside for business development includes Cromarty Firth Industrial Park, Inverbreakie Industrial Estate, Castle Avenue Industrial Estate, Invergordon Harbour and Cromlet (where outline planning permission has been granted for a supermarket). Town expansion is likely to use land at Invergordon Mains as well as the Seabank tank farm.

3.9 The Highland Council Single Outcome Agreement

3.9.1 Following on from the Scottish Government's Single Purpose, all local authorities in Scotland have produced Single Outcome Agreements (SOA). The second Highland SOA was signed in July 2009 and identifies the local outcomes which contribute to the 15 national outcomes set by the Scottish Government.

3.9.2 Outcomes taken forward through the Local Transport Strategy focus mainly upon public transport, specifically bus use, and include actions that increase the number of community transport schemes supported, the availability of buses and the number of people using the bus network. Increasing the number of pupils walking and cycling to school is also identified as a specific target.

3.9.3 Increasing public transport use is closely related to encouraging active travel, particularly walking, as modes can be combined to facilitate longer journeys. Improved public transport services coupled with improved walking and cycling networks will encourage more people to leave their cars at home and opt to travel by more sustainable modes.

3.10 Highland Community Plan

3.10.1 The Highland Community Planning partnership comprises the following partners:

- The Highland Council
- Highlands and Islands Enterprise
- NHS Highland
- Scottish Natural Heritage
- Northern Constabulary
- Communities Scotland

- Highlands and Islands Fire Brigade
- Representatives from private sector
- Representatives from public sector

3.10.2 A Community Plan for the Highlands was developed for 2004-2007, establishing a number of aims for transport, including more people choosing to live, work and learn in Highland, individuals and communities feeling they are dealt with equitably and establishing the infrastructure for Highland to keep it at the forefront of modern rural regions.

3.11 Core Paths Planning

3.11.1 Production of Core Paths plans are a mandatory requirement for every Local Authority. The Highland Council has produced a core path plan for Alness and Invergordon within its Ross and Cromarty area Core Path Network Plan.

3.11.2 It is intended that the core paths will satisfy the basic needs of local people and visitors for recreation and for getting about and will provide links to the wider path systems within the area. The plans comprise a mixture of existing paths with some new paths linking together to form an overall paths network. The paths cater for all types of users including walkers and cyclists.

3.11.3 In Alness many of the access opportunities make use of the River Averon as a corridor, with a number of signposted routes already in place. Routes that were highlighted as important within the consultation included paths in the Coulhill Wood and a well used route on both banks of the river, as well as access to the primary school at Milnafua. Following the consultative draft the cycle route to Evanton has been improved and included as a candidate core path and emphasis was placed on the importance of a cycle route to Invergordon. The route through the Dalmore Distillery was removed as a candidate core path within the consultation.

3.11.4 The most popular routes in Invergordon emerging from the Candidate Core Paths consultation were the circular route around the Polish War memorial and the link referred to as Accies or Yellowbrick Road, which is a farm track leading out in the countryside to the north of the town. Useful links that were highlighted include Donkey Bridge under the railway line and the Academy paths to the school. Important links to the centre of town include the Distillery Path and old golf course path.

3.11.5 The consultation highlighted the importance of good links to Alness and the A9. Paths linking Inverbreakie to the academy and sports centre also received high levels of community support but barriers to these exist in the form of the bonded warehouses and the oil tank farm which would be difficult to negotiate.

3.11.6 The core paths were designated after extensive consultation in the area and they reflect the priorities identified by those attending consultation events. The reason for prioritisation varies for each path, with some paths reflecting their importance as active travel routes, whilst others were prioritised according to their recreational value. The core paths boasting a possible value relating to active travel are outlined in Table 3-3 along with any works completed, planned or required.

Table 3-3: Core Paths Proposals in Alness and Invergordon

Path Reference	Path Name/Route	Improvements
603.02	Whinnie Road	Upgrading at surface – currently forest track
603.03	Alness Point	Vegetation needs regular control
603.09	Academy Drive – Rail Path	Constructed path - could be upgraded at Dalmore Lodge section
603.10	Obsdale School Path	
603.13	Teaninich	Create roadside cycle path to A9 and then to Business Park
603.18	Ballachraggan Cycleway	Constructed Path - Tie in to town centre
623.03	Academy Paths	Recently resurfaced
623.05	Black Path - Cromlet	Widening for cycle use
623.10	Old Golf Course Path	Widening for cycle use
623.21	Seaview Road – Distillery Path	Mature trees need assessment and possible surgery/removal if unsafe

3.12 Current Issues

3.12.1 The audit process identified a number of key issues that act as a disincentive for active travel:

1) Poor links between Alness and Invergordon

- Currently no formalised pedestrian/cycle routes between the two towns although there are two potential routes which are currently used

2) Key facilities and services located out of town with poor access for pedestrians and cyclists

- Alness Point Business Park and North Highland College Alness campus located out of town to the south of A9 with no formalised pedestrian crossing facilities. Cycle route to Business Park/College site is not direct and not clearly signed

3) Natural and man-made barriers to movement

These include:

- River Averon
- Railway line
- A9
- Modern residential developments with poor pedestrian permeability
- Disused industrial sites such as Seabank tank farm

4) Modern developments with no clear links to town

- Modern developments to the east and west of Alness and within Invergordon have been designed with priority for access by car

5) Availability of parking creates no incentive for people to cycle or walk

- A high number of free parking spaces both on and off street in both towns makes driving an easy, problem free mode of transport, even for short journeys

6) Inadequate public transport facilities

- Lack of a railway bridge at Invergordon station results in a long detour to return to bicycles/vehicles which may have been left at the station.
- Bus stop facilities in both towns are very basic, and in many instances there are no shelters. This does not encourage the use of public transport or ensure accessibility for passengers with disabilities.

