



A90(N) / A952 Ellon to Peterhead and Fraserburgh Road Corridor Review

Appraisal Evidence Review – Executive Summary

On behalf of **Nestrans**

nestrans

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Registered Office: Buckingham Court Kingsmead Business Park, London Road, High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire, HP11 1JU

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	Name	Position	Signature	Date
Prepared by:	Rachel Thomas	Associate	RMT	23/05/2023
Reviewed by:	Andrew Bagnall	Technical Director	AB	24/05/2023
Approved by:	Andrew Bagnall	Technical Director	AB	24/05/2023
For and on behalf of Stantec UK Limited				

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Executive Summary

Introduction

Nestrans, the Regional Transport Partnership for the North East of Scotland commissioned Stantec to review and update the previous studies on the A90(N) and A952 Ellon to Peterhead and Fraserburgh transport corridors.

Several previous Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance (STAG) based appraisals have considered options for improvements on these routes, including the:

- **Fraserburgh and Peterhead to Aberdeen Strategic Transport Study: Pre-Appraisal** (October 2015) and **Part 1 Appraisal** (March 2016) – this study identified a range of options and recommended that all be taken forward to the next stage. Ultimately two option packages were presented: a ‘Road and Bus Option Package’ and a ‘Rail and Bus Option’ Package.
- **Fraserburgh and Peterhead to Aberdeen Strategic Transport Study: STAG Part 1 Plus Study** (October 2017) – this study further defined and appraised the Road Option Package emerging from the above study.

Overall, the appraisals demonstrated a strong economic case for improvement of the two trunk road roundabouts at Ellon, and junction improvements at Toll of Birness and Cortes, forming the first stages of a longer-term improvement strategy on the route. Beyond these studies, other work, linked to development allocations in Ellon and Mintlaw, also identified that improvements to these junctions could form part of their mitigation strategies. At the Toll of Birness and Cortes junctions, there have also been additional and long-standing concerns around road safety.

Since the above appraisals were completed, however, there have been wider changes that have affected travel in the area, including but not limited to the opening of the AWPR and Balmedie-Tipperty dualling, the impact of COVID 19 on traffic flows and journey times; new housing and businesses in the communities linked by the routes; and changes in national transport policy.

In light of the above, in order to consider the case for investment and advise on future phases of work, Nestrans commissioned Stantec to undertake a structured review of each of the above studies, highlighting where material changes have occurred and setting out the overall impact of these on the study outcomes.

Study Area

The Study Area for this study is shown in Figure 1. It includes the:

- **A90(T) trunk road** – which provides the strategic road link between Aberdeen, Ellon, Peterhead, and Fraserburgh. The route is managed by Transport Scotland and maintained by Amey. The section within the Study Area extends from the B9005 / A90(T) junction south of Ellon to Peterhead and onwards to Fraserburgh and is single carriageway along the length of its route.
- **A952 (non-trunk) route** – which provides the quickest route between Aberdeen and Fraserburgh. The route connects to the A90(T) at the Toll of Birness north of Ellon and re-joins the A90(T) at Cortes junction south of Fraserburgh.

The above routes provide key connections for regional and local bus services and the freight and logistics sector as well as supporting active travel movements within the communities on the corridors.

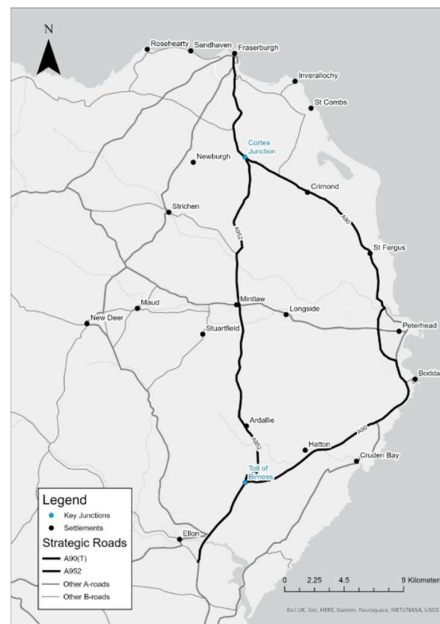


Figure 1: Study Area

Approach

The study involved the following key tasks:

