nestrans

Minute of Meeting of the North East Scotland Transport Partnership Board

Aberdeen, Wednesday, 18 February 2026

Present: Councillor Michael Hutchison (Chairperson); Councillor Alan Turner (Vice Chair); Councillor Dawn Black, Councillor Laurie Carnie (as substitute for Councillor John Cox), Councillor Isobel Davidson, Councillor Sandra Macdonald, Councillor Miranda Radley and Councillor Ian Yuill; and Colin Allanach and Gerry Donald.

In Attendance: Paul Finch, Caroline Hood, Claudia Stuerck, Jenny Anderson, Adam Kench and Lucy Johnston (Nestrans); Councillor Stephen Smith, Martin Hall and Tina Wight (Aberdeenshire Council); Councillor Martin Greig, Claire McArthur, Kirsty Chalmers, Lisa Christie and Mark Masson (Aberdeen City Council); Andrew Wallace (Grant Thornton UK); Alastair Camelford (Transport Scotland) and Ricardo Demertus (Network Rail).

Apologies: Councillor John Cox and Ian Ross.

Please note that if any changes are made to this minute at the point of approval, these will be outlined in the subsequent minute and this document will not be retrospectively altered.

DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT BUSINESS

1. The Chairperson proposed that the Board consider item 9.1 (Aberdeen City Region Deal – Procurement of Additional Design Services from Ballater Coach Parking Project) with the press and public excluded from the meeting.

The Committee resolved:-
in terms of Section 50A(4) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, to exclude the press and public from the meeting during consideration of the above item (article 17 of this minute refers) so as to avoid disclosure of information of the classes described in paragraphs 6, 8 and 9 of Schedule 7(A) to the Act.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND TRANSPARENCY STATEMENTS

2. Members were requested to intimate any declarations of interest or transparency statements in respect of the items on today's agenda, thereafter the following was intimated:-

(1) Councillor Radley advised that she had a connection in relation to item 5.1 (Aberdeen City Region Deal Update) by virtue of her being a Council appointed member of the Aberdeen City Region Deal Joint Committee. She considered that

the nature of her interest would not require her to leave the meeting prior to consideration of the item

(2) Colin Allanach advised that he had a connection in relation to item 5.3 (People and Place Programme Update) by virtue of him being a Board member of Scottish Cycling and a member of Ythan Cycle Club, which has a project being funded by Nestrans. He considered that the nature of his interest would not require him to leave the meeting prior to consideration of the item; and

(3) Councillor Yuill advised that he had a connection in relation to item 4.1 (Directors Report), item 5.1 (Aberdeen City Region Deal Update) and item 7 (Progress Report) by virtue of him being a member of NHS Grampian Board; and item 5.3 (People and Place Programme Update) by virtue of him being a member of Cycling UK. He considered that the nature of his interest would not require him to leave the meeting prior to consideration of those items.

MINUTE OF BOARD MEETING, OF 12 NOVEMBER 2025

3. The Board had before it the minute of its previous meeting of 12 November 2025, for approval.

The Board resolved:-
to approve the minute as a correct record.

NOTE OF OUTSTANDING MATTERS

4. The Board had before it a note of the outstanding items from previous meetings.

The following items were identified as being completed:-

- 25/26 Budget Matters - Query on Union Street Central and Beach Masterplan funding - It had been confirmed by ACC, that should receiving external funding contributions result in a surplus at the end of the project, then this surplus would go back into the Capital/CCMP programme;
- Director's Report – Annual Report - Approve the proposed approach to progressing updates to the Nestrans 2024/25 Annual Report - Report on Agenda for 18 February Meeting (Item 4.1); and
- Director's Report – Benchmarking of Arbroath Cycle Project - To note that the Chief Officer – Strategic Place Planning would arrange to undertake benchmarking in relation to the timelines for the cycle lanes recently installed in Arbroath – Information was included as an Appendix.

The Committee resolved:-

(i) to note the information provided; and

(ii) that in relation to the Arbroath Cycle Project, to note that following the monitoring and evaluation process of the project, that a report would be submitted to the Board, which would include comparable information with schemes undertaken in the North East, any lessons learned and community feedback.