3.13 SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) Analysis of Active Travel in Alness & Invergordon

Strengths	Weaknesses
Compact settlements	Out of town retail/key services
Highly permeable for pedestrians	Barriers to movement (natural and man-made)
Both towns in close proximity	No cycle/pedestrian link between the towns
Local employment sources/schools	Abundance of free car parking
Two opportunities for links between towns	New developments designed around car access
Existing route to Alness Business Park	Lack of railway bridge in Invergordon
Presence of National Cycle Network in the area	Quality of National Cycle Network through Alness
Opportunities	**Threats**
Local businesses could be encouraged to develop travel plans	Perceived and actual danger to pedestrians/cyclists as a result of the A9
Opportunities for new routes/developer contributions	Lack of funding and political will to complete pedestrian/cyclist routes between Alness and Invergordon
Opportunities to improve and promote existing routes	Further developments without proper consideration for pedestrians and cyclists
Lots of opportunities to provide traffic free routes	

4 Potential Alness & Invergordon Active Travel Network

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 The active travel audit identified potential walking and cycling routes that could link residential areas to the main trip generators and attractors to form a strategic network for the area. The main trip generators are:

- Supermarket in Alness
- Industrial sites/harbour/distillery
- Schools
- High Street in both towns
- Railway stations
- Invergordon and Alness leisure centres
- Out of town developments

4.1.2 The study has developed a set of long term objectives for encouraging walking and cycling as follows:

Objective 1: Create high quality pedestrian/cycle link between Alness and Invergordon

Objective 2: Improve existing facilities and their connectivity

Objective 3: Work with local businesses/employers to promote active travel incentives and travel plans

Objective 4: Ensure future developments are built with priority for active travel

4.1.3 These objectives are designed to support the economic activity within Alness, Invergordon and surrounding areas by improving access to employment opportunities and the services.

4.1.4 Creating a high quality pedestrian and cycle link between Alness and Invergordon will link the two communities, giving access to key services and facilities to residents of both towns, and creating a safer and more sustainable transport connection between the two. Encouraging people to walk or cycle the short distance (approximately 4 miles) between the towns to access employment, education, shopping or other facilities will encourage more people to participate in active travel, resulting in the health, social and sustainability benefits that this brings. Barriers that prevent active travel between the two towns will be overcome and this is likely to generate an enhanced sense of community within the region.

4.1.5 As businesses establish themselves in Alness and Invergordon and new developments provide new employment opportunities in the towns, it is important to ensure that they are encouraged to implement a package of measures to achieve a reduction in car use and provide people with greater travel choices. Employees should be given the necessary information and encouragement to enable them to think about how they are travelling to work and to make the choice to travel by more sustainable modes. Working with businesses and major employers to develop travel plans will help to ensure that incentives and facilities are provided to encourage active and sustainable travel.

4.1.6 The existing walking and cycling links within each town should be improved. This includes the routes to schools, industrial estates, health centres and hospitals, out-of-town business parks such as Alness Point and residential areas. It is important that these routes are recognisable and advertised widely to raise awareness of them amongst members of the local communities.

4.1.7 Development in Invergordon is of crucial importance to active travel as the disused industrial sites create significant barriers and detours. With considered design it could be possible in the future to develop the town with high quality pedestrian and cycle networks which could make walking and cycling not only very attractive but have substantial time savings over longer journeys by car.

4.2 Active Travel Network

4.2.1 The following corridors have been identified as having the potential to provide the most direct and coherent network of routes to the destinations listed in 4.1.1. The routes are:

- SRR – Strategic Regional Route
- NCN - National Cycle Network
- High Street Links
- NLR – Northern Link Route
- Safer Routes to School
- KER – Key Employment Routes

4.2.2 A full description of the routes with potential improvements, subject to consultation, feasibility and design, are included in Appendix A of this report. The action plan in the following sections suggests the key priorities in the development of the aforementioned routes along with the 'softer' initiatives to encourage active travel in the area. Figure A-6 and A-7 in Appendix A show the extent of the potential Active Travel Network in relation to the Local Plan for Alness and Invergordon.

5 Prioritised Action Plan

5.1 The Priorities

5.1.1 This prioritised Active Travel Action Plan sets out the key potential measures needed to encourage walking and cycling in Alness and Invergordon. As well as incorporating parts of the strategic walking and cycling network, the action plan also includes promotion, marketing and 'soft' measures which form part of a package of works which have been used successfully in towns and cities where there has been an increase in sustainable modes.

5.1.2 The following measures are the key priorities for encouraging active travel in Alness & Invergordon:

Priority 1: Develop a high quality Strategic Regional Route

Priority 2: Network improvement strategy

Priority 3: Promote uptake of travel plans to local employers

Priority 4: Create Supplementary Planning Guidance or a position statement to guarantee the creation of active travel routes in future developments

Priority 5: Improve public transport facilities

5.1.3 Each of these individual priorities are expanded below and form part of the wider Alness and Invergordon Active Travel Network outlined in chapter 4.

5.2 Priority 1 Recommendation: Develop a high quality Strategic Regional Route

5.2.1 Alness and Invergordon are located only four miles from one another, providing them with excellent opportunities to share amenities and services. The B817 provides a direct and scenic link between the two towns allowing residents from each town to benefit from the facilities and services of the other. This link is also crucial as, with the absence of a large supermarket in Invergordon, residents must travel to Alness to use the supermarket and similarly residents from Alness must travel to Invergordon for hospital facilities. Employment opportunities in both towns will also result in travel between Alness and Invergordon and it is evident that for these reasons the towns are inextricably linked.

5.2.2 Provision for walking and cycling is poor along the B817, although a new footway has been constructed at the midpoint between Belle Port and Roskeen Bridge through the water treatment works. Whilst the installation of a segregated footway along the B817 does address some of the safety concerns for pedestrians and cyclists travelling between Alness and Invergordon, because of its lack of connectivity into existing facilities at each end pedestrians and cyclists are still forced to use the road surface. At certain points a retaining wall on each side of the road creates a pinch point leaving pedestrians and cyclists with very little space should vehicles travel past them, particularly when two vehicles are travelling in opposite directions (Figure 5-4).

5.2.3 Pedestrian and cyclist safety should be improved along the B817, providing people with the option to travel safely between Alness and Invergordon by foot or bicycle. This could be achieved by joining up the newly installed footway with the footway to Alness which terminates to the east of Dalmore. This should also be formally signed as a shared footway/cycleway to allow cycles to proceed safely.

