

Fraserburgh & Peterhead to Aberdeen Strategic Transport Study Summary of Pre-Appraisal Workshops

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1 OVERVIEW

This note provides a summary of the key points highlighted by attendees at the two Pre-Appraisal workshops for the Fraserburgh and Peterhead to Aberdeen Strategic Transport Study:

- Transport and Land Use Workshop
- Economic and Enterprise Workshop

The Transport and Land-use Workshop was held on Monday 30 March in Aberdeenshire Council Offices. A wide range of individuals from Aberdeen City Council (ACC) and Aberdeenshire Council's (AC) Transport, Planning and Environmental teams attended alongside representatives from the Strategic Development Planning Authority, the three Aberdeenshire Area Manager Offices (Banff & Buchan, Buchan and Formartine) and the AWPR Management Team. The workshop also included representation from ACC's Economics team and Aberdeen City and Shire Economic Future (ACSEF) who were unable to make the Economic & Enterprise workshop on the 31 March.

The Economic & Enterprise Workshop was held on Tuesday 31 March at the Buchan Braes Hotel just south of Peterhead in Boddam. Attendees included representatives from Fraserburgh, Peterhead and Aberdeen Harbours, the Federation of Small Businesses and Chamber of Commerce, Peterhead Energy Hub, Visit Scotland, Fraserburgh Tourism Group, Energetica, North-East College, Aberdeen HyTrEc, 3 local businesses and representatives from both ACC and AC's Economic Development teams and AC Tourism Executives.

The attendees were provided with a presentation on the background of the study and the future development and transport proposals in the area. The workshops then included a number of small group sessions in which individual groups were tasked with identifying transport problems, issues, opportunities and constraints and potential transport options as well as a workshop wide discussion on potential objectives for the study. This note provides a summary of the key points raised during these discussions.

2 PROBLEMS

2.1 Economic

A number of economic problems were identified which are seen to be at least partly derived from issues within the transport system.



It was noted that there has been a growth in population in both Fraserburgh and Peterhead in recent years driven by in-migration, particularly amongst the eastern European community. The in-migrants typically fill jobs in the local fish processing industries but it was noted that this demographic typically does not have access to a car which, combined with the cost of bus-based commuting, is limiting employment opportunities further afield (i.e. Aberdeen). Stakeholders also explained that Fraserburgh and Peterhead have traditionally had quite insular labour markets, caused largely by the historic dominance of fishing. The extent to which the transport system can unlock opportunities within the labour market through increased commuting should be explored as part of the study.

A number of participants noted that highly skilled labour is limited in the northern towns because of a 'brain drain' to larger centres and difficulties attracting professionals. A number of reasons were given for this including the perception that Peterhead and Fraserburgh are peripheral; a perceived lack of vibrancy in the towns; and limited education facilities. In addition, it was noted that house prices in Fraserburgh have increased significantly and that this is both making it more difficult to attract people and further encouraging out-migration.

It was pointed out by planners that poor transport connectivity to the north of Aberdeen has constrained residential and commercial land-use development as well as commuting, creating effective 'trade barriers' in the north. The AWPR and Third Don Crossing are expected to address this issue in the short-term but there remains concern about the likelihood of these issues recurring in years to come.

Participants also noted that there has been a recent migration of firms from the Dyce area to Westhill as it is seen to be difficult to recruit from the south of the city. In addition, it was noted that the Council, NHS and others have had difficulty attracting workers into the area, partly because of high house prices and partly because of poor connectivity (which may be causing constrained development and pushing house prices up).

Comments from stakeholders generally suggested that the study should enhance access to Aberdeen but at the same time incentivise investment in Fraserburgh, Peterhead and other settlements. However, concerns were also raised that improving the transport links to Aberdeen could result in businesses, labour and investment being drawn away from the towns towards the city. This is an important point as previous evidence suggests that there is a gravity effect with transport schemes where bigger towns and cities draw in labour and investment (e.g. retail or the centralisation of services) from less populous areas. This is not a bad thing in its own right as commuting in particular may stimulate the local economy of the periphery, but it is important to be clear about the intended/desired directionality of impacts and how we account for this within our objective setting.

In terms of wider infrastructure issues, water and electricity supply as well as broadband and 4G connectivity were all identified as issues. Participants noted that digital connectivity is poor in the area and while superfast broadband is planned, ultrafast broadband remains some way off. It was noted that the poor connectivity is impacting the Small to Medium-sized Enterprise (SME) market.