NORTH EAST OF SCOTLAND TRANSPORT PARTNERSHIP
18 February 2026

PRESENTATIONS:- ABERDEEN TO CENTRAL BELT, PROGRAMME OF BENEFITS (RICARDO DEMURTAS - NETWORK RAIL & ALASTAIR CAMELFORD - TRANSPORT SCOTLAND)

5. The Board received a joint presentation from Ricardo Demurtas, Network Rail and Alastair Camelford, Transport Scotland on the Aberdeen to Central Belt programme of benefits.

Mr Camelford (1) made reference to Transport Scotland's Rail Recharge Strategy and ScotRail's Fleet Transition Strategy which refreshed the rail services decarbonisation action plan that was first published in July 2020; (2) advised that a there had been a number of changs since then, with the target date being reset for decarbonization of the traction elements of Scotland's railway from 2035 to 2045; (3) provided details and outlined the timetable in relation to live procurements for the replacement of ScotRail suburban trains and intercity fleet; (4) indicated that the first of those procurements would be replacing the intercity fleets that operate from the Central Belt up to Aberdeen and Inverness with either a cascaded diesel fleet from elsewhere in the UK or analternative diesel/electric option, which would operate on diesel power when it was out with electrified areas; and (5) explained that beyond this, they were still looking at what future options they might move forward with and that this would be determined in the coming years as technology and battery power developed, although it was unlikely that it would be hydrogen technology.

Mr Demurtas (a) described the projected service improvements from Dundee to Aberdeen as a result of an integrated project of renewals and enhancements and the modernisation of the signalling system including three passing loops and station interventions; (b) explained the development of the three phased approach to unlock significant passenger benefits from a journey time and connectivity perspective; (c) outlined the average journey time savings from Aberdeen to Dundee (7 mins), Glasgow (16 mins) and Edinburgh (18 mins); (d) provided details of the service/journey changes; (e) advised that they had now received funding for delivering the input to the final business case, which would include outline design for measuers in the Dundee and Arbroath areas, thereafter they would look to use those designs, the estimating and the access and all the inputs for that towards the final business case to be presented by Autumn 2026; and (f) intimated that they were also delivering at the same time, an outline design for the Montrose area, which was helping them to feed into the development of the investment strategy for the corridor.

During questions the following was noted:-

- Phase 1 (Dundee to Arbroath) would be subject to final business case being approved towards the end of this year, they would then move into implementation and having phase one works commissioned and completed around 2029/30. There was not an agreed programme for implementation for phases 2 (Montrose area) and 3 (Aberdeen area), which would be subject to further business case development and also the emerging picture around the fleet decisions that have to be made.

- in relation to the Aberdeen to Inverness line, the next interventions would be driven by the decisions that were made on the next phase of suburban fleet procurement, which would determine what changes and what timetable alterations/infrastructure interventions would be required on that route;
- that a work stream was ongoing to look at extending station platforms, with Portlethen being identified as one of those for consideration; and
- that phase one would deliver improvements for all passengers in terms of journey times and connectivity. There were no improvements in capacity for freight, but that would be unlocked by phase two.

The Board resolved:-
to thank Alastair Camelford and Ricardo Demurtas for their joint presentation.

2025/26 BUDGET MATTERS

6. The Board had before it a report which provided an update on the Partnership's 2025/26 financial monitoring and forecast outturn position and sought consideration of any budget or monitoring issues that may arise.

The report recommended:-
that the Board –
(a) note the monitoring position and forecast presented in Appendix 1;
(b) note the monitoring position and forecast for the People and Place projects presented in Appendix 2;
(c) approve the virements set out in Appendix 3; and
(d) approve the continuation of funding to next financial year to complete approved projects presented in Appendix 4.

Jenny Anderson provided a summary of the report, noting that in terms of the People and Place Programme grant funding for this financial year, that a grant variation offer had been received and accepted for the further £50k capital that had been requested.

The Board resolved:-
to approve the recommendations.

TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY STATEMENT 2026/27

7. The Board had before it a report which sought agreement from the Partnership on the proposed Treasury Management Strategy Statement for 2026/27.

