

## Report to Partnership Meeting 25<sup>th</sup> April 2025

### RESEARCH AND STRATEGY DELIVERY

#### Fort William Integrated Transport Plan

#### PURPOSE OF REPORT

To provide Members on progress to undertake an Integrated Transport Plan for Fort William in accordance with Recommendation 32 of the second Strategic Transport Projects Review (STPR2).

#### Background

The strategic road network in Fort William suffers from reliability and resilience issues, with congestion on the network impacting journey times on the A82 and A830 and also has a negative impact on the environment of the town with the A82 in particular, creating severance between different parts of the town and the town's connection with its waterfront. These routes also form important transport corridors serving not just Fort William but much of the northwest Highlands and Islands.

The Fort William Strategic Transport Study (Pre-Appraisal, the Case for Change) Report was published by HITRANS in August 2018. This established an evidence base from which a case for change to the transport network was developed. As part of the study, the problems, opportunities and constraints associated with the transport network in Fort William were explored and Transport Planning Objectives (TPOs) identified to guide the development of solutions.

In March 2019, Transport Scotland commissioned a Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance (STAG) for Preliminary Appraisal: the overarching aim being to build upon the 2018 Pre-Appraisal to develop a number of options for progression towards Detailed Appraisal. The report recommended that medium to longer term options, be incorporated in an assessment of merits through the (then forthcoming) Second Strategic Transport Project Review (STPR2), before being taken forward for detailed assessment.

Transport Scotland published STPR2 in December 2022. Recognising the need to address the challenges across different transport modes in Fort William, STPR2 recommended the development of an Integrated Transport Plan (ITP) for the town:

*Recommendation 32: Trunk road and motorway renewal for reliability, resilience and safety, specifically recommends continued and increased investment in the trunk road and motorway network over and above current maintenance levels to keep the network reliable and resilient for road users. Potential measures would include, but are not limited to, carriageway and structure schemes, strengthening of major bridges, removal of accessibility barriers and development of integrated transport plans for Fort William and the A90 Kingsway through Dundee*

## Fort William Integrated Transport Plan

### Client Delivery Group (CDG)

At the HITRANS Partnership meeting on 20th September 2024, members approved that HITRANS contribute up to £100,000 towards the undertaking of an Integrated Transport Plan for Fort William and that HITRANS take on the role of chairing a Client Delivery Group to be established to oversee the study, leading on the procurement and project management of the commission.

The Client Delivery Group first met in December 2024 and has met regularly since in order to progress the commission.

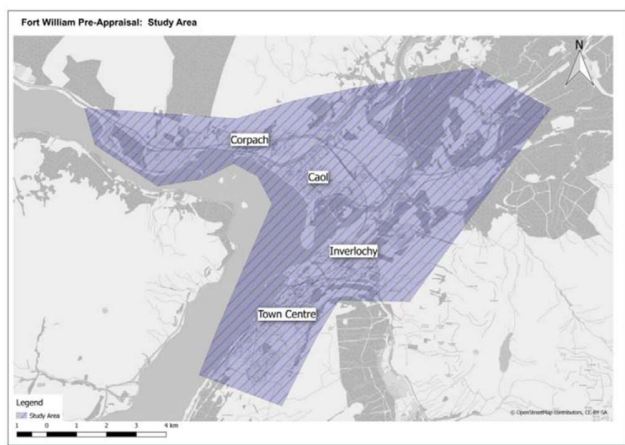
The group will provide scrutiny and oversee the following stages of the Fort William ITP:

- Development of the ITP scope;
- Procurement;
- Tendering and award;
- Project direction and management; and
- Technical advice, guidance and links to specialist input, as required.

Transport Scotland, HITRANS and The Highland Council have provided the funding to support the commission and have representation on the CDG and responsibility for the assurance of the outputs. Highlands and Islands Enterprise and Fort William 2040 are also represented on the CDG in an advisory role.