2.2 Road

The main transport problem identified by all groups was the long and unreliable journey times on the A90(T) between Fraserburgh/Peterhead, and Aberdeen and the A90(T) south. A combination of the mix of local & strategic traffic; agricultural vehicles; platooning as a result of slower moving HGVs; and limited overtaking opportunities mean that the performance of the A90(T) is seen to be poor.

Road safety was also highlighted as a key issue. Participants identified the Toll of Birness and the Cortes junctions as accident hotspots but also noted the high rate of accidents along the route itself, particularly between Fraserburgh and the Cortes junction. It was noted that drivers become frustrated as a result of being stuck behind slower moving vehicles and that this causes accidents along the route. Given the single carriageway nature of the road and the lack of alternative route options participants noted that accidents can have significant impacts on journey times. Both the A952 and the A975 were considered to be quieter than the A90(T). However, comments were also made about road speeds and high accident rates on these routes.

Long journey times and journey time reliability in Aberdeen were also highlighted as an issue. A number of participants specifically highlighted that accessibility to Aberdeen Airport/Dyce is poor as a result of the large volumes of traffic in this area (with some noting that the new Aberdeen Exhibition and Conference Centre (AECC) may further increase traffic levels). While participants recognised that the AWPR would undoubtedly have an impact on traffic in Aberdeen, there was a degree of uncertainty as to the likely benefits. A number of participants highlighted that the AWPR may serve only to move the problem further north. In addition, a number of stakeholders highlighted that the significant levels of development proposed north of Aberdeen will negate a great deal of the predicted benefits of the AWPR.

It was pointed out that poor road connectivity in particular may act to detract inward investment into the study area and undermine the credibility of the Energetica corridor. This was seen to be a key problem in emerging industries such as renewables, carbon capture, decommissioning etc. Participants also highlighted that poor road infrastructure can lead to increased costs within the freight industry. It was explained that the A90(T) is a key (and often the only) route for freight and the poor reliability leads to a reduction in overall supply chain efficiency, making it difficult to operate 'just-in-time' delivery systems. In addition, participants noted that delays can also impact driver hours necessitating additional stops; lead to reductions in income where produce is time sensitive (e.g. transporting fresh fish) and result in animal welfare issues where live produce is being transported.

2.3 Bus

As a result of the limited rail network, bus travel is the only public transport option for many within the study area. A number of barriers to bus use were identified including long and unreliable journey times; high stop frequency; few direct services (other than to Aberdeen); poor radial routes around the city; high ticket prices (which are generally not considered to be cost effective compared to private car use); very few express services and limited Wi-Fi availability.

Bus connections to places other than Aberdeen were felt to be poor as a result of the focus towards the city and the need to interchange at Aberdeen. In particular participants highlighted that there is very little direct connectivity to Dyce (a key employment hub in the study area). A number also commented that connections between Dyce Rail Station and the Airport were poor with many people travelling by taxi.

Access to bus services in rural areas was identified as an issue, with one participant noting that it is very difficult for some people in rural locations to get to work and that this is one of the key issues raised amongst those looking for employment. Comments were also made about the lack of direct point-to-point commuter services in the north, with services taking circuitous routes and making numerous stops.

Representatives from North East College noted that transport access to their sites is problematic, with students finding it difficult to get to college and transfer between campus sites. It was noted that the Fraserburgh campus currently contract 10 buses to transport between 400-500 students into college in the morning which is a significant drain on college resources.



Bus frequency and the length of the operating day for services north of Ellon was also seen to constrain opportunities for travelling by public transport, with bus start and end times not meeting the requirements for some of the larger businesses. In addition, one stakeholder noted that Dyce based companies have highlighted that the frequency of bus services drops-off considerably after 1830 in the evening.

The cost of commuting by bus from settlements in the north to Aberdeen is seen to be prohibitively expensive. This is driven by low population density and a small absolute commuter market. Inter-operator and inter-modal integration is also currently seen to be poor, although the Grasshopper ticket is seen as an opportunity in this regard.

Journey time reliability getting into and out of Aberdeen was identified as a problem, with some suggestion that bus lanes/bus priority is inadequate. One participant noted that buses experience difficulty getting into and out of lanes and one noted that despite there being good bus priority measures on Ellon Road bus services were still unreliable. Union Street Bus Interchange was also felt to be very busy, with some suggesting that a new bus station is needed.