5.2.4 This is the most important section of the Strategic Regional Route (SRR) and should be a priority for completion however the aim of the SRR is to provide a continuous route from Saltburn/Invergordon to Alness and onwards to the existing cycle track to Evanton which is part of the National Cycle Network. Further improvements on the remainder of the route are outlined in Appendix A.

Figure 5-1: Newly constructed footway between Belle Port and Roskeen Bridge

Figure 5-2: Existing footway between Alness and Belle Port

Figure 5-3: Cyclist using existing footway between Roskeen Bridge and Invergordon

Figure 5-4: Pinch point as retaining wall on either side of the carriageway results in limited space for pedestrians and cyclists

5.2.5 The recommendations are summarised below in Table 5-1:

Table 5-1: Priority 1 Recommendations Summary Table – Develop a high quality Strategic Regional Route

Description
• Provide a safe and attractive walking and cycling route linking the towns of Alness and Invergordon to encourage more people to travel between the two towns by active modes of transport with onward connections to Saltburn and Evanton.
Issues for Consideration
• High vehicle speeds between Dalmore and Invergordon • Pinch points along route • History of fatal and serious accidents involving pedestrians and cyclists
Recommended Intervention (subject to feasibility and design)
• Convert existing footway from supermarket towards Belle Port to shared use footway • Work with landowners to secure a route from existing footway to new cycle track at Belle Port • Widen existing footway and convert to shared use from old road at Roskeen Bridge to Invergordon High Street

5.3 Priority 2 Recommendation: Network Improvement Strategy

5.3.1 Many of the routes identified within the active travel network already have adequate walking and cycling facilities (footways and low volumes/speed of traffic) as well as making use of existing traffic free routes. To kick start the development of the network the first task should be to sign appropriate routes and provide low cost improvements where necessary. As routes are developed in the future they too should be signed using a co-ordinated and local branding.

5.3.2 One example of an existing route requiring these types of improvements is Alness Point Business Park which is located to the south of the A9 outside of Alness. The site can be accessed by foot or bicycle following the route of the River Averon, passing under the A9 and looping around to the Business Point. The riverside path provides an excellent traffic free route linking Alness town centre with the Business Park.

5.3.3 The riverside route to the Business Park is signposted from alongside Riverside Drive (Teaninich Industrial Estate), but signage could be clearer from the town centre itself. In places the surface is of poor quality and suffers from ponding. The route passes under the A9 by means of an underpass (Figure 5-7). This route has a very low overhead clearance, requiring cyclists to dismount, sightlines are poor and maintenance is requited to cut back vegetation. These simple measures could be enough to make the route more attractive and in turn encourage more people to travel to work by active modes.

Figure 5-5: Signage for Alness Point Business Park at Riverside Drive to the south of Teaninich Industrial Estate. Note poor drainage along route and maintenance required to clear leaves and debris from path

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Figure 5-6: Section of riverside cycle route with excellent surface quality and lighting.

Figure 5-7: Sign instructing cyclists to dismount due to low overhead clearance and poor sightlines at underpass of A9.

Figure 5-8: Pedestrian/Cyclist directional signage along Alness Point Business Park Route

Figure 5-9: Ambiguous signage for riverside cycle route to Alness points in a direction to which there is no path.

Figure 5-10: Cycle parking at Alness Point Business Park

Figure 5-11: Existing no through road at Old Milnafua Road in Alness could be signed

5.3.4 The recommendations are summarised below in Table 5-2:

Table 5-2: Priority 2 Recommendations Summary Table – Network Improvement Strategy

Description
• Sign and maintain existing routes to develop an initial network in Alness and Invergordon
Issues for Consideration
• Work with local community groups/activists to determine extent of signed network • Make use of existing 20mph zones and road closures • Improve routes before promoting them through signing
Recommended Intervention (subject to feasibility and design)
• Improve route signage from Alness town centre and within Alness Point Business Park; include markers to highlight start/end points of routes. Include pedestrians in route signage and include indications of distance and time • Improve surface quality of sections of existing routes and improve/implement a maintenance regime • Identify existing road closures that could be improved to make access on foot and bicycle easier • Review existing signing of National Cycle Network, especially at Teaninich Avenue/B817 roundabout • Work with local community groups to develop a local branding for signing strategy

5.4 Priority 3 Recommendation: Promote uptake of travel plans to local employers

5.4.1 As outlined in section 3.1, there is scope for increasing the number of people walking and cycling to work and study in Alness and Invergordon. The 2001 Census revealed that 54% of people travelling to work/study in Alness and Invergordon were travelling distances of less than 2km. Despite the majority of people having a relatively short commute to work/study only 1.6% of people in Alness and 5.2% of people in Invergordon travel to work or study by bicycle and only 21.9% of people in Alness and 18.2% of people in Invergordon travel on foot. This compares to 59.9% of people in Alness and 58% of people in Invergordon travelling to work or study by car.

5.4.2 Working with employers in both towns to encourage them to produce a travel plan and encourage employees to travel to work by more sustainable modes could have a significant impact upon reducing car use in Alness and Invergordon and increasing the number of people participating in active travel. This is particularly pertinent due to the growing employment opportunities resulting from the development of business parks and industrial estates.

5.4.3 Employers within the following business parks/industrial estates located in Alness and Invergordon could be encouraged to produce travel plans and encourage more sustainable travel by their workforce:

- Alness Point Business Park
- Teaninich Industrial Estate

- Alness Industrial Estate
- Inverbreakie Industrial Estate
- Castle Avenue Industrial Estate

5.4.4 The following employers should also be targeted to encourage them to produce travel plans as they also generate travel to work/study:

- County Community Hospital
- Superstores
- Primary/Secondary Schools

5.4.5 Encouraging modal shift has many benefits for businesses including reduced pressure on parking spaces, improved staff punctuality, lower stress levels, increased productivity as well as a positive marketing opportunity. The promotion of active travel does not necessarily need to be a financial burden on a business, however it does need continued commitment. Employers can have far reaching influence on their staff and be more effective than external organisations at achieving behaviour change.

