

Projects -

4a Aberdeen-Inverness Rail Enhancements

- Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to update members regarding the proposal to enhance journey times and frequencies on the Aberdeen-Inverness railway line.

- Background

The Aberdeen-Inverness rail line is primarily a single-track line with severe restrictions on running times and limited crossing opportunities restricting the number of journeys possible. The Scottish Government has announced that it intends to upgrade the line to enable an end-to-end journey time of less than two hours compared to the current journey of around 2¼ hours. This would then make an hourly clock-face departure possible with a few additional trains at either end of the line facilitating a higher frequency local service into Aberdeen and Inverness, probably by investing in additional passing loops and other enhancements. As part of the project, consideration will be given to new stations at Kintore and Dalcross (Inverness Airport).

The project was included within the Scottish Government's Strategic Transport Projects Review and Transport Scotland has commissioned Network Rail to detail the proposal including costs and demand assessments to GRIP 3 (the Governance for Railway Investment Projects process). The report was scheduled to be available by spring of this year, but has not as yet been published.

- Potential Benefits

Some stations on the Aberdeen-Inverness line are experiencing very high levels of patronage growth and overcrowding is a common occurrence at certain times on the line. Nestrans works with ScotRail and the railway bodies to ensure that these issues are kept to the forefront and solutions are found where appropriate. Additional journeys and additional carriages have been added in recent years to accommodate this growth and the enhancement project is the long-term aspiration to maximise the potential of the route.

Additional stations will be included in the analysis and Nestrans would also wish to give consideration to maximising the potential of the new capacity which the enhancement will provide. This may include further trains from the north crossing Aberdeen to give a through service. Further timetabling work would be necessary to assess the potential for such services.

- Recommendation

It is recommended that Members :

- a) note the report and instruct officers to continue dialogue with Transport Scotland and Network Rail and report back on the Aberdeen-Inverness enhancement project when the report is published.