

## **Report to Partnership Meeting 24 June 2022**

### **Research and Strategy**

#### **Islands Connectivity Plan**

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

This report provides Members with an update on the Islands Connectivity Plan.

##### **Background and Context**

Transport Scotland committed to undertaking an Islands Connectivity Plan (ICP) as part of the National Transport Strategy Delivery Plan in December 2020. The ICP would succeed the Ferries Plan 2013-22.

It stated 'We will develop objectives based on supporting delivery of NTS2 and the National Islands Plan, and develop proposals to meet those objectives which represent value for money. The ICP will be closely linked to the outcomes of the STPR2, in order to consider island connectivity more broadly having regard to aviation, ferries and fixed links, and to connecting and onward travel.

Following a presentation on the proposed scope of the ICP to officers representing key local stakeholders, Members agreed at the last Partnership meeting that HITRANS should submit a joint letter expressing fundamental concerns raised in relation to the proposed scope and objectives of the ICP.

These included the following observations and questions in relation to the presentation on the proposed scope:

- It was confirmed at a recent stakeholder update that the STPR2 ICIA was completed retrospectively, after the 'sifting out' stage which removed the majority of strategic interventions put forward for our Island communities. Therefore, no consideration has been given to the impact of sifting out our key priorities and what impact this will have on these island communities. Given the ICIA process was not completed at the start of the review process we therefore feel it is open to legal challenge.
- Transport Scotland confirmed that the ICP will only consider connectivity to those islands whose lifeline ferries are provided by services funded by Transport Scotland. If this is the case, then we would ask if an Island Communities Impact Assessment has commenced and if it has considered that multiple islands which are served by ferry services provided by Local Authorities are not to be considered within the ICP in any meaningful sense?
- Does this also apply to the consideration of fixed links? i.e. Will fixed links only be considered where there is an existing Transport Scotland funded service or will it consider equally the merit of fixed links between any existing islands and / or the Scottish mainland?
- How will the objectives for the ICP be developed? For example, the retention and growth of population is something which is critical to all islands and yet did not feature as an objective in STPR2.

- Similarly, has the ICIA considered why the road network of the islands is not within the scope of the ICP when all key mainland ferry ports are served by Trunk roads? Routes such as the spinal route in Western Isles, or the main routes through Islay and Mull all connect important ferry ports and have come under pressure due to the success of RET yet do not benefit from the investment provided for the A87 through Skye or A830 to Mallaig.
- It was indicated that air services would only be considered where they might provide an option to address under-provision. Again, does this only apply to those islands where there are existing services supported by Transport Scotland or does it consider connectivity to all islands?

A copy of this letter together with the response from Transport Scotland is attached as an appendix to this report.

Also attached is a copy of a Transport Scotland presentation on the Islands Connectivity Plan taken to the recent round of Ferry Stakeholder Group meetings held for the Clyde and Hebrides Ferry Services (CHFS) Contract.

### RTS Delivery

Impact - neutral

Comment – The policies outlined in these key policy document should underpin the prioritisation of the projects within the RTS Delivery Plan but there is concern that the ICP will only consider those routes and services which are the responsibility of Transport Scotland

### Policy

Impact - Neutral

Comment – These policy documents should provide a detailed and coordinated framework of policies at a national level. However, this report has highlighted concerns about the proposed scope and the need for the ICP to include a review of each islands connectivity and services rather than be restricted for which Transport Scotland is responsible.

### Financial

Impact – Positive

Budget line and value – No direct impact but the policies and priorities will identify an investment programme for lifeline services to many islands in the HITRANS area.

### Equality

Impact – neutral

Comment – Reducing Inequalities is one of the key priorities of the updated National Transport Strategy. The failure to undertake an Islands Community Impact Assessment in advance of commencing the Strategic Transport Project Review and the proposed scope of the ICP has undermined local stakeholders confidence that the ICP will consider connectivity challenges facing each island community equitably.