- **a review and update of the baseline analysis** which informed the previous STAG based studies – this included an updated policy review, socio-economic and transport baseline, and an updated assessment of predicted future year travel patterns.
- **a review and update of the previous traffic surveys** – new vehicle count and queue length surveys were undertaken at key junctions and on sections of the A90 and A952 in March 2023. These replicated and expanded upon traffic surveys previously undertaken in the area in 2019 / 2020 and 2021.
- **additional stakeholder engagement** – a series of group and one-to-one meetings were undertaken with key stakeholders and briefing notes with opportunity to comment were issued to other stakeholders. Regular users of the corridors were also able to submit evidence of any problems experienced. The purpose of this engagement was to gather information on the current problems on the routes and their wider impact in light of the changes since the previous studies.
- **a structured review of each stage of the previous appraisals** based on the updated evidence base as established via the above.

It is noted that STAG has been updated since the original appraisals were undertaken¹. As well as the wider changes identified above, the review therefore also considered the potential impact of the updates to STAG on the appraisal outcomes.

Key Findings

The appraisal evidence review is structured around the first three stages of the updated STAG framework, namely: the Case for Change; Option Generation and Development; and the Preliminary Options Appraisal. The section below provides a summary of the key findings with respect to each of these stages.

Initial Appraisal: Case for Change

Problems

Based on the updated baseline data, the analysis suggests the problems identified in the previous appraisal provide a reasonable summary of the problems which are currently experienced in the study area. Key themes include: unreliable and unpredictable journey times; road safety concerns, particularly at key junctions; inadequate diversionary routes; and limited public transport options.

The review of the updated baseline indicated there was no material change in the magnitude of the majority of the problems previously identified. The most notable changes were a decrease in average speeds on the A90 southbound on approach to the Toll of Birness and the A90(T)/A948 junctions at Ellon in the AM peak, and an increase in heavy goods vehicles around the A90 Ellon bypass. In addition, based on the available forecasts there is an increased level of uncertainty as to future traffic levels reflective of continuing changes in policy and other influential factors.

Problem Impacts

The previously identified problem impacts also continue to be valid, with the evidence review suggesting similar themes to those identified in the previous studies. These include: impacts on existing industries and businesses, including the fishing industry in both Fraserburgh and Peterhead which is dependent on 'just in time' deliveries; difficulties attracting inward investment including in new and emerging industries because of the relative 'remoteness' of Peterhead and Fraserburgh; constraints on development due to

¹ including a restructuring of the stages of STAG and the need to appraise the options against a separate 'Climate Change' criterion and the Sustainable Investment and Sustainable Travel Hierarchies as set out in the National Transport Strategy 2 (see [national-transport-strategy.pdf](#))

the requirement for road upgrades; and social and economic exclusion due to poor transport connectivity; and associated impacts on regeneration priorities in the area.

Opportunities

The opportunities identified in the previous appraisal continue to provide a reasonable summary of the current position, with changes to the transport system continuing to offer the potential for a range of positive social and economic outcomes.

Constraints

The constraints previously identified remain relevant. However, since the previous appraisals, there has been a significant evolution in the policy environment as well as legislative changes which may impact the deliverability of some road-based options. While such issues may add a level of constraint, however, there remain avenues for exploration with respect to road investment. These are discussed further below.

Transport Planning Objectives

The Transport Planning Objectives (TPOs) set out within the FPASTS Pre-Appraisal draw upon the problems identified and reflect a range of transport modes. However, while the subject matter of the TPOs is in line with the updated baseline and the revised list of problems and opportunities, their structure is not in line with Transport Scotland's current advice. Therefore, before any subsequent appraisal, the TPOs should be smartened and information should be included on the data which will be used to monitor and evaluate their success as well as associated targets.

Option Generation and Development

In the majority of cases, the options previously identified continue to be applicable and the option sifting process and associated outcomes remain generally appropriate. However, given the passage of time and the changes to STAG, some refinement is required. Key points to note are as follows:

Option generation:

- the updated baseline suggests that the bus option to increase the number of express bus services has been partly progressed and therefore the continued relevance of this option should be reviewed.
- several of the public transport options intersect with other studies and consideration should be given to how these are progressed / intersect with any concurrent or future workstreams. These are as follows:
 - several of the bus options previously identified involved enhancements between the study area and Aberdeen City. This area was considered as part of a separate study focused on the Ellon Park and Ride to Garthdee (A90 / A956) Corridor in September 2021.
 - a separate feasibility study examining rail-based options is being progressed separately by the Campaign for North East Rail campaign group using Just Transition Funding.

