
4a Aberdeen-Inverness Rail Line

- Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to inform members of progress regarding the study into the potential upgrade of the Aberdeen-Inverness railway line.

- Background

Transport Scotland instructed Network Rail to carry out a study into the upgrading of the Aberdeen to Inverness Railway Line. The initial phase of this study, the Guide to Rail Investment Procedures (GRIP) 2 stage Engineering Study has now been published by Transport Scotland. The Aberdeen to Inverness upgrade is one of four priorities in the current Government's proposals for rail improvements in Scotland. The study report can be found at: <http://www.transportscotland.gov.uk/strategy-and-research/publications-and-consultations/Aberdeen-Inverness-Report>

Objectives of the study were to develop options to:

- Create a timetable and supporting infrastructure to
 - Enable an hourly frequency between Aberdeen and Inverness
 - Enable a half hourly frequency between Aberdeen and Inverurie and between Elgin and Inverness
- Reduce journey times between Aberdeen and Inverness to around 2 hours from the current average of 2hrs 18 mins
- Deliver a new station at Dalcross (Inverness Airport)
- Examine proposals for a new station at Kintore
- Examine proposals for Forres station layout
- Examine proposals for Keith station layout
- Examine proposals for dynamic loops
- Examine options for Inveramsay Bridge
- Examine options for the operation of the Kittybrewster junction (access to the Waterloo branch)

The Aberdeen to Inverness proposals form an essential stepping stone in providing improved services in the Nestrans area.

- GRIP 2 Report

The GRIP 2 Engineering Study report has identified three options to meet the study brief. Of these, at this stage, option 3 appears to provide the most effective and efficient solution. The next stage in the Study process, the GRIP 3 proposals identifying a preferred option is due for completion in early 2012.

Option 1 crosses the hourly service between Inch and Kennethmont.

This option requires new loops at:

- Between Keith and Elgin
- East of Forres
- East of Nairn
- Dalcross
- Possibility of extending the Inverurie loop on the Kintore side

Option 2 crosses the hourly service at Keith.

This option requires loops at:

- Between Dyce and Kintore
- Between Inverurie and Inch
- East of Forres
- Between Nairn and Dalcross

Option 3 crosses the hourly service at Huntly which results in crossing at Elgin.

This option requires loops at:

- Between Aberdeen and Dyce
- Kintore
- Forres
- East of Dalcross Station

The preferred option at this stage is option 3 as it provides the best timetabling pattern and efficiency of rolling stock.

Further study findings affecting the Nestrans area are:

Kintore Station:

The Study confirms the location as the optimum location and that works may be required at the Boat of Kintore crossing. Details of stations design are part of the GRIP 3 study.

Inveramsay Bridge:

The Study included the examination of the options to renew the Bridge at Inveramsay on the A96 trunk road. This is a notorious bottleneck on the road and is a known bridge strike location. Subsequent to this study Transport Scotland have appointed consultants as designers for these upgrade works.

Kittybrewster junction:

Options are outlined depending on whether there is a need for a section of double tracking between Aberdeen and Dyce.

Cost and Programme:

The study identifies that, at this level of costing, the estimated cost is £203m. This is within the STPR estimated range. The estimate is to a +/- 40% range with a 35% contingency allowance.

Implementation works could be completed by 2016.

- Discussion

Progress on this scheme by Transport Scotland and Network Rail is welcome. The scheme has a significant impact on the North East aspirations for improving rail travel and the excellent figures for passenger number increases discussed in the monitoring report support the case for moving forward as quickly as possible.

Identification of the preferred option and of possible spending priorities and programme should assist in assessing the merits of or need for an early construction of a single platform station at Kintore.

- Recommendation

It is recommended that Members note the contents of this report and write to the Minister for Transport post election encouraging rapid development and implementation of the proposals.

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