

Statement on Improving Efficiency, Effectiveness and Economy

The Covid-19 lockdown restrictions that were introduced towards the end of 2020/21 brought significant changes to society, the economy and our transport networks. Nestrans staff worked predominantly from home throughout the 2020/21 financial year, but sought to work collaboratively throughout this period of adaptation and recovery to respond to changing needs, whilst ensuring compatibility with the longer term vision and goals of the developing Regional Transport Strategy. Every effort was also made to continue to secure additional external funding where available to deliver transport benefits for the North East.

Nestrans continued to seek and implement initiatives to assist in improving the efficiency, effectiveness and economy of the services delivered. A brief overview of these initiatives has been included.

Shared Services

Legal, Administrative, Financial, ICT, HR and Public Relations Services

The activities of Nestrans continue to be supported by partner Councils through the provision of specialist assistance and advice. These activities are governed by separate Service Level Agreements. The use of existing support staff is considered to be an efficient and economic use of an existing pool of specialist staff, the cost of which would be significantly higher if an external or dedicated in-house cadre of similarly qualified and experienced staff were to be used. Details of each support service are as follows:

Legal & Administrative Services

Legal Services etc are provided by Aberdeen City Council. Services include legal advice, contractual advice and provision of clerking for the Board and meetings. The cost of legal and contractual advice was £1,458 in 2020/21, whereas the administrative costs of clerking for the Board remained at £20,000.

Treasurer

Financial support is provided by Aberdeenshire Council. Services provided include invoice and payment processing, financial ledger, regular financial monitoring reporting to the Board, internal audit, liaising with external audit, assistance with budget preparation and control, final accounts preparation and pension fund management, general accountancy advice and treasury management. Since 2012/13 this has been extended to include financial services relating to the Strategic Transport Fund that was set up for developer contributions to strategic transport measures. The cost of this service has remained fixed at £21,100 per annum.

ICT Services

Aberdeen City Council provides and maintains quality Information and Communication Technology Services. The cost is based on the hardware, software and support costs per member of staff per annum and resulted in a charge of just over £7,000 in 2020/21. This included Nestrans participation in the device refresh being rolled out to Council staff and support for the introduction of Microsoft Teams.

HR Services

HR services are provided by Aberdeenshire Council. This includes drafting and review of HR policies and procedures, monitoring any changes in legislation, support in dealing with staff matters, offering advice on related matters and reporting to the Nestrans Board. In the last year this also included assistance with the advertisement and appointment of the Transportation Strategy Manager post. The cost of this service has remained at £15,900 per annum.

Public Relations Services

Since July 2016 public relations, marketing and event management services have been provided under a Service Level Agreement by Aberdeenshire Council. A dedicated Nestrans communications officer is located two days per week within the Nestrans office, with access to the wider team within the Council out with these days. The various duties provided include promoting Nestrans and Getabout, liaising with the media, arranging press releases, supporting events – including advising on and seeking of advertising and relevant promotional merchandise, attending Board meetings, arranging design work and preparing communications updates for Members. The Service Level Agreement was renewed in July 2019 and the total cost for this service in 2020/21 was £17,436. An additional day was funded through the EU Civitas Portis project between April and September 2020.

Getabout Partnership

Nestrans is a key member of the Getabout Partnership that also consists of Aberdeen City Council, Aberdeenshire Council, NHS Grampian, Aberdeen University, Robert Gordon University, North East College, the James Hutton Institute and the Energy Savings Trust. The joint working of the partnership continues to provide increased efficiency and effectiveness when promoting sustainable travel throughout the region via a single brand. In the past year the website and social media have been used to provide latest transport advice in accordance with government guidance relating to the pandemic.

ACTtravelwise Membership

Nestrans again negotiated a group membership for all members of the Getabout partnership to ACTtravelwise for 2020/21 that resulted in a saving in comparison with the cost that individual memberships would otherwise have been and enabling partners to participate in online events.

Getabout Cycle Roadshow

Although the Getabout cycle roadshow has not been used throughout 2020/21 due to public events not being held, Nestrans has however funded further bikes, scooters and helmets to replenish the stock and make it available in future at events organised by the Getabout partners to encourage active travel.

Liftshare

Previously Nestrans has funded the central data base for car sharing throughout the region under contract with Liftshare Ltd as this regional umbrella contract gave savings compared to each of the partners contracting individually and provided customers access to a larger database for potential matching of

trips. The contract was renewed for 2020/21 although car share was not then recommended or promoted during covid travel restrictions.

ASAM Regional Transport Model

The Aberdeen Sub Area Model (ASAM) is a multi-modal strategic model for the North East of Scotland, which is managed and maintained by Nestrans. An upgrade of the software and data was undertaken to create ASAM14 to ensure it remains a robust and effective tool in the development of future transport strategies and land use plans in the North East and was funded via the Aberdeen City Region Deal. Transport Scotland now provide administration support for requests to use the latest ASAM model via the LATIS website. In the last year, the model has been used by local authorities for future year demand predictions and strategic input to local micro simulation models for Ellon, the Berryden corridor and for Aberdeen City Centre that is being used to develop options for a Low Emission Zone. Ongoing work for the Strategic Transport Projects Review (STPR2) on behalf of Transport Scotland will also have made use of ASAM14 as permission was previously granted for this. Developers have also been granted access to model and traffic survey information when undertaking Transport Assessments, thus ensuring that the local planning authorities' requirements are met using the best available means.

