

## **Projects**

### **4a Inch Station**

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#### **o Purpose of Report**

The purpose of this report is to seek members' consideration of the need for a study to assess options for improving access to Inch railway station.

#### **o Background**

Members will be aware that Inch railway station is currently non-compliant in terms of disability legislation in that customers with mobility needs cannot access the south (west-bound) platform as it is accessed only by an overbridge with stairs.

Questions have been raised with Network Rail, Transport Scotland ScotRail particularly since proposals to extend the platforms are currently being progressed as part of the upgrade of the Aberdeen-Inverness line. However, these platform extensions are being carried out under Permitted Development rights and do not require planning permission, the Council has no powers to insist on further upgrades.

Funding for Access for All has been available through a Department for Transport fund, which Scotland receives a proportion of through the Barnett formula agreement. However, this scheme is oversubscribed and stations with much higher patronage have been the focus of the programme to date (Dyce, Elgin and Montrose have all had accessible overbridges implemented through the scheme in recent years).

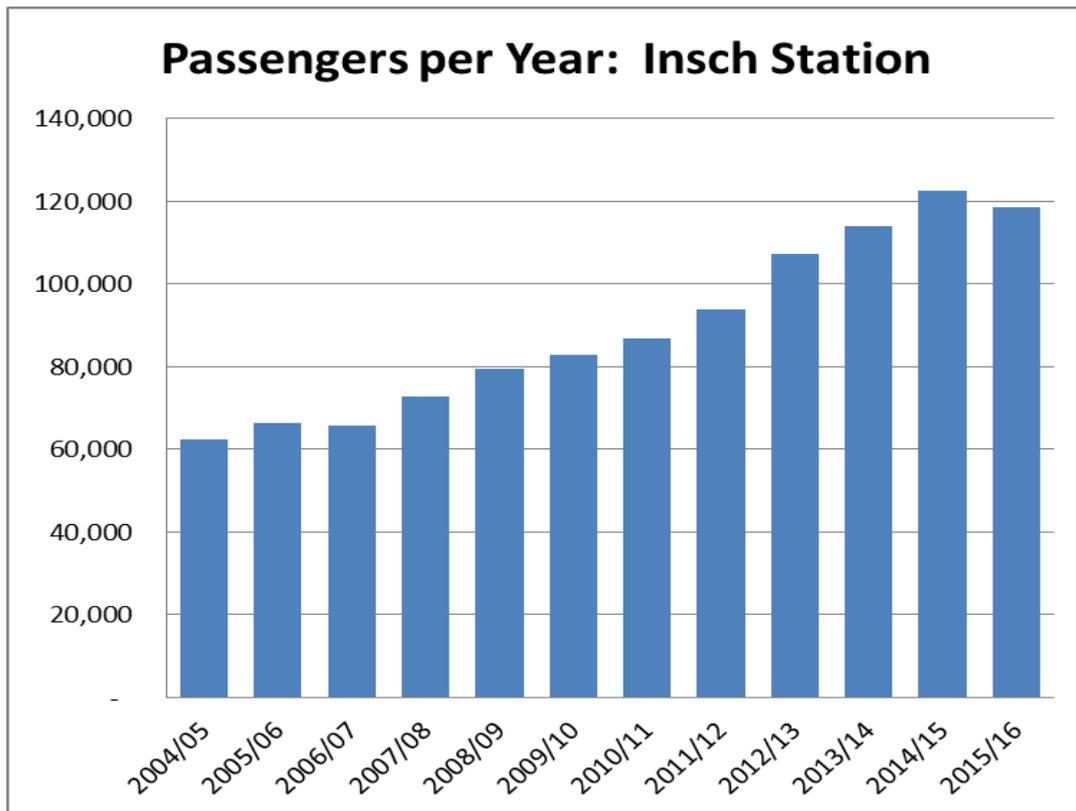
#### **Patronage**

Passenger numbers at Inch have been growing consistently in recent years, in common with other stations in the Nestrans area.

Between 2004/05 and 2014/15 passenger numbers grew from 62,000 to over 122,000 – an increase of 97%. In 2015/16, patronage was down slightly as a result of the downturn in the local economy, particularly the Oil & Gas industry but remains strong at **118,378**.

For comparison, the stations mentioned above had the following patronage in 2015/16:

- Dyce            664,396
- Elgin            343,652
- Montrose       388,864



Source: Office of Road and Rail

## o Options

Discussions have been held on a number of potential options for enabling passengers with a mobility impairment to access the south platform. These have included:

**Option 1:** A new overbridge is considered to likely to be expensive (in the region of £2million), and would be dependent on either DfT or Transport Scotland funding. Insch is likely to be lower priority than similar stations with larger patronage figures. Network Rail have assessed the existing overbridge to ensure it is not likely to be life-expired in the near future.

**Option 2:** The possibility of a new vehicular access and car park to the south of the existing station is likely to be expensive and depend on land ownership, willingness to sell and valuation. Existing car park appears to be adequate in the short term, therefore two sub-options have been identified.

**Option 2a:** Pedestrian access from south of cottages would involve purchase of a field edge and construction of approx. 250 metres of footpath. This option has a slight gradient and would involve a round trip to car park of around 700 metres. Dependent on land ownership, willingness of owner to sell and valuation, involves a long route and limited benefit to accessibility. The suitability of pavements on North Road would also have to be assessed.

**Option 2b:** Pedestrian access utilising field access between cottages on North Road would require access agreement with neighbouring householders, currently using this as a driveway and purchase of field edge. Construction of approx. 75 metres of footpath and associated fencing. Aberdeenshire Council have identified land owners, and will investigate

rights of access, question of Compulsory Purchase Orders and consider land purchase/valuation options.

**Option 3:** Platform extension westwards to B9002 North Road. Network Rail have advised that minimum acceptable width for a platform extension would require to comply with Rail Safety & Standards Board guidelines. The Railway Group Standard indicates that the minimum usable width would require to be at least 2.5 metres, (although since the primary purpose of this consideration is to achieve access for people with mobility difficulties, it may be prudent to allow at least 3 metres). It will also be necessary to consider the height difference between platform and road and the acceptable gradient.

Similarly, the question of whether it would be acceptable for a platform to open directly onto a level crossing would require to undergo a full risk and safety assessment. It may be possible to operate a gate linked to the level crossing barrier, which would prevent anyone accessing or exiting the platform when the gate is closed, linked to the level crossing barrier. The level crossing is currently operated from the adjacent signal box.

It should be noted that Inch station is a Category C Listed Building and any options which impact upon that listing would require Listed Building Consent. This would likely include overbridge options and any option which impacted on the old water tower to the south west of the station.

Preliminary discussions have been held with Aberdeenshire Council's Environmental team, regarding the listed building status of the station and what options would be acceptable. Further discussions will be required, including whether the potential for moving water tower would be considered acceptable.

### o **Next Steps**

It is suggested that Nestrans should continue discussions with Network Rail and Transport Scotland and should consider the benefits of conducting a feasibility study into the options for improving access at Inch. A feasibility study and risk assessment would identify whether any cost-effective solution is possible and could be conducted by a suitable consultant, in partnership with the rail industry.

Such a study is likely to cost in the region of £25,000 and would require allocation in the 2017/18 Revenue Budget. Should Members be minded to commission such a study, proposals for allocating funding will be prepared for consideration in the budget matters report to the next Board.

### **Recommendation**

The Board is recommended to:

1. Note the findings of this report and the preliminary investigations that have been undertaken to date;
2. Consider whether Nestrans should commission a feasibility study and risk assessment at a projected cost of around £25,000.