The report recommended:-
that the Board –
(a) approve the revised Treasury Management Strategy as set out in Appendix A and Appendix B of this report; and
(b) note the Investment Activity in the nine months to 31st December 2025 as set out in Appendix C.

NORTH EAST OF SCOTLAND TRANSPORT PARTNERSHIP
18 February 2026

The Board resolved:-
to approve the recommendations.

DRAFT BUDGET PROPOSALS

8. The Board had before it a report which sought agreement, subject to funding being confirmed, the Nestrans budgets for 2026/27 along with an indicative 5-year programme plan covering the period 2026/27 to 2030/31.

The report recommended:-
that the Board –
(a) approve the 2026/27 Budgets of £1,120,368 and £3,1115,204 with programmes as detailed in Appendices 1 and 2, subject to anticipated funding levels being confirmed and making any appropriate adjustments following the Board's consideration;
(b) note that funding proposals for active travel behaviour change associated with the Scottish Government's People and Place Programme for 2026/27 are being developed and are discussed in a separate report, with any grant award received to be reported when known; and
(c) approve the general 5-year programme of works contained in Appendices 3 and 4 as a basis for future year annual budgets.

The Board heard Jenny Anderson outline the key information from the report.

The Director responded to questions relating to the next steps to be taken if the 10% funding from either of the Councils were not be be forthcoming.

Claire McArthur advised that the design work in relation to the A92 Murcar to Blackdog Active Travel Route had commenced.

The Board resolved:-
(i) to approve the recommendations; and
(ii) to note that in terms of the A92 Murcar to Blackdog Active Travel Route, that Claire McArthur would liaise with the Council's Roads Projects Team to obtain a copy of their programme to be circulated to members.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

9. The Board had before it a report which provided an update on strategic issues not otherwise covered on the agenda, including liaison with other Regional Transport Partnerships (RTPs), with Transport Scotland and the Scottish Government.

The report recommended:-
that the Board –

(a) note the appointment of Dr Caroline Hood to post of Nestrans' Strategy Manager, and other ongoing recruitment processes;
(b) note the ongoing strategic liaison arrangements with Transport Scotland, other RTPs, and other regional partners;
(c) note the unsuccessful outcome of the regional Expression of Interest submission to Transport Scotland for the pilot £2 Bus Cap project;
(d) approve publication of the 2024/25 Annual Report and Highlights Report;
(e) approve that the location of the 16 September 2026 Board meeting be at Aberdeenshire Council's Viewmount Offices in Stonehaven, as a hybrid meeting;
(f) note the proposed programme of Conferences and Presentations in Appendix E; and
(g) note the news releases and press coverage related to Nestrans in Appendix F.

In summarising the report, the Director made reference to the following:-

- The appointment of the Strategy Manager and progression of vacancies within the team structure;
- Strategic liaison meetings with Transport Scotland, RTP Leads and Chairs, Community Planning, Bus Alliance Board, Road Safety North East Scotland, Health and Transport Action Plan, Regional Economic Partnership and GetAbout Partnership;
- the £2 Bus Fare Pilot Expression of Interest Submission, noting that Nestrans was unsuccessful and that a joint bid by Hitrans and ZetTrans had been selected by Transport Scotland; and
- Nestrans Annual Report 2024/25.

The Chair on behalf of the Board congratulated Dr Caroline Hood on her appointment to the post of Nestrans' Strategy Manager.

The Board resolved:-
to approve the recommendations.

SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT ELECTIONS 2026: NESTRANS' MANIFESTO ASKS

10. The Board had before it a report which presented for approval and subsequent publication and distribution, a set of Nestrans' specific Manifesto Asks, to inform the forthcoming Scottish Parliament Elections, to be held on 7 May 2026.

The report recommended:-
that the Board –
(a) approve the proposed Nestrans Manifesto Asks presented in Appendix A for publication and subsequent distribution;
(b) note that an accompanying set of collective RTP asks has also been prepared, and that this will be presented alongside the Nestrans specific document; and
(c) note that Nestrans will follow guidance on the pre-election period, as published by Aberdeen City Council and Aberdeenshire Council.