Option sifting:

- several of the road-based options would likely score negatively against the new STAG Climate Change and Hierarchies criterion. However, it is considered that while the individual scoring may change, there would not be sufficient rationale to reject these options at the Option Sifting stage and therefore the overall outcomes remain broadly applicable.

Preliminary Options Appraisal

Two STAG Part 1 studies have been undertaken on the A90 and A952 corridors; a Part 1 Appraisal (October 2016) and a Part 1 Plus Study (October 2017). Given that the former recommended that all options be taken forward to the next stage and was superseded by the Part 1 Plus Appraisal, the review focused on the latter.

The Part 1 Plus study appraised the option package as a whole and set out a final package of options which it was recommended should be taken forward to the next appraisal stage.

Overall, the review indicated that the outcomes of the STAG Part 1 Plus Study are broadly reasonable. However, given that the study appraised the Option Package as a whole, it is unclear as to whether an individual intervention or group of interventions (i.e., a part solution) would address the problems identified and to what extent. Separately appraising the individual options is particularly important given that it is unlikely that all of the options could be delivered as part of the same delivery mechanism.

In addition, based on the updated evidence base and the changes made to STAG since the Part 1 Plus Study was undertaken, several areas of potential change can be identified which may impact the appraisal outcomes. These include:

- **STAG and policy updates** - the Option Package as a whole would score negatively against the new Climate Change STAG criterion, the Sustainable Travel and Investment Hierarchies, and the fit with the established policy directives criterion.
- **Affordability** – given the likely high cost of some of the options within the Option Package, it would likely score negatively with respect to affordability.
- **Economy** – given the updated travel demand and traffic forecasts, the user benefits of the Option Package may change.

Summary and Next Steps

Overall, the review suggests:

- The problems, opportunities, and constraints previously identified continue to provide a reasonable summary of the current situation, with the updated baseline suggesting that some problems on the A90 around Ellon have increased including increased congestion in the morning peak and an increase in heavy goods vehicles.
- The TPOs previously identified reflect the current problems and opportunities. However, the structure of the TPOs as they currently stand is not in line with current Transport Scotland advice and therefore some refinement is required.
- In the majority of cases, the options previously identified for appraisal continue to be applicable and the option development process and associated outcomes remain generally appropriate. However, given the updated evidence base, the changes to STAG, and the above refinement of the TPOs, a review and update of the options would be appropriate.
- While the outcomes of the Preliminary Options Appraisal are broadly reasonable, the Option Package as a whole was appraised rather than individual options. An appraisal of individual options would be appropriate to inform future investment decisions, particularly where it is unlikely that all of the options could be delivered as part of the same delivery mechanism,. This would also assess if individual interventions or group of interventions (i.e., a part solution) could address the problems identified and to what extent.

A range / combination of paths are available for scheme development. At the strategic level, future investment on the trunk road network will be guided by the Second Strategic Transport Projects Review (STPR2). Despite the previous work undertaken on the corridor indicating beneficial outcomes from targeted investment, the corridor is not specifically referenced in STPR2. However Scottish Government have confirmed that this does not necessarily preclude the progression of regional scale business cases, particularly if there is alignment with established regional priorities. In addition, while STPR2 was developed within the context established by the emission targets and the Sustainable Travel and Investment Hierarchies, the document also contains a range of recommendations with respect to the road network which may provide a rationale for road enhancements, including:

- **Trunk road and motorway safety improvements** - to help meet Scotland's Road Safety Framework vision and targets.

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- **Trunk road and motorway renewal for reliability, resilience and safety** - continued and increased investment in the trunk road and motorway network over and above current maintenance levels to keep the network reliable and resilient for road users.

Beyond STPR2, there is also the potential of funding opportunities associated with development contributions, the policy imperative around regeneration of the north coast towns, and energy transition opportunities. As such, although there have been significant legislative changes and a fundamental shift in policy and associated strategic funding streams since the previous appraisals, there remain avenues for exploration with respect to the investment in required transport infrastructure based on evidence-based appraisal.

It is recommended that an updated Case for Change be prepared in line with current Transport Scotland requirements and the updated STAG framework. This should be followed by a Preliminary Options Appraisal which considers the prioritisation and delivery of individual interventions as well as associated delivery and funding mechanisms. Given the strategic importance of the corridor for the wider region, it is considered appropriate that the study continues to be supported by Aberdeen City Region Deal Funding.