## **Recommendation**

Members are invited to:

1. Note the Report
2. Consider how the Partnership should best engage with the Islands Connectivity Plan.

**Report by:** Neil MacRae  
**Designation:** Partnership Manager  
**Date:** 17<sup>th</sup> June 2022



2<sup>nd</sup> Floor,  
7 Ardross Terrace  
Inverness  
IV2 4NE

Laurence Kenny  
Ferries Unit – Aviation, Maritime, Freight & Canals  
Transport Scotland  
Buchanan House  
58 Port Dundas Road  
Glasgow G4 0HF

Tel: 01667 460464  
Fax: 01667 460468

[info@hitrans.org.uk](mailto:info@hitrans.org.uk)  
[www.hitrans.org.uk](http://www.hitrans.org.uk)

26<sup>th</sup> April 2022

Dear Laurence,

### **Islands' Connectivity Plan**

We would like to thank you and your colleagues for the presentation to officers on the Islands' Connectivity Plan on Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup> March. As you are aware, there were a number of fundamental concerns raised in relation to the proposed scope and objectives of the ICP.

Based on the information provided at the meeting and subsequent discussion of the proposed scope of the ICP at HITRANS Partnership Meeting on Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> April, I am writing on behalf of fellow Members representing each of the Local Authorities with responsibility for islands to highlight our lack of confidence in the Islands' Connectivity Plan proposal as it stands.

Throughout the STPR2 process we have regularly expressed a number of concerns for which we repeatedly received assurances that they would be addressed through the ICP. Further the commitment that "*The ICP will be closely linked to the outcomes of the STPR2, in order to consider island connectivity more broadly having regard to aviation, ferries and fixed links, and to connection and onward travel*" provided a degree of confidence that it would consider each islands connectivity in a holistic and equitable manner. However, from the presentation provided and accompanying slides it is clear that what is proposed is nothing more than a Ferries Plan II with consideration being given only to Transport Scotland's assets and services.

While we understand from Transport Scotland's perspective the rationale for this approach, it is completely unacceptable from any local stakeholder position. Not only does this approach undermine the positive engagement and common understanding developed over more than six years but it makes a mockery of the notion that it is an **Islands** Connectivity Plan.

Following the presentation, we therefore have the following observations and questions:

- It was confirmed at a recent stakeholder update that the STPR2 ICIA was completed retrospectively, after the 'sifting out' stage which removed the majority of strategic

interventions put forward for our Island communities. Therefore, no consideration has been given to the impact of sifting out our key priorities and what impact this will have on these island communities. Given the ICIA process was not completed at the start of the review process we therefore feel it is open to legal challenge.

- Transport Scotland confirmed that the ICP will only consider connectivity to those islands whose lifeline ferries are provided by services funded by Transport Scotland. If this is the case, then we would ask if an Island Communities Impact Assessment has commenced and if it has considered that multiple islands which are served by ferry services provided by Local Authorities are not to be considered within the ICP in any meaningful sense?
- Does this also apply to the consideration of fixed links? i.e. Will fixed links only be considered where there is an existing Transport Scotland funded service or will it consider equally the merit of fixed links between any existing islands and / or the Scottish mainland?
- How will the objectives for the ICP be developed? For example, the retention and growth of population is something which is critical to all islands and yet did not feature as an objective in STPR2.
- Similarly, has the ICIA considered why the road network of the islands is not within the scope of the ICP when all key mainland ferry ports are served by Trunk roads? Routes such as the spinal route in Western Isles, or the main routes through Islay and Mull all connect important ferry ports and have come under pressure due to the success of RET yet do not benefit from the investment provided for the A87 through Skye or A830 to Mallaig.
- It was indicated that air services would only be considered where they might provide an option to address under-provision. Again, does this only apply to those islands where there are existing services supported by Transport Scotland or does it consider connectivity to all islands?

If the remit of the Islands Connectivity Plan is no wider than that of the Strategic Transport Projects Review then we would ask why is it being developed in isolation and at a slower timeline to the strategic investment for the rest of the country.

We recognise that there are significant issues relating to the governance and funding of services which cannot necessarily be considered within the ICP. However, we all expected the ICP to at least provide an equitable evaluation of connectivity to each of Scotland's inhabited islands so that all stakeholders and levels of government would be aware of each islands connectivity needs.

Yours Sincerely

Cllr Alan Henderson, HITRANS Chair

cc. Cllr Robin Currie, Leader, Argyll and Bute Council  
Cllr Uisdean Robertson, Chair Transportation and Infrastructure, CNeS  
Cllr Graham Sinclair, Chair Development and Infrastructure, Orkney Islands Council  
Jenny Gilruth MSP, Minister for Transport  
Erica Clarkson, Scottish Government Islands Team

TRANSPORT SCOTLAND  
Transport Scotland

Buchanan House, 58 Port Dundas Road, Glasgow G4 0HF  
Direct Line: 01412727582  
laurence.kenney@transport.gov.scot



Neil MacRae  
Neil.MacRae@hitrans.org.uk

Your ref:  
Islands Connectivity Plan

Our ref:  
202200298620

Date:  
9 June 2022

Dear Ranaid,

Thank you for the letter of 26 April 2022 from your former Chair, Cllr Henderson regarding his concerns about the scope of the Islands' Connectivity Plan (ICP). Please could you pass this reply to your new Chair once they are in post?