During discussion of the nine manifesto asks in Appendix A, the following was raised:-

- to consider adding indicative costs at today's prices, which would outline the scale of the ask in the North East;
- to consider adding approximate time scales in terms of when we might be ready to invest and where we were at with specific business case proposals; and
- to consider rewording the section 'Ensure a Safe, Reliable, Resilient Strategic Road Network', specifically the four bullet points under the key regional investments.

The Board resolved:-
to approve the recommendations, subject to the Director reviewing Appendix A as outlined above.

ABERDEEN CITY REGION DEAL UPDATE

11. With reference to article 8 of the minute of the previous meeting of 12 November 2025, the Board had before it a report which provided an update on the strategic transport elements of the Aberdeen City Region Deal (ACRD), with a focus on the Strategic Transport Appraisal (STA).

The report recommended:-
that the Board –

(a) note the wider progress being made on the Transport elements of the Aberdeen City Region Deal Strategic Transport Appraisal detailed in Appendix A;
(b) approve publication of the Mobility Hubs Networks Scoping Project technical reports contained in Appendix B and Appendix C;
(c) note the proposal to further develop coach parking at Ballater to RIBA Stage 3, subject to ACRD Joint Committee approval;
(d) note the refinement of A90/A952 DMRB3 project to focus on Toll of Birness and Cortes Junctions, in order to fit with ACRD funding and programme constraints, subject to ACRD Joint Committee approval;
(e) note the proposal to commence a new study on Drones/Future Logistics, subject to ACRD Joint Committee approval;
(f) provide Delegated Approval to the Partnership Director to Award Tendered Contract for forthcoming City Region Deal funded study to explore Drones/Future Logistics subject to satisfactory Tender Exercise, Award Report and Approval from Treasurer and Procurement Officers, within budgeted value of £150,000; and
(g) note that a verbal update on the outcome of the Joint Committee decisions on 13 February 2026 will be provided to the Board.

The Board heard Claudia Stuerck provide a summary of the report and adding that the two material change requests relating to the refinement of the A90/ A952 project scope and the reallocation of the hydrogen refueler funding to support the Ballatar coach parking development and the new drones and future logistics study had been approved by the Joint Committee on meeting on the 13 February 2026.

In response to a question, Claudia provided a progress update in relation to the work on the Laurencekirk/Mearns Connectivity measures, advising that the appointment of a

consultant under the scheme framework had been made and the commencement of the study would be in mid-March with completion of this likely to be by the end of the Summer.
The Board resolved:-
to approve the recommendations.

ABERDEEN RAPID TRANSIT UPDATE - PUBLIC & STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT: SUMMARY OF OUTCOMES

12. The Board had before it a report which (1) presented a summary of the public and stakeholder engagement undertaken to inform the development of the Aberdeen Rapid Transit (ART) Business Case, carried out from 30 September to 7 November 2025; (2) outlined, in Appendix A, how the findings of the engagement would inform the next stage of project development; and (3) provided a brief update on the progress to date on the programme-level Outline Business Case (OBC) for ART.

The report recommended:-
that the Board –
(a) note the outcomes of the engagement set out in this report and detailed at Appendix A;
(b) note that the engagement findings will inform the option development and public acceptability considerations for the programme-level OBC;
(c) note the approach to planned further engagement outlined at section 7; and
(d) note the progress to date on the programme-level OBC, as described at section 8 of the report.

Kirsty Chalmers, Programme Manager, Bus Partnership Find, ACC provided a summary of the report, which included the following:-

- that the Scottish Government had published their infrastructure delivery pipeline on the 13 January 2026, which retained ART as a key national project following on from the STPR2 and were currently working on an outline business case;
- that there had been more than 2,250 interactions through a range of face-to-face events, drop-in events, and an online briefing. An online survey was hosted on the City Council's Commonplace engagement platform, and also shared through the Aberdeen Council engagement platform which had a total of 596 survey returns;
- that in addition, a separate market research exercise was undertaken, by an organisation called Scotpulse and received 1228 responses;
- that respondents broadly agreed that the existing public transport did not meet future needs and a new approach was required. There was an overarching agreement that ART would improve public transport in the region with 65% of the responses being positive across the Commonplace survey and 60% across the market research; and
- that negative responses tended to focus on questions or concerns around deliverability, value for money, rather than opposition to improvements in general.

