
3b North East Transport Consultative Forum meeting

- Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to outline for members' information the outcomes from the latest meeting of the North East Transport Consultative Forum (NETCF) held in Woodhill House on Monday 31 October 2011.

- Outcomes

The meeting was attended by 23 of the Forum's members and held in Committee Room 5 at Woodhill House, Aberdeen. The meeting covered four main topics: a progress update, the Strategic Development Plan, refreshing Nestrans' Regional Transport Strategy and development of a Regional Parking Strategy.

Councillor Ian Yuill, Chair of the Nestrans Board, welcomed everyone and introduced the meeting. Derick Murray, Nestrans' Director, gave an update on general transport issues in the North East since the last Forum meeting. This included mention of the following:

- High Speed Rail (HSR) – there is north east support for HSR to Glasgow and Edinburgh whilst recognising there is not a business case for extending further north and that even if it did, the journey time would be beyond the 3 hour tipping point to encourage transfer from air to rail. The central belt in turn are backing the North East in our call that such significant investment should result in benefit to all and therefore our seeking to protect landing slots at London airports for the North East of Scotland;
- Aviation – The UK Government has consulted on a new policy following the decision not to progress with a 3rd Heathrow runway or any further south east runway extensions. Their better not bigger policy appears to involve better surface access and no domestic flights. We are asking for landing slots for Aberdeen and Inverness to be protected as HSR will not remove the need for short haul flights to London from peripheral areas and Heathrow and Gatwick are attempting to introduce charges that would discriminate against smaller aircraft serving destinations like Aberdeen in favour of larger aircraft serving new world destinations in India and China;
- Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route - Next stage of the court consideration will be in mid December. Also dependent on this decision are the construction of the A90 Balmedie to Tippetty dualling and the A96 Park & Choose with link road to the airport. Possible other linked projects are the A90 (S) Park & Choose and the Third Don Crossing. The Government have committed to constructing an improvement to the A90/A96 Haudagain junction once AWPR is built. Discussions on all of these projects are ongoing;
- Buses – A new bus lane has been introduced on King St/Castle St and the operating times along Holburn St standardised. Both main bus companies have improved punctuality and reliability, although this has sometimes been as a result of increased scheduled journey times;
- Rail – Continuing to see very large growth in usage of all North East stations. In discussion with Transport Scotland to try and get Network Rail to look at Aberdeen as a growth area in the same way as they look at Edinburgh and Glasgow as separate growth markets. Currently we are looked at as part of the intercity market growth. We are also discussing the 20 minute journey time reduction between Aberdeen and the Central Belt as contained within the Strategic Transport Projects

Review. The next stage of investigation into the Aberdeen to Inverness rail line improvements, including a station at Kintore, is ongoing by Network Rail;

- Health and Transport – Audit Scotland carried out an audit on access to health and social care which showed significant improvement could be made across Scotland. This would involve integrating services across Councils, the third sector, the NHS and the Ambulance Service's patient transport service. The NE were highlighted as good practice for having a Health and Transport Action Plan, but we now have to deliver the improvements to service that the Audit Scotland report identified:
- Travel Planning – Getabout has focussed on cycling issues through the summer and will be promoting Park & Ride by both bus and rail during the winter.

There were then three presentations illustrated by slides¹:

The Strategic Development Plan

David Jennings, Strategic Development Planning Authority Manager, gave a presentation on the Main Issues Report for the Strategic Development Plan that is currently being consulted upon and the Strategic Transport Fund that is also out for consultation within Supplementary Guidance for the current Structure Plan. The Strategic Transport Fund proposes an equitable mechanism for developers of new residential and commercial sites to contribute to transport infrastructure improvements that have been identified to address the cumulative impact of new development.

Refreshing Nestrans' Regional Transport Strategy

Rab Dickson, Nestrans Transport Strategy Manager, gave a presentation on refreshing the Regional Transport Strategy to align it with the timescale and proposals within the Strategic Development Plan and to reflect updated policy advice since the Strategy was approved.

Towards a Regional Car Parking Strategy

Kirsty Morrison, Nestrans Transport Executive (Strategy & Delivery), gave a presentation on development of a Regional Parking Strategy. This included information on how car parking is currently dealt with and the Local Authority roles. Issues to be considered and draft objectives for the development of a regional strategy were also highlighted.

Following a buffet the meeting split into three tables to discuss the following:

- The RTS refresh and links to the Strategic Development Plan
- Achieving sustainable economic development in the north east
- The role of car parking in influencing strategic transport
 1. Do you agree with the issues identified and draft objectives?
 2. How can Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Councils use the provision, management and control of parking to meet the 2 proposed objectives?
 3. Thinking about what is already done, what could be done differently or better?
 4. What policies and actions should be included in the 'Toolbox' of the Regional Parking Strategy

¹ Copies of the powerpoint presentations are available on the Nestrans website <http://www.nestrans.org.uk/news/articles.asp>

There was a plenary feedback session where discussions from each of the groups were outlined and an opportunity given for any further questions. Summary notes from each of the group discussions are given in the Appendix.