5.4.6 Working with specific businesses is an effective way of targeting limited resources and will enable meaningful monitoring to take place to measure the effect of any measures. The local authority should work with businesses to identify how they may already be promoting active travel and how to develop other initiatives. The development of a staff travel plan will help employers determine the potential for modal shift by examining existing travel patterns and identifying the barriers to walking and cycling. Additionally, employers could also work with Cycling Scotland to achieve 'Cycle Friendly Employer' status.

5.4.7 The recommendations are summarised below in Table 5-3:

Table 5-3: Priority 3 Recommendations Summary Table – Promote uptake of travel plans to local employers

Description
• Work with local employers to encourage them to produce travel plans and provide guidance and assistance in encouraging their workforce to travel by more sustainable modes
Issues for Consideration
• Low level of walking and cycling to work/study given that a majority of people travel less than 2km • Perceived safety concerns, particularly with regards to cycling • Employees resistant to change as they are in the habit of driving to work
Recommended Intervention (subject to feasibility and design)
• Develop a 'Help Pack' to encourage employers to develop travel plans • Promote the existing HITRANS car share initiative 'www.ifyoucareshare.com • Establish a travel plan forum for employers in Alness and Invergordon to disseminate best practice and provide support

5.5 Priority 4 Recommendation: Create SOG or position statement to guarantee the creation of active travel routes in future developments

5.5.1 Within the heart of Invergordon the disused industrial estates and distillery create a significant barrier, especially for people walking or cycling. There is also the added problem of many areas of contaminated land identified which makes future development more expensive and complicated.

5.5.2 Despite these problems the area is identified for expansion within the current local plan and safeguards must be set out at the earliest opportunity to ensure any development considers movement by sustainable modes as a priority. Routes from east to west and north to south have the potential to open up the town and make walking and cycling faster and more convenient than access by car. A specific Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) note or position statement related exclusively to access by sustainable modes will set out clearly, unambiguously and with certainty that walking and cycling should be considered from the outset and not an 'add on' fitted retrospectively after access by vehicle.

5.5.3 The recommendations are summarised below in Table 5-4:

Table 5-4: Priority 4 Recommendations Summary Table – Create SPG or position statement to guarantee the creation of active travel routes in future developments

Description
• Set out clear guidelines and policy objectives to ensure any development in the area considers the needs of pedestrians and cyclists above those of motorised traffic
Issues for Consideration
• Planning and transport policies already in place to support a specific SPG for this area
Recommended Intervention (subject to feasibility and design)
• Work with planners and transport staff to develop a specific policy for future development in the area with regards to sustainable travel

5.6 Priority 5 Recommendation: Improve public transport facilities

5.6.1 Due to its rural nature it is likely that many people will often make longer journeys from Alness and Invergordon to Inverness or other surrounding locations. In order to encourage people to make use of more sustainable modes of transport they should be encouraged to integrate active travel with public transport rather than making their journey by car. In order to do so it is important that public transport facilities are of a high quality to encourage people to make use of them.

5.6.2 As discussed in section 3.6, the towns of Alness and Invergordon are served by both bus and rail services which provide links with Inverness, surrounding areas and the northern centres of Thurso and Wick. Bus stops on the High Streets of both towns are adequate, with shelters and seating areas provided, along with timetable and service information. However many of the bus stops in other areas of the towns such as residential areas and on the outskirts of the towns are of fairly poor quality with only a basic flag and pole bus stop marker, no resting areas and no timetable or service information. In many instances people may be unaware of the services that run in their locality and this would result in low numbers of passengers using the services, instead choosing to travel by private car.

5.6.3 Alness and Invergordon railway stations are both unstaffed stations with very basic waiting shelters provided. Alness railway station has only one platform serving both directions. Invergordon railway station however has two platforms but no footbridge linking the platforms and passengers are therefore required to take a significant detour over the road bridge to move from one platform to the other where car/cycle parking is also located. Facilities are basic with no CCTV or ticket machines at either station, although both stations have basic cycle parking provided. With regards to ongoing journeys, neither station provides a clear link with other modes of transport, such as location information, walking and cycling route information or links to bus services. In addition it is not obvious for passengers in Alness that at times it is a request stop only.

5.6.4 Waiting facilities at main bus stops need to be as attractive as possible to encourage people to use them. Larger shelters with seating, accurate and easy to read timetables and real time information would all assist with this. In addition, facilities for secure cycle parking should also be provided to encourage people to use sustainable travel as part of an onward journey.

Figure 5-12: Bus shelter in Alness with flag and pole with timetable information attached. No seat or resting area in bus shelter.

Figure 5-13: Bus stops on road linking A9 with Alness. Note lack of timetable/service information and basic pedestrian infrastructure such as pavements or crossings.

Figure 5-14: Bus stop in Alness housing estate. Note lack of timetable/service information.

Figure 5-15: Bus shelter on Invergordon High Street. Timetable/service information provided along with seating in shelter.

5.6.5 The recommendations are summarised below in Table 5-5:

Table 5-5: Priority 6 Recommendations Summary Table – Improve Public Transport Facilities

Description
• Improve public transport facilities in and between Alness and Invergordon to encourage people making longer journeys to travel by public transport and active travel modes rather than private car.
Issues for Consideration
• Bus stops underused with the exception of the High Street in both towns • Poor perception of public transport services • Convenience of car use
Recommended Intervention (subject to feasibility and design)
• Improve bus stop facilities and timetable/service information at all stops in Alness and Invergordon • Ensure good interchange facilities between modes at railway stations in Alness and Invergordon • Ensure adequate pedestrian infrastructure • Provide secure cycle parking and other facilities such as lockers

6 Conclusions

6.1.1 The proximity of the towns of Alness and Invergordon to one another, the abundance of local sources of employment and the compact sizes of the towns mean that Alness and Invergordon both have excellent potential for active travel. The majority of people travel relatively short distances to work and study and local employers could become involved to encourage their workforce to adopt more sustainable travel choices. Improving and promoting existing routes around the towns of Alness and Invergordon and working with local employers to encourage the uptake of travel plans will raise awareness of local routes amongst local workforces and encourage them to choose to travel by active modes.

