**Transport Programme – Rural Impact Screening – Highland Mainstream Schools and Public Bus Services Re-tendering 2016**

**Rural Impacts**

**Background**

The Transport Programme has been instigated by Highland Council to make savings on the delivery of transport services across Highland – the target reduction is to generate £2.246m savings (15%) from expenditure of £15.003m during the baseline year of 2014-15.

The focus of this rural impact assessment is Highland Council’s expenditure on mainstream schools and public bus services in Highland (excluding Sutherland as services were retendering there during 2015. The value of contracts for mainstream schools (which includes Gaelic and Denominational schools) and public bus services (which includes dial-a-bus services) for the baseline year of 2104-15 is £13,415,584.

The current contracts are delivered by a range of providers, the vast majority of which can be defined as small to medium sized enterprises.

Retendering activity in Sutherland generated savings of £242,456 and contract variation negotiations with high route cost operators in various parts of the Highlands generated £35,968; therefore the balance of savings to be accomplished through the remaining Highland retendering of services is £1,967,576.

Through a consultation running September – December 2015 current and prospective suppliers, the general public, Ward Councillors, community councils and community groups were informed of the budgetary circumstances and of Highland Council’s intention seek significant savings during the tendering of bus services. Views on potential impact and ideas for cost efficient service provision were sought from these stakeholder groups during the consultative process and reports capturing these have been fed into the process of route specifications planning.

**1. Describe what the change will mean in rural communities – positive and negative.**

E.g. centralisation, re-location or closure of service, change in sector provision e.g. third sector or private sector model, is this different in different rural areas?

|  |
| --- |
| The Council’s aim is to provide a comprehensive set of school and public bus services across Highland. The provision of home-to-school services will have priority – they are a statutory requirement.  Recommendations for the provision of public bus services will be dependent upon how much the school services will cost to provide – with the reduced budget available with which to purchase transport services market forces will be a significant determinant upon Highland Council’s ability to continue to provide public bus services.  For many of the routes the tender documentation will include options for different service levels in order to assess the cost of alternatives proposed during the public consultations and to assess the savings potential.  Wherever feasible, school routes will be opened to the general public rather than being run as pupil only services. This was considered a positive move during the consultations.  On all public routes, if wheelchair accessible vehicles are not already in use, options are invited for accessible vehicles: this could improve accessibility for disabled people.  An increase of approximately 5% on the Council’s maximum fare scale will be applied, with the increase being slightly biased towards longer journeys: potentially higher fares, particularly for people living further away from larger settlements; but potentially lower contract costs for Highland Council if contractors feed the fare increases into their tender prices. |

**2. How will people in rural communities be affected? Both positive and negative impacts.**

Accessibility of service - travel time to the service, higher costs of goods/services, new costs of goods/services, energy costs, public access to internet, impact on seasonal or part-time workers, self-employed people and people on low wages, impact on land based business and on tourism business, concerns about sustainability of the service, is there variable impact across different rural communities?

