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## **4a Aberdeen-Inverness Rail Enhancements (including proposed Kintore Station)**

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### **o Purpose of Report**

The purpose of this report is to update members on progress regarding the project to upgrade the Aberdeen-Inverness railway and to develop a new railway station to the north of Kintore.

### **o Background**

The Scottish Government's Strategic Transport Projects Review contained a commitment to enhance the railway line between Aberdeen and Inverness. The project will enable an hourly frequency between the two cities, with a journey time close to two hours.

The first phase, which will be complete by end-March 2019 will include dualling most of the track between Aberdeen and Inverurie and the development of new stations at Kintore and Dalcross, near Inverness Airport. The first phase also involves relocation of Forres Station and platform extensions at Insh and Elgin. These enhancements are intended to provide greater capacity at either end of the line to facilitate journeys into Inverness and Aberdeen without compromising the capabilities of the end-to-end journeys.

Nestrans' Regional Transport Strategy contains a proposal to develop a new station at Kintore and for improved rail services to Inverness. These are detailed in the Rail Action Plan which supports the RTS.

### **o Progress on Aberdeen-Inverness Enhancement**

Nestrans officers have met with both Transport Scotland and Network Rail regarding progress with the proposed upgrade of the Aberdeen-Inverness line. It has always been understood that the route would be developed in two phases: the first of which involves increasing capacity at each end of the line to facilitate additional commuter journeys into and out of the cities at either end, including developing new stations at Kintore and Dalcross; and a second phase which will enable faster end-to-end journey times and a regular hourly service.

The first phase (in the 2014-2019 control period 5) will include redoubling of most of the track between Aberdeen and Inverurie. However, there is some uncertainty over whether this would require doubling all of the route or whether a suitable capacity could be achieved without necessitating dualling in the tunnels at the Aberdeen station end – a process which could prove to be expensive and may not be required.

Nestrans officers have requested information on whether doubling is necessary to enable a half-hourly Aberdeen-Inverurie service; whether it is necessary to provide sufficient reliability and robustness to enable a through service across Aberdeen to Stonehaven or Montrose; and whether it is necessary to facilitate the possible future reopening of a line from Ellon (or further north) to Aberdeen, if the ongoing Fraserburgh and Peterhead to Aberdeen Strategic Transport Study should conclude that this is worthy of further consideration.

It is understood that progress is being made by Network Rail's technical team and that a report is likely to be presented to Transport Scotland this summer.

Nestrans officers have met with the recently appointed Community Liaison Manager for the project and she made a presentation to Aberdeenshire Council's Infrastructure Services Committee.

### o **Kintore Station**

Nestrans and Aberdeenshire Council officials have been developing the business case for the proposed new Kintore station and have held preliminary discussion with Network Rail. The station site is included within the proposed Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan and initial work is progressing towards a possible bid to the Scottish Stations Fund.

Network Rail have agreed to undertake design work to take the proposal to Governance for Railway Investment Projects (GRIP) level 3, which will enable a detailed design, costings and programme to be developed for the station itself. By using Network Rail designers, this will ensure that there is no need to duplicate work which might otherwise happen if an external consultant is used for this element.

In parallel, Aberdeenshire Council is separately updating previous designs for the proposed station car park and access road arrangements, to a level of detail commensurate with the station design. Updated costings will also be provided from this work.

### o **Inverurie Transport Interchange**

Nestrans officers and colleagues from Aberdeenshire Council have met with both Transport Scotland and Network Rail regarding progressing proposals to enhance the transport interchange at Inverurie Station. Proposals could include additional car parking, to support additional station demand without impacting on the town centre, better circulation including provision for buses and improved facilities for cyclists and pedestrians.

An initial design has been developed and Aberdeenshire Council will progress this with support from Nestrans. The proposals may also be eligible for Scottish Stations Funding, so discussions will continue with Network Rail who administer the fund on behalf of Transport Scotland.

### o **Recommendation**

It is recommended that the Board:

- a) Note the progress with the Aberdeen-Inverness enhancement project and instruct officers to continue liaison with Transport Scotland and others to ensure that the objectives for the project are sufficient to adequately address future aspirations for rail development in the north east;
- b) Authorise development of the proposals for Kintore station, including a business case and application to the Scottish Stations Fund;
- c) Note the progress regarding Inverurie Interchange and authorise officers to further develop proposals including investigating the potential for a Scottish Stations Fund contribution to the scheme

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