
6c North East Transport Consultative Forum

- 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 Tuesday 30 October 2012.

- Outcomes

The meeting was attended by 21 of the Forum's members and held in Committee Room 5 Woodhill House, Aberdeen. The meeting was focussed on two main topics: a progress update, covering the work of the previous twelve months, and consideration of refreshing Nestrans' Regional Transport Strategy including a Main Issues Report and proposed changes to the strategy documentation.

Councillor Peter Argyle, 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:

- ~ AWPR – Process approved by Supreme Court
 - Start of construction by Autumn 2014 following EU procurement rules
 - Completion of construction by 2018
 - Includes Balmedie to Tipperty
 - Discussion underway on other associated projects
 - Most likely is A96 link road to airport
- ~ Aberdeen to Inverness Rail
 - Included in Scottish Government's Infrastructure Investment Plan
 - Current GRIP 3 being re-prioritised to include commuter trips into Aberdeen and Inverness as the priority – May be due by end of year
- ~ Aberdeen City and Shire Local Development Plans adopted
 - Cumulative impact assessments completed and being used to advise:
 - Strategic Development Plan development
 - Regional Transport Strategy refresh
- ~ Strategic Transport Fund adopted
 - Now being implemented
 - Takes a developer contribution for strategic transport (new and unique in Scotland)
 - Only takes funding when development is occupied
- ~ Health and Transport
 - Upgraded the bus facility at ARI
 - Started implementation of an Information Centre to assist people in accessing appointments

- ~ Getabout
 - Another successful summer of events promoting active travel
 - NE has most membership of car share scheme per head in Scotland
 - Car clubs introduced in Aberdeen & Laurencekirk
- ~ Rail timetable
 - Improvements to be introduced at Aberdeen to Dundee stations in December without reducing overall journey times to any significant extent
 - Significant improvement at Portlethen and other improvements at Stonehaven & Laurencekirk
- ~ Bus
 - Bus lane introduced on King Street into Castle Street
 - Fraserburgh Bus station about to be refurbished
 - Ellon P&R car park being extended
 - Cleaner buses introduced on 59 & Aberdeen to Westhill by Stagecoach
- ~ Maintenance
 - Significant investment in strategic route resurfacing following the two bad winters
- ~ Safety
 - Major safety work being undertaken on the A947 route to reduce accidents
 - Laurencekirk junction studies reviewed
- ~ Rail
 - A study into possibility of extending Inverness to Aberdeen train to Montrose will follow publication of Aberdeen to Inverness GRIP 3
 - This would provide local rail services
 - Working with rail industry to get
 - Ticketing improvements at Portlethen
 - Upgrading of Dyce station
 - Working on a turning circle for the airport shuttle bus
 - Kintore station as part of Aberdeen to Inverness
 - Scotrail franchise
 - East Coast franchise & maintenance of through trains to London
- ~ AWPR
 - Working with Councils on Locking in the benefits
 - Cycling
 - Signal timings
 - Bus priorities, High Occupancy Vehicle Lanes, Pedestrian priority
- ~ Bus
 - BPIP corridor
 - Aberdeen to Inverurie being considered with Councils and Operators
- ~ Aviation
 - Working to preserve competition on Aberdeen to Heathrow route
 - Working to ensure access to Heathrow is maintained
- ~ High Speed Rail
 - Supported HSR to Scotland and involved with the Fast Track Group to ensure North of Scotland interests are considered
- ~ Planning
 - NPF3
 - Strategic Development Plan

Derick also explained a number of changes which had taken place as a result of the May 2012 elections. Nestrans has a new Board following the elections, although three of the eight Councillor Members are returning from the previous Board. Councillor Peter Argyle is the new Chair and Councillor Ramsay Milne joins non-Councillor member Eddie Anderson as Vice Chair. The four non elected Members are not due for renewal until autumn 2014, ensuring a degree of continuity.