6.1.2 The distance between the towns of Alness and Invergordon is short, but the lack of pedestrian or cycle infrastructure along the entire length of the route, along with high vehicle speeds and pinch points along the route means that travelling between the two towns by foot or cycle is not as safe as it should be. The situation has been improved with the recent installation of a footway along a section of the B817 (albeit with substandard surfacing), but to increase the safe travel between Invergordon and Alness by walking or cycling, a segregated footway and cycleway should be provided along the length of the route to remove the need for pedestrians and cyclists to travel on the road surface.

Appendix A: Alness/Invergordon Active Travel Network – Potential Improvements and Mapping

N

0 500m 1km 2km

Figure A-1: Reported Accidents in Alness (2005-2009)

Key:

- Pedestrian damage only
- Pedestrian slight
- Pedestrian serious
- Pedestrian fatal
- Cyclist damage only
- Cyclist slight

Data provided from The Highland Council

0 500m 1km 2km

N

Figure A-2: Reported Accidents in Invergordon (2005-2009)

Key:

- Pedestrian damage only
- Pedestrian slight
- Pedestrian serious
- Pedestrian fatal
- Cyclist damage only
- Cyclist slight

Data provided from The Highland Council

N

0 500m 1km 2km

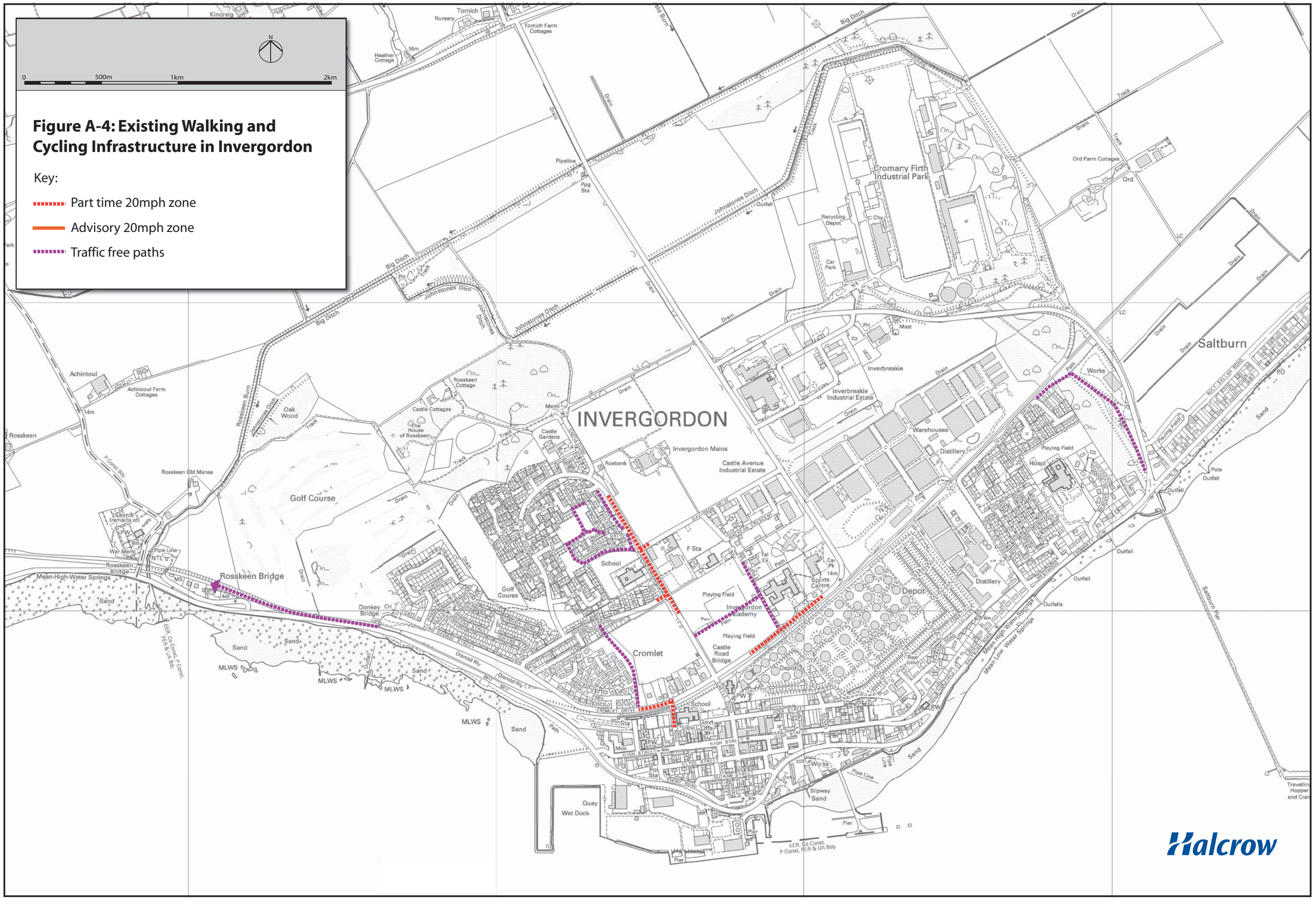
Figure A-3: Existing Walking and Cycling Infrastructure in Alness

Key:

- Part time 20mph zone
- Advisory 20mph zone
- Signalised junctions/pedestrian crossing
- Unsignaled pedestrian crossing
- Signed cycle routes
- National Cycle Network Route 1
- Traffic free paths

ALNESS

Halcrow



N

0 500m 1km 2km

Figure A-5: Existing Walking and Cycling Infrastructure: Alness-Invergordon Link

Key:

- Section of B817 with no footway / cycleway
- Pavement south of Alness Academy
- Traffic free route

0 500m 1km 2km

N

Figure: A-6: Alness Potential Active Travel Plan Network (Indicative)

Key:

- Strategic Regional Route (SRR)
- National Cycle Network (NCN)
- Northern Link Route (NLR)
- Safer Routes to School
- High Street Links
- Key Employment Routes

NOTE: Potential routes shown are indicative and are subject to change as a result of consultation, feasibility and design.

