

## **Report to Partnership Meeting 26 April 2019**

### **RESEARCH AND STRATEGY DELIVERY**

#### **STPR Highland Rail Commitments**

##### **Purpose of Report**

To set out the commitments made by Scottish Government in the first Strategic Transport Projects Review and restated in the Control Period publication of Network Rail in respect to improvement in the HITRANS area. The report seeks to update members on the latest developments in rail policy and proposes some research to underline the importance of these past commitments being delivered comprehensively.

##### **Scotland's Railway Control Period 6 2019-2024**

In March 2019 Transport Scotland published government's plans for the railway for the next five years.

"The priority will be the completion of the current suite of rail improvements and the introduction of associated services.

These are: Edinburgh Glasgow Improvement Programme Stirling, Dunblane and Alloa electrification - service introduction Shotts Line electrification - service introduction Dunbar station additional platform, **Aberdeen to Inverness Improvements (Phase One) Highland Main Line Improvements (Phase Two)**.

We will shortly be publishing an action plan for stations in Scotland, which will focus on new and improved stations to better support community access to the railway.

Much of this work is already underway, including: the redevelopment of Glasgow Queen Street station and surrounding area new stations at Robroyston, **Dalcross (serving Inverness airport)**, Kintore, Reston and East Linton large scale improvements at Stirling, Inverness, Motherwell and Aberdeen stations station improvements through the Access for All Scheme.

Whilst the following significant projects have been identified for development work and will progress through the investment decision-making stages, the pipeline is flexible and other projects may come on stream. We cannot at this stage give a commitment to fund all projects through each stage of development

or to delivery, and for complex projects and programmes, phasing maybe required to align with the availability of funding:

- provision of a new electricity feeder station at Currie to ensure a resilient power supply to Central Scotland and enable additional services on the Shotts line
- improvements to Portobello Junction to improve the reliability of passenger services to the Scottish Borders, North Berwick, Dunbar and cross-border destinations
- connecting the towns of Reston and East Linton to Edinburgh and beyond through two new stations, with wider connectivity improvements from East Lothian and the Eastern Scottish Borders into Edinburgh, and improvements for passengers and freight travelling to and from England
- improvements to how the rail network operates West of Haymarket station (Edinburgh) and on lines that interconnect, to allow current and increased numbers of passenger and freight trains
- improvements (targeted) to the railway between Perth and Glasgow including **potentially extending electrification from Dunblane to Perth** seeking faster overall rail journeys from Aberdeen and Inverness to Glasgow and accommodating an increase in rail freight between Central Scotland freight terminals. This project also considers improvements for passengers to Perth Station and where to best stable and maintain trains in the area. An early phase has been an improved rail connection at Blackford, which supports additional rail freight services, which will reduce lorry traffic on the A9 and surrounding areas
- improvements to East Kilbride and Barrhead services to enable more passengers to use the railway and create a greener commute from two of the main Glasgow commuter areas
- **new phases of Highland Main Line and Aberdeen to Inverness Improvements, which will look at maximising the existing investments to create more and faster services for passengers and opportunities for freight**
- **development works to improve rail services for communities along the Far North Line from Inverness to Thurso and Wick, supporting the local economy and tourism**
- **early consideration of ways in which improvements to services along the West Highland Lines (Glasgow to Oban, Fort William and Mallaig) can support economic growth and the tourist offer early consideration of improvements to rail services on the Argyle Lines, with a focus on improving the passenger experience and train service reliability**
- building on existing improvements, consideration of improving passenger and freight services from Aberdeen to Central Belt, supporting business and local communities.

A number of minor and technical projects are being developed by Network Rail, such as linespeed improvements, improvements to sidings, minor power upgrades, and a suite of gauging improvements.

In line with the Scottish Government's Rail Freight Strategy and the rail freight industry's growth plan, a number of the significant development projects have a clear freight element already embedded.

In addition, there are also dedicated freight projects which have started and expect to be completed in CP6:

- **Aberdeen to Inverness Improvement Project Phases One and Two– freight capacity at the West end of the line**
- **West Highland Line – facilitating the development of lineside loading facilities—for example at Rannoch**

### **HITRANS Role**

HITRANS is involved in both Far North Line Review Team and the West Highland Line Review Group, and is likely to be involved in the establishment of the Timber by Rail Working Group.

There is an opportunity to press for *new phases of Highland Main Line and Aberdeen to Inverness Improvements*. These projects formed two of the four STPR1 projects selected for development back in 2008, as a result of the Room for Growth Report of 2006 <http://timeline.hie.co.uk/media/1366/transport-room-for-growth-report.pdf>

### **STPR1 Intervention 17 HML**

This intervention supports objectives to reduce journey time and increase travel opportunities between Inverness and Perth, more effectively linking Inverness to the Central Belt.

