

Report to Partnership Meeting 24 November 2017

RESEARCH AND STRATEGY DELIVERY

Fort William Pre-Appraisal STAG Study

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To advise Members on the progress of the work to undertake a Scottish Transport Pre-Appraisal (STAG) for Fort William.

Background

Fort William is the principal town in the Lochaber area and as such is a vital economic centre for the West Highlands. It is also a strategic hub for the strategic road and rail network. The transport network in and around Fort William fulfils both a strategic and local role and has seen increasing journeys across all modes in recent years.

Increasing summer visitor numbers throughout the Highlands and islands, development allocated within the West Highland and Islands Local Development Plan and employment-led growth which may be generated by the proposed manufacturing facility on the site of the current Fort William smelter have led to calls for both short-term capacity improvements and consideration of longer-term interventions.

Scope

While STAG is a single continuous process, the guidance places significant emphasis on the development of a robust case for change as part of the Pre-Appraisal. This initial commission will therefore be focussed on the preparation of a comprehensive and evidence-based Pre-Appraisal Report.

The Pre-Appraisal will use available evidence and the STAG process to identify problems and opportunities across all modes of transport in the Fort William area.

In particular, this will include examining the transport-related factors which are affecting the relationship between connectivity, accessibility, economic development and land-use development in the Fort William area. It will identify opportunities in relation to how strategic multi-modal transport improvements could support local and nationally significant economic development opportunities within the area.

The scope of work includes considering problems and opportunities in relation to the road, railway, marine and active travel infrastructure in and around Fort William, particularly in light of traffic growth and anticipated residential and commercial developments in the area. It is important that the analysis of problems and opportunities goes beyond personal / business travel and clearly considers problems and opportunities in relation to the conveyance of freight.

Accordingly, the commission will comprise the following key elements of the transport appraisal, namely:

- Policy and key document review.
- Transport, socio-economic and development planning baseline which, taken as a whole, will be used as the basis of developing and analysing transport problems and opportunities.
- Stakeholder and public engagement.
- Setting of Transport Planning Objectives.
- Generation of an initial long-list of options, refined to remove any options which clearly have no possibility of delivering the objectives.
- Development of a shortlist of options which may merit more detailed appraisal.

Transport Scotland commissioned the development of a microsimulation model of the Fort William area in 2014, with a view to testing a series of small scale options to improve traffic flow on the A82. New and extended traffic counts for summer 2017 have been undertaken and the existing model is being updated through a separate commission.

Funding and Project Management

The study will be project managed by The Highland Council. The Project Steering Group will also include representatives of Highlands & Islands Regional Transport Partnership (HITRANS) and Highlands & Islands Enterprise (HIE) and Transport Scotland.

HITRANS are leading the procurement of the work by utilising Transport Scotland's Multi Framework Agreement for Transport and Land-Use Modelling and Transport Appraisal and Planning.

HITRANS and The Highland Council have both agreed to contribute funding towards the pre-appraisal and an application has been made to Highlands and Islands Enterprise to support the work on a similar basis as the recently commissioned STAG appraisal for Orkneys Internal transport network.

The intention is to commence the work in December 2017 with the appointed consultant expected to deliver a draft Pre-Appraisal report by May 2018.

Recommendation

Members are invited to note this report and support the partnership approach to tackling one of the key priorities identified in both the original Regional Transport Strategy and recent refresh.

RTS Delivery

Impact - Positive

Comment – This work supports RTS Strategic priorities to enhance regional connectivity.

Policy

Impact - Positive

Comment – This work supports policies to reduce congestion and improve journey time reliability set out in the RTS.

Financial

Impact – Positive

Budget line and value – An allocation of funding has been identified in the 2017/18 research and strategy budget.

Equality

Impact – Positive

Comment – Improving regional connectivity helps improve the competitiveness of business in the West Highlands and improving journey times in Fort William helps local bus operators provide more reliable public transport services.

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