Local Plan key:

- Action Area
- Affordable Housing
- Business
- Community
- Housing
- Industry
- Long-Term/Expansion
- Mixed Use/Special Uses
- Open Space/Amenity
- Town/Village Centre
- Settlement Development Area

To Tain/John O' Groats

To Inverness

Halcrow

Figure: A-7: Alness Potential Active Travel Plan Network (Indicative)

Key:

- Strategic Regional Route (SRR)
- Northern Link Route (NLR)
- Safer Routes to School
- High Street Links
- Key Employment Routes

NOTE: Potential routes shown are indicative and are subject to change as a result of consultation, feasibility and design.

0 500m 1km 2km

N

Local Plan key:

- Action Area
- Affordable Housing
- Business
- Community
- Housing
- Industry
- Long-Term/Expansion
- Mixed Use/Special Uses
- Open Space/Amenity
- Town/Village Centre
- Settlement Development Area

Potential for NLR to join via Roskeen Church Road

INVERGORDON

Cromarty Firth Industrial Park

Saltburn

Golf Course

Rosskeen Bridge

Halcrow

Route 1 – Strategic Regional Route (SRR)

Ref	Street	Start	End	Potential intervention (All subject to feasibility and design)
1a	B817	Junction of Saltburn and Cromarty View		Redesign junction to reduce number of lanes, install advanced stop lines and ensure intergreen time is adequate for cyclists to clear junction. Provide flush dropped crossings with appropriate tactile paving and dedicated pedestrian phases and crossing points.
1b	Cromarty View/Saltburn Road	Saltburn	Start of 30mph zone (approximately 13 Saltburn Road)	Within 40mph zone, consider widening footway to create a 'promenade' for pedestrians and cyclists, install flush dropped crossings with tactile paving. Verify speed, volume and classification of traffic to determine the most suitable solution for improving cyclist safety which could be reducing the speed limit to 30mph.
1c	Saltburn Road	Start of 30mph zone	High Street junction/start of 50mph zone	Verify speed, volume and classification of traffic to determine the most suitable solution for improving cyclist safety. Ensure all side roads have flush dropped crossings and consider reducing width of the widest junctions. Provide a continuous footway without the need to cross the road and prevent vehicles parking on footway at Shore Garage. Improve pedestrian routes across road from harbour to town centre.
1d	B817	High Street/start of 50mph zone	Start of 40mph zone at Dalmore Distillery	Provide a traffic free shared use route using new track between Roskeen Bridge and Belle Port and ensure it has a sealed surface and flush dropped crossings. Widen existing footway from the High Street to Roskeen Bridge and redetermine for shared use.
1e	B817	Start of 40mph zone at Dalmore Distillery	Access road to Alness Academy opposite supermarket	Widen existing footway and redetermine to allow for shared use and improve junction for improved pedestrian/cycle access from high school to supermarket.

Ref	Street	Start	End	Potential intervention (All subject to feasibility and design)
1f	Existing footpath	Dalmore Lodge	Access road to Alness Academy	Provide a sealed surface and improve design of access gates to allow easier access for cyclists, wheelchair users and prams.
1g	Traffic free route to Alness Academy	B817	River Averon/Crawl Park	Path is sealed and lit requiring only signing. Ensure entrance to path in car park is protected from parked cars. Existing cycle counter could be adopted by the Highland Council to ensure regular data download and analysis.
1h	Crawl Park	Existing path	River Drive	Support Alness Partnership in work to create new paths and bridge over River Averon.
1i	River Drive	Crawl Park	Teaninich Avenue	Verify speed, volume and classification of traffic to determine the most suitable solution for improving cyclist safety. Any segregated facilities will need protection from parked cars. Ensure all side roads have flush dropped crossings.
1j	Teaninich Avenue	River Drive	Westford Estate entrance	Verify speed, volume and classification of traffic to determine the most suitable solution for improving cyclist safety. Provide traffic free facilities for cyclists around roundabout. Ensure all side roads have flush dropped crossings.

N

0 500m 1km 2km

Figure A-8: Alness/Invergordon Potential Active Travel Network Route 1 Strategic Regional Route (SRR)

Key:

Strategic Regional Route (SRR)

NOTE: Potential routes shown are indicative and are subject to change as a result of consultation, feasibility and design.

1e Potential to widen footway from supermarket to Belle Port.

1f Existing path (Dalmore circular walk) could be improved with a sealed surface.

1g Existing route from the Academy to Crawl Park is high quality.

1h Location of new cycle track in Crawl Park to link to proposed new bridge.

1i River Drive may require a segregated walking/cycling facility due to industrial traffic. Speed, volume and classification surveys are require.

1h

1g

1i

1e

1f

1e

To Evanton/Inverness

ALNESS

Halcrow

Figure A-9: Alness/Invergordon Potential Active Travel Network - Route 1: Strategic Regional Route (SRR)

0 500m 1km 2km

Key:

Strategic Regional Route (SRR

NOTE: Potential routes shown are indicative and are subject to change as a result of consultation, feasibility and design.

1b 40mph speed at Cromarty View. Speed and volume surveys required to determine type of facility for cyclists. Potential to create a promenade for all users.

1c Desire lines from the harbour across the B817 to the town centre need to be formalised.

1d Old road at Roskeen Bridge provides a tranistion between existing footway and new track on B817.