A further upgrade of ASAM to a 2019 base is underway and has been progressed. It has benefitted from methodologies developed for the Tay Cities Regional Transport Model and data shared by Transport Scotland from National models and under Scotland wide licences they have obtained.

East Coast Main Line Authorities

Nestrans continue to be partners in the consortium of East Coast Main Line Authorities (ECMA). All partners contribute to the consortium, which is a grouping of local authorities and Regional Transport Partnerships that aim to work in partnership to promote the case for investment in the line to enable economic growth.

Thistle Assistance Card

Nestrans contributed along with other Regional Transport Partnerships to the cost of marketing, maintaining and updating the website and App for the Thistle Assistance cards that are used by people when using public transport. Sustrans manage this scheme thus providing efficiency and effectiveness benefits nationally. As well as fixed costs for management and marketing support there was a recharge for the leaflets printed and posted out to the Nestrans area of which there were 178 in 2020/21.

Attracted Funding and Cost Savings

Sustainable Travel Grant Scheme

Nestrans provides a Sustainable Travel Grant Scheme, which can provide up to 50% match funding to organisations investing in measures to promote more sustainable travel by their employees or customers. In 2020/21 a grant was awarded by Nestrans to Aberdeenshire Council for the installation of six bike lockers at the Banchory Household Waste Recycling Centre. Nestrans provided match funding of £2,753 to the Council to help promote sustainable modes of travel and enable more staff to cycle to work.

ASAM Regional Transport Model Update

The update of the Aberdeen Sub Area Model (ASAM) to a 2019 base year previously commissioned by Nestrans has been progressed to ensure it continues to provide a suitably robust basis for transport and land use appraisal and reflects any change in travel patterns following the opening of the Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route and Balmedie to Tippetty dualling that was completed in February 2019. It will also provide greater functionality by including active travel, city centre parking capacity and representation of LEZ compliant vehicles.

Survey data from a number of organisations has previously been shared at no cost to enhance the robustness of the model and this has continued in the past year with Transport Scotland sharing access to Inrix and mobile phone data that they have licenced and Aberdeen City Council providing Car Parking data. The data surveys commissioned specifically for the ASAM19 update have likewise been made available for a number of public and private sector studies following requests submitted to Transport Scotland via their Land Use and Transport Integrations in Scotland ([LATIS](#)) data service. The current strategic model (ASAM14) is also listed within the section on Regional Transport models on the LATIS website along with a copy of the model development report and Transport Scotland continued to administer the application process for access to the ASAM model or data via the LATIS website.

The ASAM19 update has also benefited from the sharing of methodologies developed for other regional strategic models and input from the national suite of models. Although Nestrans manages ASAM, the cost of the update is being met through the Aberdeen City Region Deal funding as the model will be used to appraise transport options. The cost recharged in 2020/21 for model development and audit work associated with ASAM19 amounted to £156,886.

Strategic Transport Appraisal

The consultancy work previously commissioned by Nestrans for the Aberdeen City Region Deal - Strategic Transport Appraisal, initial STAG Appraisal of regional transport projects has been completed. This work will be used to inform not only the most effective projects to take forward for further development and appraisal through the City Region Deal, but has also assisted with the development of the next Regional Transport Strategy (RTS2040). It was consulted upon in autumn 2020 along with the RTS2040 that it formed a supporting document for. This work will also be made available for Transport Scotland's work on Strategic Transport Projects Review (STPR2) to provide an enhanced and consolidated evidence base for it. The cost recharged to Aberdeen City Region Deal in 2020/21 associated with this work amounted to £31,015.

Civitas Portis

The North East is included in a collaboration with four other European port cities that were awarded European funding under the Civitas banner for a project titled PORTIS to look at opportunities to enhance transport provision in and around port areas and to provide innovative and sustainable solutions to transport issues. Locally, the project is led by Aberdeen City Council, but also involves Nestrans, Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen Harbour Board and Aberdeenshire Council, with the University of Aberdeen involved in the assessment of the project. The project has been awarded almost

€20million Euros grant funding over the four-year period from September 2016 – August 2020, giving around €1million Euros per annum for each port. The available award to Nestrans for our involvement over the four-year period was increased to just over 350,000 Euros. In this final year of the project, the timescale was extended to November 2020 as a result of the pandemic and Nestrans claimed the available grant in full, with funding in 2020/21 being used to fund additional staff, promote and encouraging active travel and safe travel by sustainable transport in line with government guidance, developing related elements of the Regional Transport Strategy to 2040, Travel Planning Guidance, an ultra-low emission vehicle strategy and to contribute to the wayfinding signage project led by Aberdeen City Council.