Peak hour capacity was also raised as an issue. Participants noted that many services leaving Aberdeen are full and that people are left behind but that many users only travel as far as the Bridge of Don, demonstrating a conflict between local and strategic traffic.

In terms of Park and Ride (P&R), the Kingswell Site was felt to work relatively well but the Bridge of Don site was felt to be not well used. The issue of the directionality of impacts with regard to P&R was also raised with some participants noting that they could act to take shoppers, business and/or employees away from Peterhead.

2.4 Rail

The lack of rail links within the study area was felt to be a constraint in terms of commuting, land-use development and tourism. There was a feeling among many participants that investment in the rail infrastructure in the area was behind that of elsewhere, with a number noting that Peterhead will be the largest Scottish town without a rail station following the completion of the Borders Railway.

A number of participants anticipated there being congestion issues around Dyce railway station, with the station and the forthcoming link road into Aberdeen Airport both seen to be on the 'wrong side' of the terminal.

Rail capacity between Dyce and Aberdeen was also identified as an issue although it was noted that Transport Scotland are currently investigating how to double track the line between Inverurie and Aberdeen which may impact this (although this could also reduce gauge capacity for freight).

The rail line to the south of Aberdeen was felt to be poor with participants noting that it does not serve the main industrial areas.

2.5 Freight

As discussed above, the importance of the A90(T) as a freight route and the additional costs incurred as a result of delays on the route were highlighted.

A number of participants suggested that the study area was a high cost freight location as there were limited prospects for backloads given the lack of economic density. Indeed, one stakeholder explained that the area to the north of Aberdeen is often designated as being in the



'Highlands & Islands' which generally suffer from higher freight costs. There was some suggestion that this resulted in difficulties attracting retail companies to the area.

Participants noted that it is difficult to transport freight by rail because of the restrictions in terms of rolling stock/rail gauges and therefore if a new rail line was to be developed the case would have to be made based on commuter travel rather than industry.

Comments were also made about the limited amount of HGV parking, poor accessibility to the industrial estates around Dyce and capacity issues at Aberdeen Harbour (both in terms of the number of vessels which can be berthed and traffic movements in/out and around the harbour).

There were also comments about the manoeuvrability of larger HGVs (>15m), with participants noting that there can be issues in and around Aberdeen due to the gradient of the roads and junction geometrics.

2.6 Active Travel

Cycle connections in Aberdeen were felt to be poor. A number of groups suggested that the surface of the Formartine and Buchan Way could be improved in order to accommodate the mix of users (including pedestrians, cyclists, and horses). Participants also highlighted that there have been issues with motorised scooters using the trail and that this should be considered wherever improvements are made. One group felt that there were not a sufficient number of cycle lockers at P&R locations and that the ability to take bikes on Stagecoach buses should be further promoted.

2.7 Environment

Air quality and traffic related noise pollution were identified as problems on King Street. One group also discussed the lack of compatibility between the location of electric charging points and the key transport routes.

3 ISSUES

A number of uncertainties which could influence the study were highlighted, including the future impact of the committed transport improvements including the AWPR; the future trajectory of the oil and gas industry and decommissioning activities. The extent to which the renewables sector and carbon capture and storage will develop, the key hubs in this regard, and the level of transport demand they are likely to generate were noted. There is also uncertainty over the evolution of the housing market in response to land values/transport improvements.

There was some discussion on the allocated residential and employment land across the study area and the extent to which this is likely to be built out and the consequent impact on the transport network. Some participants commented that the build out rates in Aberdeen are slow and others noted that the build out rates decline as you travel north through the study area. One participant noted that the picture in terms of future development at Mintlaw was very optimistic with the town being in a good location between Peterhead and Aberdeen and one allocated site having already come forward. Questions were also raised as to whether there is capacity within the construction industry to achieve the build out rates required.

While it was felt that the AWPR will relieve some of the congestion problems within Aberdeen, respondents noted that any increase in development will create further demands on the transport network which will need to be mitigated. A number of participants noted that the new exhibition centre will attract more and bigger events which could increase problems on the road network in this area.



4 OPPORTUNITIES

It was felt that the Energetica Corridor presented significant opportunities for the area, with participants highlighting a number of potential growth areas including decommissioning, carbon capture and storage (particularly at Peterhead); and offshore renewables.