Route 2 – National Cycle Network (NCN)

Ref	Street	Start	End	Potential intervention (All subject to feasibility and design)
2a	B817	Cycle track at Ballachraggan Farm Cottages		Relocate wheelie bay from cycle track.
2b	Cycle track at B817/Alness Burial Ground			Improve surface of cycle track – damaged caused by tree roots.
2c	Signing by Teaninich Farm Cottages	Roundabout at Westford	Novar Road/Teaninich Street	NCN signing is not clear on this stretch of cycle route – signs direct users through a roundabout and on cycle track. Overhaul signing.
2d	Novar Road	Teaninich Street	High Street	Verify speed, volume and classification of traffic to determine the most suitable solution for improving cyclist safety and improve transition for cyclists from road to cycle track. Ensure all side roads have flush dropped crossings.
2e	B817	Start of 40mph zone at Dalmore Distillery	Access road to Alness Academy opposite supermarket	Widen existing footway and redetermine to allow for shared use and improve junction for improved pedestrian/cycle access from high school to supermarket.
2f	Junction of Ardross Street/High Street			Redesign junction and signing to improve continuity of route and safety for right turning cyclists. Build outs may help to improve visibility and prevent parking.
2g	Ardross Street/Road	High Street	Caplich Road	Consider implementing a 20mph zone to improve conditions for pedestrians and cyclists
2h	Ardross Road	Caplich Road	Junction with road to Balnaguisich	Consider converting existing footway to shared use at end of 60mph zone

N

0 500m 1km 2km

Figure A-10: Alness/Invergordon Potential Active Travel Network Route 2: National Cycle Network (NCN)

Key:

National Cycle Network (NCN)

NOTE: Potential routes shown are indicative and are subject to change as a result of consultation, feasibility and design.

2a Remove obstacles from NCN at Ballachraggan Farm.

2b Cycle track requires relaying due to damage from tree roots.

2c Signing is ambiguous at junction of Novar Road/B817.

2d Existing design of NCN requires cyclists to turn right across traffic to reach existing cycle track.

2e Junction signing at Ardross Street / High Street is un-coordinated.

2f Existing footway could be redetermined to allow for shared use.

To Tain/John O' Groats

To Evanton/Inverness

2a

2b

2c

2d

2e

2h

ALNESS

Halcrow

Route 3 – Northern Link Route (NLR)

Ref	Street	Start	End	Potential intervention (All subject to feasibility and design)
3a	Obsdale Road	High Street	Access road to A9	Install flush dropped crossings with tactile paving at all side roads. Verify speed, volume and classification of traffic to determine the most suitable solution for improving cyclist safety. Improve junction to access road to The Evergreens.
3b	A9	The Evergreens	Roskeen Church, Achnagarron	Liaise with Transport Scotland to provide a traffic free cycle track along the A9 to the church. Will require an informal crossing point.
3c	Minor road to B817	Roskeen Church	B817, Invergordon	Erect signing on minor road.
3d	Kendal Crescent	High Street	Obsdale Road	Provide a signed route along Kendal Crescent and provide a high quality link to Old Milnafua Road. Install flush dropped kerbs and appropriate tactile paving at all side roads.

N

0 500m 1km 2km

Figure A-11: Alness/Invergordon Potential Active Travel Network Route 3: Northern Link Route (NLR)

Key:

Northern Link Route (NLR)

NOTE: Potential routes shown are indicative and are subject to change as a result of consultation, feasibility and design.

3a Investigative work is required on Obsdale Road to determine most suitable type of facility for cyclists.

3b Existing desire line to Achnagarron. Roskeen Church in the background.

3a

3b

ALNESS

Halcrow

Figure A-12: Alness/Invergordon Potential Active Travel Network - Route 3: Northern Link Route (NLR)

Key:

Northern Link Route (NLR)

NOTE: Potential routes shown are indicative and are subject to change as a result of consultation, feasibility and design.

0 500m 1km 2km

N

3c

Potential for NLR to join via Roskeen Church Road

3c Minor road from Roskeen Church ties into old road and new cycle track on B817.

Route 4 – Safer Routes to School

Ref	Street	Start	End	Potential intervention (All subject to feasibility and design)
4a	Traffic free path (Invergordon)	Gordon Terrace	Cromlet Drive	Provide flush dropped crossings at entrance to track on Gordon Terrace and consider providing a build out to improve visibility for pedestrians and cyclists leaving the track. Alter existing chicane to make access easier whilst still slowing cyclists down. Widen access to path at Cromlet Drive and provide a flush dropped crossing to allow cyclists level access to carriageway
4b	Castle Avenue	Davidson Drive	Castle Road	Verify speed, volume and classification of traffic to determine the most suitable solution for improving cyclist safety. Ensure all side roads have flush dropped crossings.
4c	Castle Road	Cromlet Drive	High Street	Verify speed, volume and classification of traffic to determine the most suitable solution for improving cyclist safety. Ensure all side roads have flush dropped crossings.
4d	Cromlet Drive/Academy Road	Invergordon Railway Station	Invergordon Leisure Centre	Allow cyclists two way access on Cromlet Drive at the junction of Castle Avenue. Verify speed, volume and classification of traffic to determine the most suitable solution for improving cyclist safety including considering the redetermination of the footway to shared use. Provide a footway or shared use cycle track from the high school to the leisure centre car park entrance. Ensure all side roads have flush dropped crossings.
4e	Albany Road	Cromlet Drive	High Street	Allow cyclists two way access in order to provide the most direct route to station, library and High Street.
4f	Traffic free paths to Invergordon Academy	Castle Avenue	Academy Road	Provide a through route from the Academy access road to Mackean Crescent. Improve access for pedestrians and cyclists to the track from Castle Avenue.

Ref	Street	Start	End	Potential intervention (All subject to feasibility and design)
4g	Saltburn Wood paths	B817	Inverbreakie Drive	Improve connectivity to the entrance to the woods. Consider providing a sealed surface to paths and improve the stepped access ramp from Inverbreakie Drive.
4h	Westford Estate access road	Novar Road	Burnside	Verify speed, volume and classification of traffic to determine the most suitable solution for improving cyclist safety including considering the redetermination and widening of the footway to shared use. Consider improving uncontrolled crossing points with creation of zebra crossings. Reduce width of junction at Novar Road and provide flush dropped crossings and tactile paving at all side roads.
4i	Alness Academy to High Street via Station Court and railway bridge			Provide a step free access on the bridge for cyclists and prams and sign the route from the High Street.
4j	Perrins Road Area			Consider providing a formal crossing point on Perrins Road to access stepped route to school.
4k	Old Milnafua Road	Obsdale Road	Milnafua	Improve road closure at Obsdale Road to make route more attractive to pedestrians and cyclists. Provide a footway on section of road where there is new housing. Improve design of road closure at Invercarron to improve pedestrian and cyclist's access. Provide a new section of footway outside Obsdale Primary School to link new cycle track to existing path to Milnafua. Provide a new footway/cycle track from Obsdale to Primary School where there is an existing desire line.