Allow me to address the points raised in turn:

1. I can confirm that the ICIA has not been undertaken retrospectively, but was integrated with the development of STPR2 since its inception. The ICIA guidance was in draft format at that point. Therefore, the ICIA process was incorporated into the overarching Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance (STAG) appraisal process, along with other statutory assessments, which was applied to STPR2. The rationale for taking this approach was to allow a meaningful consideration of island communities would be undertaken. The draft ICIA report was published on the 20 January 2022 setting out the legislative background, process undertaken, key issues and the high level potential impacts of the STPR2 recommendations on island communities.

A final ICIA report will be published at the end of the STPR2 process and will incorporate feedback from consultation, in line with the requirements of the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018 by describing the likely significantly different effect of STPR2 on island communities, as well as the extent to which the STPR2 recommendations can be developed or delivered for the benefit of island communities.

2. Following feedback we have reviewed the scope of the ICP. I am pleased to confirm that the overall strategy will identify all ferry services in Scotland. Respecting delivery responsibilities this will then allow the relevant operators of any given ferry services to develop their own delivery plans in light of the overall strategy.

In this regard the Scottish Government will, alongside the drafting of the ICP strategy itself, develop a number of delivery plans for the Clyde and Hebrides Ferry Services and Northern Isles Ferry services and the Caledonian Maritime Assets Limited fleet for which it is responsible.

It remains the case that the replacement of local authority ferries is wholly the responsibility of local authorities but, where opportunities are identified for us to work together, we will give them due

consideration. In this regard we have made an offer to all four local authorities to share learning from CMAL's Small Vessel Replacement Programme.

Going forward, local authorities may choose to adopt the same community needs assessment methodology to be used for ICP for their own planning for their ferry services. A number of the local authorities are already progressing a range of work in respect of their own services and have undertaken such assessments more recently than we have for the CHFS and NIFS networks.

It is important to remember that the ICP is not a funding programme, but a strategic policy document. We will be expanding the methodology for the needs assessments and this is also something we will discuss in more detail with local authorities and other stakeholders.

3. The ICP will not in itself identify any fixed links however it will have regard for existing links and the proposed links set out in the STPR2. The STPR2 draft report recommends that further consideration be given to the potential of a fixed link across the Sound of Harris and the Sound of Barra in the Western Isles, as well as a link between Mull and the Scottish mainland. STPR2 recommends that further work is undertaken on business cases for these proposed links to better understand the benefits, costs and challenges associated. The studies would take into account the role of existing ferry services and involve input from communities that may potentially be affected.

Replacement of local authority ferry services by fixed links would be a matter for the relevant local authority to consider. However, we'd be happy to explore identifying in the ICP fixed links being progressed by other parties.

4. The ICP objectives will be developed from the priorities of the National Transport Strategy, the National Islands Plan and the National Strategy for Economic Transformation. We recognise the importance of reliable, resilient ferry services to securing island population and we will use this feedback and those of others to inform the development of ICP objectives.

5. No delivery plans for roads, local or trunk, will developed within the scope of the ICP as its primary focus is on connectivity provided by ferry services. There may be some acknowledgement of role roads such as the Skye Bridge or peninsular roads play in meeting community connectivity needs in the Community Needs Assessments and in regard to connecting and onward travel.

6. The place of air services in the ICP is still to be confirmed however we currently envisage that, as a minimum, they will be considered alongside ferry services where they play a role in meeting community connectivity needs.

Although ICP may appear similar to the STPR2 remit we do not consider its development and delivery as isolated but as one part of the wider delivery of the National Transport Strategy to deliver the infrastructure and services our island and remote mainland communities need to sustain and grow both in population and economically into the future.

I hope this helps to clarify the current position and we are happy to discuss further at officer level.

Yours sincerely

*Laurence Kenney*

Laurence Kenney  
**Head of Ferries Policy Unit**