

5a Rail Matters

o Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to update Board members on rail matters, particularly to note the announcement on the new operator of the ScotRail and East Coast franchises and to note progress on a number of rail matters.

o Background

The Regional Transport Strategy identifies the need for more detailed sub-strategies, one of which is for rail. A Rail Action Plan was agreed by the Nestrans Board in 2009 and is available on the Nestrans' website at:

(http://www.nestrans.org.uk/db_docs/docs/RAP%20second%20draft%20sept%202010.pdf)

o ScotRail franchise

As members may be aware, Transport Scotland has announced that the ScotRail franchise has been awarded to Abellio, a subsidiary of Dutch Railways company, Nederlandse Spoorwegen. As indicated under item 3a of this agenda, Nestrans has had early discussions with the Abellio team.

The franchise length is for a minimum of seven years from April 2015. By mutual consent, it can be extended to ten years following a review during Year 5. Signing of the franchise agreement took place on 7th October 2014, allowing 6 months for mobilisation.

Abellio will take over all of the services currently operated by First ScotRail on 1 April 2015, except for the Caledonian Sleeper services, which will transfer to a separate franchise operated by Serco.

A copy of a brochure, published by Transport Scotland to explain the key elements of the Abellio bid and the proposals for the franchise is available from the Transport Scotland website at:

(<http://www.transportscotland.gov.uk/system/files/images/Rail/ScotRail%20franchise/Scotrail%20Brochure%20October%202014.pdf>)

o East Coast Franchise

On 27 November 2014, the Department for Transport announced that the new operator of the East Coast Main Line franchise, including the service between Aberdeen and London Kings Cross was to be InterCity East Coast ('ICEC') rail, a joint bid submitted on behalf of Stagecoach and Virgin Group.

The new franchise will start in March 2015 and is planned to run for eight years, until 31 March 2023, with the option for a one-year extension. The formal contract for the new franchise is expected to be signed by DfT following a standstill period of at least 10 days. Stagecoach and Virgin have formed a dedicated company to bid for the franchise, which is

owned 90% by Stagecoach and 10% by Virgin. Rail services will be run under the Virgin Trains East Coast brand, building on the strong heritage and pride of the current East Coast team and at the same time use the familiar Virgin brand.

Their bid offered a more personal travel experience for customers with better value fares, faster, more frequent services, and improved trains and stations. They claim that passengers will benefit from the latest technology before they travel, at stations, on board and beyond.

The franchise is set to see more than £140m invested in delivering an improved service and a more personalised travel experience for passengers. Key commitments include faster journey times, more services and better value fares.

The franchise holder will be required to pay an estimated £2.3 billion to the Government between 2015 and 2023, in 2014/15 prices.

o **Portlethen**

Previous meetings have heard concerns that Portlethen was the only station in the north east without a ticket machine and that on occasion, passengers arriving into Aberdeen had experienced difficulties in having to queue for a ticket before they could exit the station. In response to calls from Nestrans and others, ScotRail confirmed that they intended to install a Ticket Vending Machine (TVM) at Portlethen and this has now been implemented, with a machine on the northbound platform.

Further, ScotRail have confirmed that they will add an additional southbound stop at Portlethen in the evening peak from December. This is in response to increasing demand and overcrowding issues, which have been raised by Nestrans and others in recent years.

The departure from Aberdeen to Glasgow Queen Street at 1747 will now call additionally at Portlethen at 1758.

o **Inverurie Interchange**

Members will recall that Nestrans and Aberdeenshire Council have a long-standing proposal to improve the interchange opportunities at Inverurie station.

Members of Aberdeenshire Council's Garioch Area Committee decided to pursue an option for the interchange based on maximising the surface area parking, and not progressing with the potential link road to Harlaw Road. Discussions with Network Rail in September 2014 were held to inform them of this design development, and also to discuss the opportunities to submit a Stations Fund bid application to support elements of the scheme.

Consultants AECOM have recently been commissioned by Aberdeenshire Council to progress a preliminary outline design, undertake consultation, and prepare costings for the scheme. In parallel to this work, a funding application bid will be progressed.

o **Kintore**

Network Rail have commenced planning for the provision of the rail infrastructure required to enable the future construction of Kintore Station. A meeting with Network Rail has been arranged for 15 December involving officers from both Nestrans and Aberdeenshire Council, to ensure that all parties have a full understanding of the anticipated form of the new station

(both road and rail side) and to understand better the timescales. In parallel, Aberdeenshire Council are continuing to progress land acquisition discussions for the station, station car park, and approach road.

o **Dyce**

The proposed extension to the car park at Dyce station has been developed into a brief which has been shared with a consultant, who will estimate the future demand at Dyce station, the likely future demand for car parking, suggest options for managing any car park extension and provide an indicative design for a car park extension to the north of the existing car park.

The intention is to undertake work which can support our representation to the Local Development Plan that an area of land should be allocated for future car park extension at Dyce station.

o **Aberdeen-Inverness enhancement project**

Further details are emerging of the proposals announced in March 2014 of a £170 million first phase upgrade of the Aberdeen-Inverness line. Transport Scotland has now published the GRIP 3 report:

<http://www.transportscotland.gov.uk/system/files/documents/projects/GRIP3%20Phase%20on%20enhancements%20-%20Summary%20-%20Final%20version%20-%202013%20August%202014.pdf>

The proposals also allow for the development of new stations at Dalcross near Inverness Airport and at Kintore, although the delivery of the stations themselves are not included in the funding announcement.

A further phase to be implemented in the period 2019-2024 will enable end-to-end journey times of less than two hours and a regular hourly through service in each direction.

o **East Coast Main Line Authorities**

As previously reported, Nestrans are partners in the East Coast Main Line consortium, a grouping of local authorities and Regional Transport Partnerships working in partnership to promote the case for investment in the line to enable economic growth.

Nestrans and other Regional Transport Partnerships in the area served by the route are continuing to support the consortium and will report further to future meetings of the Board.

o **Recommendation**

It is recommended that the Board:

- a) Note the contents of this report.

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