N

0 500m 1km 2km

Figure A-13: Alness/Invergordon Potential Active Travel Network Route 4: Safer Routes to School

Key:

Safer Routes to School

NOTE: Potential routes shown are indicative and are subject to change as a result of consultation, feasibility and design.

4h Existing informal crossing points could be made more conspicuous.

4j Existing traffic free path to Shilling Primary School has a drop off point on Caplich Road.

4j Crossing point at Perrins Road - a zebra crossing may be more appropriate.

4k Inadequate footway in new build areas.

4k Section of footway missing from Obsdale Primary School.

4k The road closure at Old Miniafua Road / Obsdale Road is becoming overgrown.

Figure A-14: Alness/Invergordon Potential Active Travel Network - Route 4: Safer Routes to School

0 500m 1km 2km

Key:

Safer Routes to School

NOTE: Potential routes shown are indicative and are subject to change as a result of consultation, feasibility and design.

4b Surveys will help determine the speed of traffic, especially on the straighter sections of Castle Avenue.

4d Existing footway on Academy Road could be redetermined to allow shared use.

4g A sealed surface would improve the Saltburn woods tracks for all users.

4g Improve access point on Inverbreakie Drive to traffic free path.

Route 5 – High Street Links

Ref	Street	Start	End	Potential intervention (All subject to feasibility and design)
5a	Alness High Street	River Lane	Supermarket on B817	Verify speed, volume and classification of traffic to determine the most suitable solution for improving cyclist safety. Ensure all side roads have flush dropped crossings. Provide improved bus stop waiting facilities with seating and timetables. Consider the reduction of vehicular traffic to improve ambience of street. Reduce width of junction at Obsdale Road and provide flush dropped crossings.
5b	Invergordon High Street	B817	Seabank Road	Verify speed, volume and classification of traffic to determine the most suitable solution for improving cyclist safety. Ensure all side roads have flush dropped crossings. Provide improved bus stop waiting facilities with seating and timetables. Consider removing car parking in middle of road to reduce dominance of vehicular traffic. Replace uncontrolled crossing points with zebra crossings and introduce more crossings to provide more pedestrian priority.

N

0 500m 1km 2km

Figure A-15: Alness/Invergordon Potential Active Travel Network Route 5: High Street Links

Key:

— High Street Links

NOTE: Potential routes shown are indicative and are subject to change as a result of consultation, feasibility and design.

5a Alness High Street is dominated by vehicular traffic.

5a Footway narrows on approach to supermarket in Alness on railway bridge.

5a

5a

Figure A-16: Alness/Invergordon Potential Active Travel Network - Route 5: High Street Links

Key:

High Street Links

NOTE: Potential routes shown are indicative and are subject to change as a result of consultation, feasibility and design.

5b Car parking in the central reservation cuts Invergordon High Street in half.

Route 6 – Key Employment Routes (KER)

Ref	Street	Start	End	Potential intervention (All subject to feasibility and design)
6a	Teaninich Avenue	River Drive	A9	Verify speed, volume and classification of traffic to determine the most suitable solution for improving cyclist safety. Ensure all side roads have flush dropped crossings. Provide improved bus stop waiting facilities with seating and timetables. Provide a footway/cycle track from the business park to the A9.
6b	A9	Teaninich Avenue	Alness Business Park	Provide a traffic free shared use footway with an informal crossing point to the business park.
6c	Route from River Lane via Riverside Drive to Alness Business Park			Provide comprehensive signing along entire route. Improve road closure on River Lane underneath railway bridge. Provide regular maintenance on traffic free sections and improve headroom at A9.
6d	Seabank Road	Invergordon High Street	End of road	Provide advanced stop lines at the signalised junction at the High Street with appropriate pedestrian phases. Improve access to traffic free path including a dropped kerb.
6e	Traffic free path from Seabank Road to Golfview Terrace			Provide a sealed surface and widen path where possible including the removal of tree stumps. Widen access ramp at Golfview Terrace and improve accessibility to ramp from the road.
6f	Golfview Terrace	Saltburn Road	Inverbreakie Drive	Reduce width of junction at Saltburn Road and provide flush dropped crossings and tactile paving. Verify speed, volume and classification of traffic to determine the most suitable solution for improving cyclist safety. Ensure all side roads have flush dropped crossings.
6g	Grosvenor Street	Golfview Terrace	End of road	Reduce width of junction and provide flush dropped crossings and tactile paving. Provide flush dropped crossings and tactile paving along entire road. Improve connectivity of route into hospital grounds.

Ref	Street	Start	End	Potential intervention (All subject to feasibility and design)
6h	Routes to Castle Avenue and Inverbreakie Industrial Estate			Verify speed, volume and classification of traffic to determine the most suitable solution for improving cyclist safety. Provide maintenance to existing footways. Provide footways were there are none and provide flush dropped kerbs and tactile paving at all minor roads. Provide cycle parking at all places of employment.

N

0 500m 1km 2km

Figure A-17: Alness/Invergordon Potential Active Travel Network Route 6 : Key Employment Routes (KER)

Key:

Key Employment Routes

NOTE: Potential routes shown are indicative and are subject to change as a result of consultation, feasibility and design.

6a No footway on Teanich Avenue - a direct route to Alness Business Park.

6b There is a clear desire line along the A9 to Alness Business Park.

6a

6b

Halcrow

Figure A-18: Alness/Invergordon Potential Active Travel Network - Route 6: Key Employment Routes (KER)

Key:

Key Employment Routes

NOTE: Potential routes shown are indicative and are subject to change as a result of consultation, feasibility and design.

6e Narrow ramp to track off Golfview Terrace.

6e Traffic free path from Seabank Road is very narrow in places.

6h There are no footways from Invergordon Leisure Centre towards the industrial estates.

6h Existing footways are in poor condition in Inverbreakie Industrial Estate.