During discussion, the following was noted:-

- that implications for bus services that currently run on the ART corridors had been discussed at the Bus Alliance meetings and there was an appetite to develop a partnership solution to improve the bus network as a whole; and
- the existing bus network would continue to be important, as ART would provide a network of two cross city routes to enhance connectivity from across the city including journey times, punctuality, a quality onboard experience and the fares and ticketing as a package that would make it a bus rapid transit experience.

The Board resolved:-
to approve the recommendations.

PEOPLE AND PLACE PROGRAMME UPDATE

13. The Board had before it a report which provided details of the up-to-date position on the 2025/26 People and Place Programme and set out plans for the 2026/27 Programme.

The report recommended:-
that the Board –
(a) note the progress made during the third quarter of this year's Programme;
(b) note the preparation and development and planning for the 2026/27 Programme; and
(c) note the intention to hold an Aberdeen event on Thursday, 5th March 2026.

Caroline Hood summarised the report providing information on the Quarter 3 highlights, which included details around strengthening active and sustainable travel habits across daily lives, supporting young people through skills, safety and access, widening participation through inclusion, accessibility and affordability and building regional capacity, skills and volunteer strength.

In addition, Caroline advised that due to unforeseen circumstances, Nestrans was no longer able to host the event at Pittodrie as planned and Board members would receive communication to that effect in due course. It was hoped that a future event celebrating the People and Place Programme could be arranged.

The Board resolved:-
to approve recommendations (a) and (b).

RAIL MATTERS UPDATE

14. The Board had before it a report which provided an update on a number of rail related matters.

The report recommended:-
that the Board –

(a) note key themes discussed at the recent Rail Futures Conference held in Edinburgh;
(b) note the update on accessibility issues at Inverurie and Insch Stations, including recent engagement with Network Rail; and
(c) note ongoing engagement with the East Coast Mainline Authorities consortium.

The Board noted with disappointment that the Department for Transport were no longer funding Network Rail to take Inverurie Station any further forward for design development. In this regard, the Director provided further information on the process and decision taken by the Scottish Government.

The Board resolved:-
to approve the recommendations.

PROGRESS REPORT

15. The Board had before it a progress report which outlined the status of various activities in support of the Regional Transport Strategy.

The Board resolved:-
to note the progress report.

PUBLICATIONS AND CONSULTATIONS

16. The Board had before it a report which provided information on recent publications and consultations and sought views or comments on draft responses where appropriate.

The report made reference to the following:-

- Scotland's Climate Change Plan – 2026-2040;
- Draft Transport Noise Action Plan 2024 to 2028;
- Rail Recharged: Scotland's Fleet Transition Strategy - Delivering a Modern Fleet for a Connected Scotland; and
- National Speed Management Review Update.

The report recommended:-
that the Board –
(a) note the content of this report;
(b) note the submission to the Draft Climate Change Plan Consultation (Appendix A); and
(c) note the submission to the Draft Transport Noise Action Plan Consultation (Appendix B).

The Board resolved:-
to approve the recommendations.

NORTH EAST OF SCOTLAND TRANSPORT PARTNERSHIP
18 February 2026

In accordance with the decision taken at Article 1 of this minute, the following item was considered with the press and public excluded.

ABERDEEN CITY REGION DEAL (ACRD) - PROCUREMENT OF ADDITIONAL DESIGN SERVICES FROM BALLATER COACH PARKING PROJECT

17. The Board had before it a report which sought approval to extend the current design commission for the Ballater Mobility Hub, extending the scope of work on the coach parking element from RIBA Stage 2, through to RIBA Stage 3.

The report recommended:-
that the Board provide Delegated Approval to the Partnership Director to extend the existing design contract held by AECOM from the current value to a revised total award *(figures were outlined within the exempt report)* to accommodate additional design work to extend the Coach Parking element of the project from RIBA Stage 2 to RIBA Stage 3.

The Board resolved:-
to approve the recommendation.
- COUNCILLOR MICHAEL HUTCHISON, Chairperson