### Scope

The proposed study area is the same as that adopted for the 2018 Pre-Appraisal, Case for Change Report. This covers Fort William's urban boundary (as defined within the Proposed West Highland and Islands Local Development Plan, May 2017). This urban area is a loose aggregation of settlements bordering Loch Eil, Loch Linnhe, and along the corridors carved by the Great Glen and Glen Nevis. The A82 and A830 Trunk Roads provide the primary vehicular routes through and across the urban area. The area is served by railway with lines to Glasgow and Mallaig, has an important port function and National Cycle Route 78 and many other active travel linkages are present. It also serves as a West Highland hub for the coach network with services to Inverness, Glasgow, Oban, Skye and Ardnamurchan.



The transport network in and around Fort William fulfils both a strategic and local role and, prior to the Covid 19 Pandemic, had seen increasing trip volumes across all modes. Increasing summer visitor numbers throughout the Highlands and islands, development allocated within the West Highland and Islands Local Development Plan and an ongoing desire for employment-led growth

have led to calls for both short-term capacity improvements and consideration of longer-term interventions.

Traffic congestion, journey time reliability and resilience are cited as key concerns for people who live and work in Fort William and surrounding area. Specific junctions are an important factor, whilst higher seasonal volumes of traffic correlate with the largest degree of travel time variability. The proximity of local junctions and queuing associated with opposed right-turns on the A82, are thought to have contributed to quite specific localised driver behaviours which are not replicable in typical network modelling software. When incidents occur, whilst generally infrequently, their impacts are compounded by the lack and length (min 42miles inc ferry or 160miles) of diversionary routes on the network. Emergency services in Fort William are amongst the road users impacted by the lack of resilience with reported issues of staff being unable to reach work due to traffic congestion, as well as delays to emergency vehicles accessing the road network. Local business have stated that network constraints have impacted on decisions to expand within the area.

Local and regional resources are already working to deliver transport solutions for the town, however, these have not significantly solved the problem of resilience and reliability on the road network.

### **Requirements and Procurement of the ITP**

The study will involve a review, proportionate refresh and validation of the evidence-base and findings of both the Fort William Strategic Transport Study: Case for Change and subsequent Preliminary Appraisal to develop a Detailed STAG Appraisal. This will inform the ITP: a comprehensive, multi-modal plan which will establish proposed package of interventions, priorities, direction, responsibilities, funding sources and process for change for the town of Fort William.

Following a STAG-based approach encompassing the four key stages (Case for change, Preliminary Appraisal, Detailed Appraisal and Post-Appraisal Evaluation) will ensure that the ITP has a robust evidence base, makes best use of preceding work and allows members of the public, stakeholders and funders to have confidence in the ITP.

Lot 2 of Transport Scotlands LATIS framework is being used to procure consultants with suitable experience and expertise to undertake the appraisal and develop the Integrated Transport Plan. STAG appraisal has clear requirements for stakeholder engagement and public consultation and the consultants will be expected to set out how propose to do this within the commission. It is expected that the successful consultant will be appointed in May 2025 with the ITP taking up to 18 months to complete.

## **Recommendation**

Members are asked to:

- i. Note this report;

## **Risk Register**

### RTS Delivery

Impact - Positive

Comment – This work supports RTS Strategic priorities to enhance regional connectivity.

### Policy

Impact - Positive

Comment – This work supports several policies set out in the RTS including; improving journey time reliability and network resilience, promotion of sustainable transport options in Fort William.

### Financial

Impact – Positive

Budget line and value – HITRANS will allocate 25% of funding up to a value of £100,000 towards the undertaking of the next stage of an Integrated Transport Plan for Fort William over the next three financial years.

### Equality

Impact – Positive

Comment – Improving regional connectivity helps improve the competitiveness of businesses in the West Highlands and improving journey times in Fort William helps local bus operators provide more reliable public transport services.

**Report by:** Neil MacRae  
**Designation:** Partnership Manager, HITRANS  
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