Improvements to the Highland Main Line are proposed, providing:

- An increase in service frequency (minimum of hourly between Inverness and Perth with additional peak express services); and
- A reduction in journey times of approximately 35 minutes, resulting in Edinburgh to Inverness journeys of under three hours, with similar reductions for services to Glasgow.

Journey time reductions to benefit passenger services would be delivered through, timetable developments, minor infrastructure enhancements such as tail light cameras, line speed improvements, additional loops, dynamic loops or lengthening of double track sections, signalling improvements and more powerful traction. It is envisaged that this could be delivered in two phases.

Phase 1 will seek to maximise service frequency and journey times on existing infrastructure.

Phase 2 would comprise infrastructure enhancements to allow even faster services to operate.

Additional freight improvements: The passenger enhancements could be optimised to also benefit freight operations. It is envisaged that this would include:

- Provision of bi-directional signalling to reduce the impact of engineering works on the route (permitting the route to remain open for freight throughout the day and week);
- Increased length of freight loops (allowing longer freight trains); and
- Removal of speed limits below 75 mph Permanent Speed Reductions (PSRs) for freight trains.

Included within this intervention is the capability to operate low floor wagons that are currently becoming available for use on the network. These would allow standard containers to be carried on existing infrastructure with minimal physical works, such as targeted gauge enhancements at appropriate structures.

## **HITRANS View**

Transport Scotland subsequently established the project parameters for the HML scheme and this can be accessed at:

<https://www.transport.gov.scot/projects/highland-main-line/>

This sets out a project ambition of:

“Upgrading the Highland Main Line is one of the Scottish Government’s key priorities. The long-term goal of the project seeks to achieve a fastest journey time of 2 hours 45 minutes between Inverness and the Central Belt with an average journey time of 3 hours and an hourly service by 2025.”

The key priority that would deliver most for the Highlands is the average journey time of 3 hours. Recent Parliamentary questions have had a response from Ministers that reiterated the intention to deliver a fastest journey time of 2 hours 45 minutes but no mention of the 3-hour average journey time.

The journey time reduction proposed will not be delivered in the May 2020 timetable. Hourly frequency will be delivered. No double tracking or additional loops have been created.

## **STPR1 Intervention 19 A2I**

This intervention supports the objectives to reduce journey time and increase opportunities to travel, particularly by public transport, between Aberdeen and Inverness.

The improvements to the railway between Aberdeen and Inverness would allow:

- An increase in service frequency (minimum of hourly service over the full route);
- A reduction in journey time by about 20 minutes between Aberdeen and Inverness;
- Extra rail services between Nairn and Inverness to provide an overall two trains per hour over this section; and
- A new station at Dalcross with Park-&-Ride facilities and interchange facilities with Inverness Airport.

Phase 1 would involve the introduction of new loops in the area and line speed improvements.

Phase 2 would involve more comprehensive improvements to line speed, journey times and the provision of some dual tracking on approaches to Inverness and Aberdeen. Development of this intervention will also give consideration to the option of a station at Kintore.

## **HITRANS View**

Transport Scotland subsequently established the project parameters for the A2I scheme and this can be accessed at - <https://www.transport.gov.scot/projects/aberdeen-to-inverness-rail-improvements/>

This sets out a project commitment as set out below:

“The rail improvements project will be delivered in phases and aims to provide incremental benefits throughout the life of the scheme, with the whole project being delivered by 2030.

### Project aspirations

The long-term aspirations of the project aim to deliver:

- a 2 hour journey time (end to end);
- an hourly service;
- enhanced commuter services into each city;
- the infrastructure to support new stations at Kintore in Aberdeenshire and Dalcross, next to Inverness airport; and
- increased opportunities for freight.”

This project is progressing in phases with significant infrastructure enhancement particularly at the eastern end where the line will be double tracked from Inverurie to Aberdeen. We do though have a concern that the ambition for a 2 hour journey time is being stepped away from in a similar fashion to the HML 3 hour journey time.

Inverness Airport Dalcross - without Park-&-Ride, Kintore and double tracking at the eastern end are in programme for 2019-2021. Additional Inverness-Elgin services commenced in December 18. Forres station and loop were rebuilt.

Journey times will be standardised but hourly services over the full route, with 20 mins journey time reductions are not programmed. An additional loop at Dalcross, but not full double tracking at the western end is under consideration.

### **Room For Growth II?**

It is suggested that significant resource is put into a study that will compare proposed and actual outputs of STPR1 and provide evidence of the need for their full delivery.

## **RISK REGISTER**

### RTS Delivery

Impact – RTS compliant

### Policy

Impact – Mode shift, connectivity, environmental benefits

### Financial

Impact – Will require funding from HITRANS and partners

Equality

Impact – Nil

**Recommendations**

1. Members and Advisors are asked to note the report and the recommendation to undertake the study.

**Report by:** Frank Roach  
**Designation:** Partnership Manager  
**Date:** 16 April 2019