It was noted that both Ellon and Fraserburgh have been made Integrated Travel Towns by Aberdeenshire council with the first workshop to develop plans in this regard scheduled for May 2015. Participants explained that the council is looking to develop a walking and cycling network within a 5 mile radius of each town, with aspirations at this stage including links between Ellon and Newburgh, and Ellon and the Formartine and Buchan Way.

Comments were also made about the opportunities to encourage cycling in the northern corridor as a result of the development of the Third Don Crossing and the potential of providing cycling facilities on the southern section of the A90(T) when the route is de-trunked.

There were also felt to be opportunities to further encourage car sharing in the study area with one participant noting that annual car occupancy surveys on key routes undertaken by Aberdeenshire Council indicate there are currently higher occupancy levels on roads between Fraserburgh (just below 2.0) than those in other locations such as Westhill (just above 1.0).

There were also discussions around opportunities to promote and expand the tourism industry (of which Golf tourism was highlighted as a key sector). It was felt that there would be opportunities to develop the day trip market from Aberdeen to Aberdeenshire if connectivity was improved. In addition, comments were made about developing the cruise tourism market, although it was noted that this would be limited by the distance/transport connections between the ports and key tourist destinations.

The recent announcement that Aberdeenshire has been awarded funding as part of the Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme (CARS) for the regeneration of Fraserburgh's town centre was also highlighted as an opportunity.

5 CONSTRAINTS

A number of environmental/planning constraints were identified which would have to be considered in the context of infrastructure development including the location of SSSI sites, Local Nature Conservation Areas, AQMAS, areas of peat bog (e.g. St Fergus), the location of explosive stores and the large number of listed buildings/heritage sites. Participants also noted that Aberdeen Airport is a very constrained site, with expansion plans restricted by the green belt, trunk road and areas of residential development.

6 OBJECTIVES

A small amount of time was spent discussing the potential objectives of the study. Participants in the Transport & Land Use Workshop raised the following points:

- Ensure onward connectivity to markets
- Support the development of tourism
- Improve quality of life
- Reduce journey times and improving journey time reliability
- Improve travel choice
- Improve connectivity between rural areas and town centres



Participants in the Economics & Enterprise Workshop suggested the following:

- Supporting businesses and economic growth
- Reducing feelings of peripherality
- Improve quality of life
- Support population retention
- Improve travel choice
- Improve the attractiveness of public transport and other non-car based modes

7 POTENTIAL TRANSPORT OPTIONS

Various options were suggested. These are discussed under the headings below.

7.1 Economic

Suggested improvements included:

- Improving broadband connectivity
- Reducing the need to travel through the encouragement of flexible working/smarter working.

7.2 Road Transport

All of the groups suggested making improvements to the A90(T) in order to resolve the issues with journey time reliability and safety. Suggested improvements included:

- Developing a Route Action Plan
- Dualling the whole route between Balmedie and Fraserburgh
- Dualling sections of the route only (including Balmedie to the Toll of Birness or Balmedie to Peterhead)
- Targeted sections of 2+1 (with specific sections mentioned including the Toll of Birness to Peterhead and Hatton and Cruden Bay)
- Development of a bypass at St Fergus
- Improving provision for right turners on the A90(T) as well as other B-class roads used by commuters (including the B999 and B977).
- Redesigning the Toll of Birness and Cortes junctions, including examining options for roundabouts and/or grade separation in order to improve safety and alleviate congestion/delays
- Improving junctions at Ellon including examining options for more lanes at the roundabout, grade separation, and a bridge/bypass
- Improving the A952 including
 - Dualling the complete route
 - Making incremental improvements to the alignment to improve visibility
 - Providing targeted stretches of 2+1
 - Providing a bypass at Mintlaw



- Improving access to Inverurie by straightening the route between Old Meldrum and Ellon
- Improving the A975 as an alternative commuter route, (with one group suggesting the provision of additional overtaking areas and another proposing that this road be made an express route for buses only)
- Incentivising car sharing
- Installing real time information to inform motorists of traffic hotspots.