Regional Transport Strategy Refresh

Derick indicated that it was a Statutory requirement to review the RTS every four years, but the Scottish Government has indicated that it wishes to have concentration on delivery. Agreement has been reached that maintaining general direction of current plan but refreshing to align with the new Structure Plan/ Strategic Development Plan was advisable, so it is intended to produce not a new Plan but an extension of the current Plan, taking into account the new circumstances.

There was then a presentation by Rab Dickson illustrated by slides¹, following which the group broke into three workshops to discuss the issues relating to future forecasts, the main Issues Report and suggested amendments to the strategy. Summary notes from each of the group discussions are given in the Appendix.

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

Rab Dickson emphasised that the consultation period for responses on the Main Issues Report and for contributions towards the RTS refresh was open and welcomed responses by the extended deadline of Friday 30 November 2012.

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

- Recommendation

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

RD/JA/20November 2012

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

Notes from Workshop Group A

Facilitators - Rab Dickson, Nestrans
Scott Ramsay, Aberdeen City Council

Other group members: Gregor McAbery (Aberdeen City Environmental Forum), Councillor Barney Crockett (Aberdeen City Council), Lewis Anderson (Scottish Enterprise Grampian) and Michael Cairns (Tactran).

Discussion on RTS refresh

The group considered the changes which had taken place since 2008 in regard to policy, funding and the trends outlined, and generally agreed that the Main Issues Report hit the right note in identifying how a refreshed Regional Transport Strategy should look. Issues were raised about balance and the need to ensure that Locking in the benefits were promoted – safety and community severance benefits should be to the fore.

In extending the RTS to 2035, other issues which should be considered include Energetica, for which AWPR is the catalyst and the possibilities for hydrogen fuel development. Focus should be on practicalities and innovative ideas, focussing on low carbon technologies.

The trends which will likely influence the delivery of the RTS are an increasing focus on air quality targets and standards, and the question of whether we have reached “peak car” in addition to peak oil. Is strategy robust enough to be appropriate if fuel prices rise and cars are used less?

Participants generally agreed with the key issues on external connections (inclusion of proposals to dual the A96, ferry services, rail enhancements Aberdeen-Inverness and Aberdeen-Central Belt, High Speed Rail and Aviation). However, there could be more emphasis on Sleeper services, the need for an early morning train departure to London, links to the HSR and electrification of the rail network.

Participants also agreed with the key issues relating to internal connections, and discussed the need to bring forward proposals for Kintore station and Park & Ride sites as well as further emphasis on strategic cycle routes, pedestrianisation and the urban realm.

Participants generally agreed with the key issues regarding strategic policy, but suggested a need for non-party political consensus was required for long-term benefit.

In so far as any aspects that had been missed or could be further emphasised, the group discussed the potential for concentrating development encouraging higher densities and strict management of car parking.

Notes from Workshop Group B

Facilitator - Jennifer Anderson, Nestrans

Other group members: Stanley Flett (Aberdeen Disability Group), Duncan Cameron (First Aberdeen), Ally McLeod (Aberdeenshire Council), Seona Shand (Aberdeen & Grampian Chamber of Commerce) and Ewan Wallace (Aberdeenshire Council)

Discussion on RTS refresh

The group thought that the targets within the monitoring report would have to be reviewed to ensure that any actions are achieving the desired outcomes over the longer timescale of the refresh. In particular it was noted that bus journey times are slower as a result of congestion and to ensure punctuality requirements, so it was suggested that targets within the RTS monitoring report be changed to match the key performance indicators being considered by the Local Authorities and Bus Operators Forum.

The potential effect Scotland's Referendum on Independence in 2014 may have on long term strategy was raised and it was recognised that there could be changes amongst transport matters that are currently controlled at a UK level should they become devolved. It was also recognised that legislation coming forward during the lifetime of the extended RTS may impact on the strategy eg potential legislation on bus regulation.

In considering any issues that should be considered or trends that could influence the delivery of an extended RTS the group agreed that cost of fuel was a major uncertainty, but wondered the level of change that may be required to make a significant impact. Allowing the Strategy to be open to encompass future technological advances was seen as important, but it was noted that alternative fuel technology such as hydrogen fuel cells can have significant start up costs and require long term support.