Sustrans Grants

Nestrans continues to fund a cycling development officer post, with Sustrans providing a capital contribution of up to £100,000 per annum as match funding of this post. Following a bid by this officer, a further grant of £250,000 was offered through the National Cycle Network Development fund towards improvements on the Deeside Way. Although Covid-19 has meant that some of the grant funding awarded in 2020/21 will not now be spent until next financial year, continuation of the funding offers has been agreed. The works that were completed and reclaimed in 2020/21 amounted to £160,687 for improvements to the Deeside Way from Boghead to Cambus O May to Ballater.

RTP Active Travel Grant

The outstanding 2019/20 grant award of £134,828 that could continue to be claimed until end June 2020 was claimed in full. It enabled further work on the A944 Westhill to Kingswells Cycle Route to be progressed, the completion of generic design of replacement bridges on the Formartine & Buchan Way and purchase of four timber kit bridges for the F&B Way at Middle Tack, Upper Tack, North Kinmundy and Buckie Farm. The Scottish Government continued to offer an Active Travel Grant to Regional Transport Partnerships in 2020/21 with Nestrans again being awarded £220,000. A total of £39,625 was claimed by end March 2021, with the deadline extended to end June 2021 for further claims as a result of the pandemic. Agreement has been reached that most of the remaining grant be used for resurfacing of the Ellon Viaduct and path improvements in this area.

Local Rail Development Fund

Nestrans was previously successful in applying to Transport Scotland's Local Rail Development Fund in 2018 to undertake an option appraisal for improving access, particularly for passengers with mobility difficulties, at Insch station and this work continued in 2020/21 with Nestrans funding £6,974 and a further £13,465 funded via the grant.

A further bid to the LRDF was granted £80,000 in August 2019 to undertake a multi-modal STAG appraisal between Aberdeen and Laurencekirk and the deadline for claiming this was extended until 31 March 2022 due to the pandemic. Consultancy support was commissioned and a sum of £30,700 claimed in 2020/21 for works completed to date on the case for change.

Smarter Choices Smarter Places Open Fund

In February 2020 Nestrans secured match funding through the Paths for All, Smarter Choices Smarter Places Open Fund towards a comprehensive travel survey as a baseline for the emerging Regional Transport Strategy to 2040 and to enable monitoring of the impact of the Strategy. As regular travel patterns were completely changed by the Covid-19 restrictions, it was agreed to instead fund regular telephone/online surveys with a representative sample of residents within the Nestrans area to understand their changing travel patterns, behaviours and attitudes. This work has informed the short term work and priorities of Nestrans and the results were published and shared with local partners, other Regional Transport Partnership and Transport Scotland to help establish a nation-wide picture of transport and travel during this unprecedented time. Nestrans contributed match funding and a final grant of £17,700 was claimed towards the ten monthly surveys undertaken and final summary report.

Health and Transport Action Plan

Nestrans continued to fund 50% of the costs of a support manager for the Health and Transport Programme in partnership with NHS Grampian in 2020/21.

Nestrans has also continued to contribute along with Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire and Moray Councils and NHS Grampian to deliver the Transport to Healthcare Information Centre (THInC). The public transport unit within Aberdeenshire Council operates this dedicated telephone service to provide information on transport options for access to all NHS Grampian sites. Nestrans funded advertisement of the service and it has also been referenced on covid vaccination appointments to help those requiring advice and assistance on travel options to be able to attend.

Procurement Activity

Scotland Excel Engineering and Technical Consultancy Services Framework Agreement

Nestrans continues to be an associate member of Scotland Excel and as such can acquire consultancy services under the above framework agreement. Nestrans can use the framework to appoint consultants for services that cannot be undertaken in-house or by neighbouring authorities, either due to a skill shortage, the specialist nature of the work, or due to other workload commitments.

Although there is no guarantee of work being awarded, any use of the framework significantly reduces the cost of procurement of services to Nestrans and the consultants. To award a work package there is the option of directly selecting a consultant within the relevant lot(s) or conducting a mini competition amongst relevant consultants. Work can be awarded on a priced contract (lump sum), target contract or time-based contract basis. In 2020/21 Nestrans either held mini competitions or placed direct awards through the framework for the following projects:

- Aberdeen to Laurencekirk strategic corridor multi-modal feasibility study
- Covid-19 travel attitude and behaviour surveys
- RTS2040 Virtual Consultation Room
- Strategic Transport Appraisal/RTS2040 Consultation Analysis

Consultancy Support for Aberdeen Rapid Transit and Bus Partnership Fund
Bid Support
An extension to previous contract for additional work on Insch Accessibility
Study
Union Street Public Realm Transformation Work

A tender exercise was undertaken by Scotland Excel staff in 2020/21 to renew this framework and two members of Nestrans staff volunteered to participate in the technical evaluation group. The individual evaluations were undertaken in October and consensus meetings held in November. A benchmarking exercise was also undertaken to compare the tendered professional title rates to those within the then current framework (0616). This reported direct savings of 3.8% as well as 10.7% inclusive of indexation. The new Engineering and Technical Consultancy framework (0820) was officially awarded in February 2021 and became live on 18 March 2021. It will run for four years, up to 17 March 2025. Future usage of the framework will enable a compliant, best value and efficient method to procure technical services for Nestrans.