|  |
| --- |
| Rural communities provided their views during the consultation exercise, typically highlighting services they would wish to see protected, issues and difficulties with current service provision, as well as indicating how they would wish to see services developed and improved. The extent to which the range of issues, ideas and aspirations of rural communities can be implemented and satisfied will be very substantially based on the prices quoted by potential suppliers in their tender submissions.  A range of the issues, ideas and aspirations from each of the rural communities are given below.  Caithness  No buses come down the B874 Thrumster to Gillock road – if they did then they could take the children to school instead of the current fleet of buses and taxis. The general public could also make use of the buses. With the new houses at Gillock a bus service would be very helpful.  Bus quality, punctuality and reliability are very poor. Newer and better maintained buses should be used.  Rural buses are needed to allow individuals to get into towns for shopping.  The terrain at rural bus stops can be difficult to negotiate – Access Panel will be discussing this with the Council.  The X99 service cuts are causing an issue and, as well as a sense that Wick is being neglected, it is considered that locations such as Castletown, Bower and Keiss have a very sparse service now.  Skye  The school bus service Dunvegan via Sligachan to Portree is good but it’s a private service for the high school and doesn’t go into the square in Portree so if you’re getting a bus to Inverness you have to take your bags from the school to the square which may leave you slightly tight for time. Plus it would be good if there was a service through the summer months/holidays for people that go to Portree to work.  Would like to see more frequency of buses to and from Peinachorran, particularly around 5pm, to get home from work. Would also like the bus to run outwith school terms. Would help to reduce congestion and parking in Portree too.  Important to keep the Braes Friday lunchtime bus service.  Minginish will need a good service to the new hospital in Broadford when it is built.  Not all bus stops are physically marked for passengers to wait at.  Services to the shops in Kyle and Broadford are vital for those living in Sleat, whilst it is considered that there are poor connections form the south of the island to Portree.    The pavements in Armadale are often under water posing a bus access issue.  Considered to be a disjointed bus service at Kyleakin – also poor options on a Sunday other than Citylink – and no link between Kyle and Kyleakin.  Enabling the bus to turn at Ardvasar would be a great help – it is a long standing problem that it stops at Armadale Pier 1.5 miles from the village.  Wester Ross & Lochalsh  Very difficult to get from South West Ross to Broadford.  It would be very helpful if the school bus from Cove could link in with the Westerbus to Inverness at Poolewe - only happens at present if the Inverness bus is running late.  Local links between communities desirable sometime between, say, 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. Communities from Cove to Poolewe to Aultbea and Gairloch.  If the school transport serving Gairloch High School is already open to the general public then it needs to be better publicised – and if currently unavailable then it would be good to open it up.  Poolewe-Dingwall and Poolewe-Ullapool - would be good to have 3 hours at destination rather than just over 2 hours, as it's quite rushed at present, especially if have you have an appointment.  It would be really good to have an additional later evening bus from Inverness to Poolewe for connection when travelling from long distances, and do not arrive in Inverness until after 5.20pm. But realise this would be a huge expense.  We should not lose what we already have which is the Westerbus from Gairloch to Inverness on Tue, Thu and Fri. And the Westerbus on a wed afternoon to Dingwall. A bus service to Torridon would be great for doctor appointments etc., or a regular day bus to Gairloch would be great (although the budget restrictions are understood).  Meeting the evening train at Strathcarron. Currently the connecting bus will only take people to Lochcarron. There is no way to return to Applecross or Shieldaig/Torridon except by using the community car scheme.  The times do not allow a resident from Glenelg to get to Broadford and back using a bus. At least one a week should be synchronised to allow this journey.  Maintaining the weekly shopping bus from Gairloch to Ullapool is vital.  Lochaber  If you live outside Inverness in the direction of Fort William you cannot spend a Saturday night in Inverness as there are no late buses, the 2015 being unsuitable.  Fort William is the second largest town in the Highlands and I cannot even get to work on time! I work in Inverness and commute daily from Fort William by bus. Many other working people and college students in Lochaber also travel to Inverness to work/study some on the bus but many taking cars. Why is there not a bus that will get people to their work in Inverness on time i.e. prior to 0900hrs? Say 0840?  The number 46 Fort William to Corpach service could be run a lot better. The buses are often late or do not show up at all. Many of the buses only go as far as Caol bus depot which is very inconvenient, especially when waiting with two small children in very cold weather conditions.  Please build a new bus shelter at the last bus stop for the Corpach-industry area.  It would help to have our local Shiel bus to leave Fort William later than 17.40 to Arisaig to allow for eating out in the evening.  The buses could link to allow easier access to and from the local Doctor and other outreach services provided in Mallaig (dentist, CAB, etc.) This would also allow access to local food shops and recreational facilities such as the community swimming pool which is need of support. The bus during the day to Fort William (not the early school bus) restricts the time available in town, leaving to time for accessing recreational facilities.  