Following the feedback session, Stanley Flett of the Aberdeen Disability Advisory Group requested to attend a future Local Authority and Bus Operator Forum (Labof) meeting to discuss issues relating to accessibility. This request was discussed at the next Labof meeting and it was agreed that a special meeting of the group should be set up on this issue. This opportunity for a meeting has been confirmed with Stanley Flett and a date is currently being set up.

The date for the next North East Transport Consultative Forum will be advised in due course.

- Recommendation

It is recommended that Members note the contents of this report.

JA/15 November 2011

Notes from Workshop Group A

Facilitators - Rab Dickson and Don Kent, Nestrans

Other group members: Jennifer Hall (Aberdeenshire CHP), Gregor McAbery (Aberdeen City Environmental Forum), Councillor Ian Mollison (Aberdeenshire Council), Louise Napier (Aberdeen City Council), Scott Ramsay (Aberdeen City Council), Mark Skilling (Aberdeenshire Council), John Yellowlees (First ScotRail).

Sustainable Development/RTS refresh

The development plan needs to be integrated with sustainable strategies such as the Low Emission Zone, active travel, Health and Transport Action Plan.

The RTS should take into account the effects of Aberdeen City strategies on Aberdeenshire residents for example the pedestrianisation of Union Street may have both positive and negative effects on Aberdeenshire residents. The RTS needs to spell out who is responsible for key strategies such as local access, community transport, bus strategy etc.

Alternative fuels will solve air quality and other non transport objectives but won't solve any transport problems.

Electrification of the railways was seen as a positive move but a contributor noted:

- Electrification needs grade separated junctions
- Electric trains cannot be built in configurations less than 4 coaches
- Since 1993 only 2 railways have been electrified in the UK
- There are no rail plans at all after Borders rail (2014) and the end of the electrification of all the central belt lines (2016)
- The end of the current ScotRail franchise coincides with the end of all the train leasing contracts for Scotrail.

Strategies and plans for actions such as pedestrianisation, trams, and guided bus track, congestion charging, workplace parking levy and new railways should not be ruled out of a 30 year strategy because of current project management problems or political/social unpopularity.

Smart phones ticketing across the region needs to be in the RTS refresh. There are Scottish Trials particularly in Strathclyde potentially for the Commonwealth games

There was discussion on the economic justifications of RTS plans ie the relative costs and benefits of spending £30m on a link road or on active travel measures. They are evaluated on different criteria where the economic benefits of a road will be to the users and the council the active travel benefits will be to the user and the NHS

Parking Strategy

Felt to be a key element of a transport strategy and control over the number of vehicles accessing the city. Discussion ranged over:

- New developments such as Union Square, Menie Estate and some plans for UTG are building in significant car parking capacity
- The location and size of park and ride sites
- Promotion of park and ride must be done in conjunction with bus priority measures, smart traffic lights and bus bypass measures
- Needs to be linked to the Health and Transport action plan to promote active travel
- Smart ticketing for car parks linked to other transport modes

Notes from Workshop Group B

Facilitators - Derick Murray, Nestrans and David Jennings, SDPA

Other group members: Stanley Flett (Aberdeen Disability Group), Andrew Jarvis (Stagecoach Bluebird), Roddy MacTaggart (Aberdeen City Council), Councillor Ian Yuill (Aberdeen City Council).

RTS refresh and achieving sustainable economic development

Timeline for RTS – Agreed that this should be extended to match that of the Strategic Development Plan.

Access to buses for those with learning or physical disabilities – Question was raised as to the best way to become involved in discussions on how to improve this and it was agreed that this would be raised for consideration by the Local Authority and Bus Operator Forum.

Bus Passenger Forums – noted that there are a number of bus passenger forums held within the Aberdeenshire area and so suggested that consideration be given to a City forum.

Alternative Fuels – Policies should aim to increase use of alternative fuels. It was recognised that it is difficult at present, but think this is an important aspiration and an extended RTS should have a high level policy relating to this.

Charging Points – discussed locations for electric charging points and although charging at home is probably most useful, provision by employers and new developments as part of travel plans and at Park & Ride sites were also mentioned.

Mini Park & Ride sites – Previously a Park & Ride site had been proposed on the A947, but given the close proximity to the A96 Park & Choose site it may be more appropriate to consider mini Park & Ride sites at Old Meldrum, Newmachar etc.

Integrated Ticketing – Felt that this was of key importance within the Strategy and with advancements in technology that something should be developed for use in the north east similar to the Oyster card in London. Noted ticketing being introduced by SPT for the Commonwealth Games.