7.3 Bus

A number of improvements were proposed in terms of bus travel and included:

- Providing new bus routes/interchange points so that users would not have to travel into Union Square for destinations outside of the city. Suggestions for new interchanges included Ellon, Park Hill and the Exhibition Centre. In terms of bus routes participants emphasised that new routes should connect key settlements and major employment hubs (such as Aberdeen Royal Infirmary, the universities and Aberdeen Airport), with a number of groups specifically highlighting the important role of Dyce and the need to improve public transport connections to the town.
- Exploring P&R options:
 - Developing a revised P&R Strategy/marketing for P&R
 - Examining options for P&R at Fraserburgh/Peterhead
 - Opening a new P&R site at Mintlaw, Blackdog, Inverurie or Newmachar
 - Encouraging local P&R use through pricing (e.g. offer reduced pricing to prevent residents driving to southern P&Rs)
 - Improving cycle storage at P&R sites.
 - Closing the P&R site at the Bridge of Don and moving it north of the A90(T) Parkway.
- Improving bus priority/providing segregated bus lanes on key routes into Aberdeen (including on the A90(T) and A956).
- Following the introduction of the AWPR, the section of the A90(T) which is to be de-trunked should be made a public transport only route.
- Improving the overall quality of bus services (e.g. cleaner buses, making Wi-Fi available etc)
- Implement region wide bus quality partnership
- Provide support for the purchase of a new coach fleet to make longer journeys more comfortable.
- Develop a real time information system for Aberdeenshire (which should be smart phone compatible)
- Introduce low carbon/hydrogen buses
- Expand community transport provision and/or funding.
- Develop a fully integrated ticketing system to enable use across bus operators and potentially rail in the longer term
- Subsidise bus fares to make them equivalent to benchmark comparators



- Provide subsidised tickets specifically for those trying to get back into employment.
- Provide commuter hovercraft services between Peterhead and the Bridge of Don P&R/Aberdeen
- Provide a ferry service from Fraserburgh to Peterhead.

7.4 Rail

All of the groups suggested making improvements to the rail system. Options included:

- Restoring the previous Formartine and Buchan rail line
- Providing a new direct link from Ellon to Peterhead and Fraserburgh
- Providing a rail link or light rail link between Dyce and Ellon, with links to Ellon P&R (suggested stops on this route included Ellon, Newmacher and Udney)
- Providing a new suburban light railway to the relocated AECC
- Providing a rail link between Ellon and Cruden Bay
- Providing a rail link between Ellon and the A90(T) corridor
- Providing a radial light rail/tram route around Aberdeen city
- Providing a rail link to Aberdeen Port.
- Improving connections between Dyce Railway Station and Aberdeen Airport with one suggesting that the bus service could be improved and three groups proposing providing a tunnel between the two hubs
- Increasing the level of parking at key stations including Dyce and Inverurie.
- Providing more commuter stops within Aberdeen City
- Enhancing the Aberdeen to Dundee service.

7.5 Active Travel

A number of suggestions for new active travel routes were made including:

- Developing a walking/cycling link between Ellon and Newburgh
- An off-road cycle path to Dyce Industrial Estate
- An off-road cycle paths to the Bridge of Don
- A segregated cycleway on the A90(T)
- Completing the coastal footpath south from Peterhead
- Providing off road cycle routes along B-roads.
- Enhancing the Formartine and Buchan Way for leisure travel (via improving junction interactions and maintenance) and commuter travel (through improving surfaces)
- Extension of the Formartine & Buchan Way from Dyce to Aberdeen to improve access into the city centre
- Improving integration between public transport and cycling to enable longer distance sustainable journeys including:
 - Investing in walking and cycling links to bus termini in Fraserburgh, Peterhead and Ellon



- Allowing bikes on trains/buses and improving the promotion of the availability of this service
- Providing more cycle lockers at P&R locations
- Encouraging park and cycle at Bridge of Don and Blackdog
- Developing an active travel strategy complete with an implementation, branding and marketing plan
- Fully integrating walking and cycling facilities into consents for new developments
- Developing Travel Plans for major businesses.

7.6 Freight

Suggested improvements for freight included:

- Developing a freight terminal near Dyce airport
- Providing freight only road routes
- Investigating the potential of developing shipping routes between the north east and other countries so that freight can be shipped directly by sea rather than road.

7.7 Ports

Suggested port improvements included:

- Expanding breakwaters to ensure weather proofing
- Developing cruise tourism at Peterhead.

7.8 Air Travel

Suggested improvements to air travel included:

- Encouraging further route development
- Developing an air link between Aberdeen and Houston
- Securing additional carriers to provide route security and competition (particularly on London routes)
- Developing Longside Airport.

7.9 Environment

Participants suggested:

- Providing more electric charging points (including at P&R sites)
- Developing an electric vehicle application for mobile phones showing their location.