The Skye to Glasgow service and the Inverness to Fort William buses come through all the stops from Invergarry to Spean Bridge virtually at the same time. It would provide a more comprehensive service if they were staggered.  Better local service to and from Roy Bridge- it’s ridiculous a bus runs back from Roy Bridge at 6pm but people can't get on it.  Service 44 from Fort William to Kinlochleven should leave from the bus station at Morrisons and not from Middle Street.  Kilchoan and all stops to Fort William. This is the ONLY bus service with only one bus per day Mon-Sat. It is absolutely essential for anyone without a car, or unable to drive to Fort William for shopping/hospital/ etc.  Fort William is our nearest town and therefore a continued public bus service is very important for the rural community of Morvern, especially people who don't have their own transport. Also, Morvern has an aging population therefore it is important to have a public service.  The Strontian local bus service is considered a lifeline – for instance allowing access to Fort William on a Saturday for the young people and the elderly to go into Fort William mid-week for their shopping and personal needs such as visiting the bank. Extending or moving back the return time from Fort William on a Saturday (currently 15:20) would enable residents to access more social activities.  An important priority is establishing good rural transport to reach centres where services are – Strontian has the youth club, a library and a retirement home – people from all around wish to access these facilities.  Concern over lack of information on bus services affecting residents and visitors; plus concern about lack of bicycle provision on buses, also impacting on tourists which are important for Lochaber economy.  Highland Council needs to be aware of the “accessibility trap” – accessibility isn’t just about wheelchairs – there needs to be consideration given to amputees, other walking impaired and visually impaired passengers.  Badenoch & Strathspey  Need more disabled accessible transport.  The school buses could be used as a public service and a charge made for its use, thus contributing a small income. Fuel is used returning the bus from Kingussie High School to the depot in Aviemore and it is empty. You could charge customers to use it on a journey that would be made anyway.  A bus service Grantown-on-Spey to Aberlour with connections to Elgin was suspended in 2014. This was a vital service for the isolated individuals along the route. Also to travellers direct to Aberlour and onwards to Elgin. The Speyside Way is close to this route with potential pick-up/ drop off points for walkers. Likewise for visitors to Strathspey thus promoting a tourism service.  A circular bus from Grantown to Aviemore to have a better regular service. Later buses are needed on this route for workers - this would also help the recruitment crisis in certain sectors.  The school bus from Grantown to Nethy Bridge on a Friday should run earlier, leaving Grantown when the school finishes at 1.20pm.  The frequency and connecting service Grantown-on-Spey via Aviemore to Cairngorm and return should be reviewed and upgraded for daily scheduling. Thus being advantageous to locals, summer visitors and winter sports. Links to other villages and the towns/ larger villages in the area. Visitors should be able to get from the villages to the mountain for skiing.  Saturdays and Sundays - poor morning connections from Grantown to Aviemore and Cairngorms. Should be as the Monday-Friday services are.  If Citylink carries out their planned changes to services to Badenoch many people will have to use their minibus link to meet the Citylink service on the A9. One connection point is at Bruar where there is no bus shelter. Given the dangerous weather conditions often occurring in that locality this seems to put their customers' safety at risk. I understand that The Highland Council does not run the A9 service, but I would be keen for The Highland Council to work with Citylink to ensure public safety.  Current services not meeting needs. Also concerned that when A9 upgraded, there will be no tie up from villages to A9 other than being reliant on use of motor car if you have one.  The Newtonmore to Carrbridge two-hourly service is very useful to members of the Kingussie community wishing to visit Aviemore and Carrbridge. Whilst it is a good service it is a bit long for elderly people to sit.  Withdrawing the Grantown-Aviemore-Newtonmore evening bus which runs on Fridays and Saturdays would cause problems for workers as well as those attending social events. It was also suggested this should be extended to a daily service.  There is a need to balance services between tourism and local needs given the significant income generated by tourism to the area.  Linking to railway timetable would be good – a problem especially in Kingussie (5 minutes from main road) and Newtonmore (10 minutes from main road) and Carrbridge (1/2 mile from main road) – signage and timings of these links would be good.  Laggan and Dalwhinnie are very poorly served.  Will need to ensure transport to the new hospital is appropriate.  Easter Ross & Black Isle  There is a perfectly good service running from Cromarty to Inverness.  There should be a 7.30, 7.45 bus from Cromarty to Inverness in the mornings, closing the gap between 7.21 and 9.10 and a bus from Inverness to Cromarty between after 8.24 and before 11.24 in the evenings and potentially a bus after or instead of 11.24, it is too early.  The Cromarty to Fortrose to Inverness service is not reliable enough. sometimes buses are late or don't turn up - the evening service is essential if any kind of social life is wanted, plus getting back from trains getting into Inverness after 6pm.  Fortrose from Culbokie. The kids can't stay for after school activities as they can't get home if not on school bus. There are no other links to Fortrose (where everything is - leisure centre, golf club, sailing club, service point, doctors’ surgery, library, etc.).  