Reducing Traffic (particularly in the City Centre) – A desire to reduce cross city traffic was expressed to generally improve the City Centre. Noted that AWPR will help achieve this, but there will always be traffic attracted to the harbour, nearby areas and car parks within and around the City Centre. Pedestrian proposals would reduce traffic at the point they are introduced, but may just displace it to nearest available routes.

Electrification of railways – Wish to see this introduced between Aberdeen and the Central Belt and Aberdeen to Inverness.

Light Rail – This could be considered as a future aspiration for Dyce to Ellon and Ellon to Aberdeen, but queried the deliverability given the cost. May be better therefore to consider lower cost, more flexible options such as guided bus ways or bus only roads that allow the driver to continue on normal sections of the highway thereafter and may also be options for radial corridors.

Bus Stations – Noted that the Stagecoach Bluebird bus station within Aberdeen City Centre is open to the elements for passengers waiting and queried whether this could be enclosed?

Strategic Transport Fund – Discussed the purpose of this fund and how it would be used to deliver key strategic infrastructure to address the cumulative impact of future development allocations.

Taxis and Private Hire - This should also be included in the Strategy as a form of public transport provision.

Notes from Workshop Group C

Facilitators - Kirsty Morrison and Jennifer Anderson, Nestrans

Other group members: David Cheseldine (Aberdeen Cycle Forum), David Lindsey (Cycle Touring Club), Dr Peter Smart (Airport Consultative Committee), Joanna Murray (Aberdeen City Council), Stephen Archer (Aberdeenshire Council), David Stewart (First Aberdeen).

Regional Car Parking Strategy

It was questioned whether objectives to support economic vitality and increase the proportion of journeys undertaken by sustainable modes were mutually exclusive, but all agreed that obtaining the best balance is key. It will be difficult to influence mode choice given the significant amount of free Private Non-Residential (PNR) parking that exists. Noted that there is a tool available in England to tax such spaces, but Primary Legislation would be required to introduce this in Scotland.

It was considered important to engage with the business sector in developing parking policy to seek their opinion on what works best to support the economic vitality of the city and town centres eg they may consider sponsoring short stay customer parking spaces. Discussed the development of travel plans and how RGU and Aberdeen University have introduced charges to control their own car parks and introduced controlled parking zones on surrounding streets. It was considered important to also encourage travel plans for existing organisations and not just by those required to create a travel plan as part of their planning consent when seeking permission for new development.

Noted that many existing parking machines would require replacement as they reach end of working life and opportunity should be taken to achieve savings through joint procurement and to utilise technology advancements eg use of smart phone apps and cashless payment to avoid the emptying of machines and increase convenience of use. Technology could also be used to manage capacity by charging different rates at different times of day ie cheaper parking rates outwith peak demand period of 11am – 2pm at retail outlets at weekends. Also discussed differential parking charges based on vehicle emissions.

The shortage of cycle parking was raised given the increased numbers now cycling and desire to continue this growth. Suggested that an evidence based business case of existing facilities, their usage (are they in the right place?) and where there are gaps be put together. A need for secure, sheltered and easily accessible parking at railway stations was highlighted along with good practice in other cities that have commercial bike servicing companies and cycle rental at rail stations and other key transport hubs such as P&R sites. Question raised as to whether there should be a regional cycle strategy, but noted that this is currently set within the Local Transport Strategies of both Councils.

RTS refresh and achieving sustainable economic development

Question raised as to whether rapid transport is viable in the north east and should stay in a refreshed RTS and it was thought important that future projects whilst being aspirational, should also be realistically deliverable. Scope for introducing guided bus ways was discussed, but noted this depends on the road space and capacity available.

Discussed better linkage between Dyce Railway station and the airport, as the existing service 80 Airlink has to go around the runway and industrial estates. Question raised as to whether a tunnel connection was feasible, but this has been ruled out due to culverts and

security concerns about passing under the runway. Also noted the narrow access road to the railway station and the limitations this places on the size of bus that can be used.

As well as surface access improvements to the Airport we need to ensure multi-modal egress for those arriving in the north east is easy to use and well promoted and work with partners to collectively market good points and address misconceptions.

Question raised as to how the Strategy can help ensure the targets set by the Scottish Government in the Climate Change Act can be met. The public sector can look at own fleet and alternative fuels considered. It was agreed that the Strategy should ensure that it has scope to remain abreast of all types of future technological advances that give transport benefits.

Following the workshops there was a plenary feedback session where discussions from each of the groups were outlined and an opportunity given for any further questions.

The date for the next North East Transport Consultative Forum will be advised in due course.

A light buffet and tea/coffee followed the formal conclusion of the meeting.