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Report to Partnership Meeting 6th June 2008

RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

ACTIVE TRAVEL

SUMMARY

The report provides information on the outcomes from the Active Travel Regional Audit Study and proposes how HITRANS and its constituent Councils should best proceed to promote active travel in communities across the Highlands and Islands.

RECOMMENDATION

The Board is asked to note the outcome of the Active Travel Regional Audit Study and agree how best to proceed with further Audits across the Partnership area based on the options included in the report.

DETAIL

Work on the Active Travel Regional Audit Study of which the Board was provided with information at its Meeting of 3 August 2007, is now complete. The Study produced a methodology for undertaking Active Travel Audits of settlements in terms of identifying existing facilities for walking and cycling, the constraints that are present to active travel within the local transport network, and recommending enhancements that could be introduced, both in terms of improved infrastructure and soft measures such as information and publicity, signage, maps and other promotional material that will encourage mode transfer from cars and greater use of existing facilities.

The final methodology was tested by undertaking trial Audits in Dingwall and Keith, and adjusted to reflect the experience gained both in terms of the process and the best means of presenting the output.

A key purpose of the audits was to establish and develop a costed programme of implementation for:

'A practical network of high quality routes suitable for cycling within each settlement that provides convenient and safe access to all major destinations'

and

'A network of routes for pedestrians focussed upon railway stations, bus stations, major employment areas, local shopping areas, leisure/recreation centres, hospitals, and main trip generators.'

It was found that significant benefit could be gained by encouraging local people to engage in the audit process in terms of gaining information on usage of existing facilities and where provision of improvement would add real value. It would also provide an opportunity for the local community to understand the process and take ownership of the output.

The seamless integration of land use and transportation planning has always been a challenge for Councils particularly when looking at best practice in planning services and development in local communities. Opportunities to ensure best integration of new developments within existing settlements have often been lost due to the lack of availability of information on the existing transport system linked to the Local Plan settlement plans. A key element has been the lack of provision of active travel plan and public transport information in the same format as that used in the local plan mapping systems. The methodology proposed aims to create an active travel plan which can be used as an overlay to the local plan settlement plans for each of the key settlements identified in the RTS. This will be a useful tool to Developers, Development Control Officers, and Transportation Officers in ensuring that new development best integrates into existing settlements and ensures that such developments add value to communities by encouraging a healthier lifestyle for both new and existing people within our towns.

The Way Forward

The intention is to allow Councils to carry out Active Travel Audits in each of the 12 Regional Key Settlements and Inverness. It was originally envisaged that Consultants carry out this work as a follow on from the original Study but it is now proposed that this approach be altered as a result of the likely cost identified by indicative prices supplied for the work, and the findings of the trials where the benefits through local engagement were found to be a value. In addition it is considered that Council transportation employees should be encouraged to gain experience in the audit processes so they can use the output to greatest effect, and potentially cascade the process to other settlements within their areas.

Funding of £60,000 has been included in the 2008/09 Research Programme for Active Travel Audits. Given that experience has already been gained in the Highland and Moray Council areas, it is proposed that Audits be undertaken this autumn in the other 3 Council areas as a first priority, then further Audits in Highland and Moray as funding permits.

The proposed settlements to be audited in priority order are

1. Kirkwall, Stornoway and one of the Argyll and Bute Key Settlements
2. Elgin and one of the Highland Key Settlements (possibly Fort William)

The method of delivering the Audits could be one of the following

1. Consultant undertakes the Audit
2. Consultant leads the Audit, supported by Council staff with significant local community engagement

3. Consultant employee is seconded to each Council to lead the Audit, working with Council employees and the local community.
4. Councils undertake the Audit working with the local community.

From the findings of the Study it is recommended that option 1 is not pursued on the basis of cost and effectiveness, that Option 3 or 4 be considered for future Studies by Councils once the initial experience is gained in each area, and that Options 2 or 3 be adopted for the 2008/09 programme as best fits individual Council commitments and employee availability.

A number of Councils have individual Framework Agreements in place for this type of work, and HITRANS intends to invite interest and proposals from consultants to engage in a 3 year framework agreement for individual commissions in a number of disciplines of less than £25000, with a maximum overall framework commission in any year of £100,000.

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