The Cromarty to Dingwall service is inadequate. it only runs three days a week and the timings don't work for getting much done at either end, e.g. for medical appointments. Some people (including in my family) have had to get bus from Cromarty to Dingwall, then Dingwall to Inverness, then Inverness to Cromarty to be able to make appointments or other Dingwall needs. Ticketing doesn't make this feasible as it is VERY expensive, so some form of 'all day' ticket for use on different routes would be helpful.  You could reduce the number of buses that run on my route (Contin-Inverness) IF the timings were looked at and made more suitable for workers. E.g. there is a bus just after 7am and then one at 9am that go to Inverness. Neither is great for work, you either get in early or late for a normal work day. Why not put one bus on at 8am that would arrive at a reasonable time and reduce your costs?  My children, now young adults comment on how expensive the buses are for us.  Buses linking up to Number 25 bus in Duncanston for Inverness or 27 bus to Dingwall. This would help link up to other forms of transport as current buses do not allow Culbokie commuters or others to get early morning trains from Inverness.  Culbokie to Inverness needs a better service. Because of times I can't use the bus to get to work (I start at 0800) and it is a long wait after work to get the only bus back. I am forced to use the car.  Buses could run to time and have a consistent fare. Our 12 year old daughter uses the service bus from Culbokie to Dingwall Academy and return each day. The bus is often late, the drivers are rude and our daughter is often charged a different fare to that published.  Culbokie buses could extend beyond Schoolcroft and turn at east end of village (serving new housing estate and Braefindon area).  Culbokie is a commuter village - it needs better links with Inverness. The south side of the Black Isle has a great service - some of these buses should be diverted to the north side.  A 'round east Black Isle service' with an interchange at Tore would address many concerns.  The bus stops at Fortrose, it should continue to Rosemarkie on ALL occasions. For all the time difference it would take as bus often turns and WAITS at Rodger Close/Court before going on to actual bus stop. It waits with engine running so next to no saving is being made so could easily go on to Rosemarkie, allowing elderly/disabled more use of bus service.  More direct services to Inverness from Muir of Ord via Tore not Beauly Kirkhill etc.  Alness - Dingwall needs to be more frequent as the recent cuts are causing major problems.  As the Evanton - Dingwall commercial service has virtually been withdrawn funding needs to be found urgently for an early afternoon return service to Evanton and further north.  Keep reasonable timings on Conon – Dingwall – Alness service especially for people going to work at the Alness call centre.  Alness-Evanton-Dingwall: lot of travel north for work e.g. to Drummuie from Dingwall – possible to introduce more commuter services for fare-paying passengers?  Introduction of direct bus service to and from hospital to Easter Ross/ Black Isle, service to include suitable times for staff working shifts.  Strathpeffer and Alness routes - travel to work times. Currently there's a nearly 2 hour gap in the mornings and evenings at the precise time when people need to travel. Also - Strathpeffer bus finishes around 7pm. For example - after the 4.13pm bus from Strath to Dingwall (27) - the next one is at 6pm (though usually half an hour late). If I need to be in work in Strath at 8.30 - I have to get 6.40 from Dingwall which gets me to work for 7am - or the 8.40 which makes me late. Similarly Dingwall to Inverness. And the Alness routes. The very times folks need buses for work.  If rural buses are to be any use at all they need to run more than a couple of times in a day.  The Balintore - Tain bus does not meet the needs of the community because students from Balintore that attend college in Alness have to get a taxi to Tain due to the serious lack of transport from the seaboard villages.  Dial-a-bus around Nigg – practice of having to dial before 6pm the day before is restrictive. Will need a bus link to get ferry passengers to village from terminal – perhaps easing of dial-a-bus to get ferry passengers to Tain?  To get to Strathpeffer from Shandwick – you have to go to Inverness then Dingwall – the journey takes all day.  Inverness & Nairn  The Saturday bus from Cannich to Inverness and return journey is a very useful service and should be kept. It provides a valuable service to the youth of our communities giving them independence and a chance to socialize with others.  Our present service run by Ross' buses is very good especially for pensioners going from Tomich/Cannich Beauly/Dingwall - could run on one more day.  To keep people living in the Tomich area public transport is essential.  The school bus currently takes the primary school pupils to Balnain Primary School. This means young children being at the bus stop at 8.15 am and arriving at school at approximately 8.30 am. It would be better for these young children to be picked up at approximately 8.45 am, particularly in cold winter months. The bus should leave the school in the afternoon at 3.00 pm but is nearly always late.  First bus north from Kirkhill is 09:27 and doesn't get to Dingwall until nearly 10:00 - No use at all for commuting! Pretty nearly useless for even irregular use.  At present there is a limited one way link between Ardersier and Nairn in the morning and the evening. This restricts public transport access to Nairn Hospital which is the community’s primary health care facility, it also restricts access to both community planning partner services, employment and social activities and facilities. A return service at start work, lunch time and cease work would provide reasonable access to these facilities.  Foyers/Dores to Inverness arriving for starting School / work and returning from school / work. Arriving mid-morning and early afternoon. The morning service is already very full with school children and workers, older people need access to transport at different times to working / school attending population.  Services are required on the Whitebridge – Foyers – Inverness route which allow for shopping and socialising. Would also be good to have an evening service for residents to go out in Inverness or Fort Augustus. |