It was agreed that the RTS objectives remain valid and the proposed wording change to reduce the numbers and severity of traffic related "casualties" rather than the number of "accidents" within the objectives was supported, given the potential for a single accident to result in multiple casualties. It was however suggested that strategic objective 1: economy be extended to include leisure and tourism development as well as business transport improvements. Within strategic objective 4: spatial planning it was noted that although there is an aim to encourage integration of transport and spatial planning, developers tend only to discuss accessibility with transport providers when requesting planning permission and often what is conditioned is not sustainable and often not enforced. It was noted that strategic bus priority, frequency improvements and additional bus services could be funded through the Strategic Transport Fund to link new development sites to key locations and the need for this to be sustainable in the long term was stressed.

The proposed actions to achieve the RTS objectives were discussed and within External Connections it was considered important not only to improve accessibility for air travel, but also to make it affordable too. Within connections by sea it was questioned whether the north east could be promoted as a destination for cruise ships? The possible proposals for Park & Ride expansion within Internal Connections were discussed and it was noted that this is to be extended to also explore the potential for mini hubs that can be served by existing bus provision. It was considered important to provide cycle lockers at any Park & Ride sites.

The possibility of more through trains at Aberdeen between the north and south was welcomed as it is a huge benefit for those with disabilities if they do not need to change trains. It was recommended that the additional stops at north east stations as a result of timetable changes in December be publicised in the areas that will benefit.

It was suggested that the monitoring report refer to targets within the Single Outcome Agreements of each local authority area. The proposed new action on engagement was welcomed as it was thought to be essential to seek input, provide information and to publicise improvements more.

Notes from Workshop Group C

Facilitators - Joanna Murray and Cameron Baillie, Aberdeen City Council

Other group members: Councillor Peter Argyle (Nestrans/AC), Andrew Jarvis (Stagecoach Bluebird), Roddy MacTaggart (Aberdeen City Council), Rita Stephen (ACSEF) and Cllr Andy Finlayson (Nestrans/ACC)

Discussion on RTS refresh

The group considered funding changes since the RTS was approved including changes to the Bus Service Operators Grant, fuel tax effects, concessionary fare re-imbusement and reduction in funding to local authorities. The predicted increase in average ages and hence the growing elderly population within the north east was discussed. It was noted that changes in fuel prices are leading to a change in travel modes and public transport should maximise this by:

- Having a cost structure to entice people to use public transport and understand the costs for fares
- Provision of easily accessible and understandable public transport information
- Whole product quality services from bus stop/bus station to destination

When discussing issues that should be considered when extending the RTS to 2035, the significant rise in the use of social media was noted and it is suggested that this is an area that should be used more widely in future to advertise key transport policies and information. It was also agreed that there have been significant improvements in hybrid and electric vehicles so it is important that an extended RTS should allow for further technology advances that may as yet be unknown.

In considering the trends that are likely to influence the delivery of the RTS, the contribution that the North East of Scotland makes to the national economy was noted and it was felt crucial that transport links be improved to sustain this. It was also felt that the transport needs and views of young people should be captured and promoted in the RTS refresh and this group should be particularly targeted to continue the active lifestyles into adulthood of cycling and walking that many will have had before being old enough to drive. Given the aims for population and housing growth in the North East to 2035 the need for sustainable communities was felt to be of key importance.

The proposed actions to achieve the RTS objectives within External Connections were discussed and it was thought that they were heavily geared towards passenger rail improvements and it was noted that bus service providers could deliver similar results at a much smaller cost and consideration should be given to the benefits the local bus network would experience if some of that funding was directed towards the service providers. It was questioned whether more freight transfer onto rail could be achieved. With regard to the action under connections by air to ensure protection of slots for Aberdeen services at key hubs such as London Heathrow, it was felt that consideration could also be given to other London airports.