**3. Are any other public services changing locally as well?**

Is there cumulative impact from partners’ services?

|  |
| --- |
| It is likely that by August 2017 all secondary schools will be operating a 33-period week. The position with primary schools is less certain – some may change, some may not. The adoption of a 33-period week will alter start/end times during the school week and, whilst detail is not available at present regarding precise start/end times, the tendering of school transport services has sought to incorporate guidance into the mini-competition documentation.  In three-five years’ time there may be new hospitals at Aviemore and Broadford. It is too early to reflect their presence in bus route terms but it is likely that planning gain finance will need to be applied to transport services to augment services arising from this current tendering.  Whilst not public services, there are a number of housing developments being planned or at early stages of construction which may also require the application of planning gain where it is available to support new bus services. For example:   * In Kingussie there is planning permission for 300 houses. * At Braes of Conon a 150-house development is about a third way through construction currently. * A developer is seeking planning permission for 70 residential and a couple of commercial units near the Conon Hotel. * Whitebridge is continuing to grow due to the number of new houses being constructed. If the affordable housing in Gorthleck and Foyers is built, then these two communities will also be growing. * Tomatin has been zoned in the Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan for 200 houses. |

**4. Have other options or adjustments been considered?**

E.g. co-location, mobile services, telephone/internetaccess, new transport links, re-location of some centralised functions to off-set local impact, transfer of assets, local groups providing the service instead.

|  |
| --- |
| Community transport grants have recently been approved for 24 projects across the Highlands. These support local communities, complementing Highland Council’s contracts with commercial providers through efficient provision of additional transport services.  The March 2016 Education, Children and Adult Services Committee will consider a paper describing proposed changes to school transport policy. Particular aspects which could affect the provision of transport include:   * Pupil Safety assessment – revising policy to allow assessment of school transport on safety grounds, to now consider the walking route on the basis of the child being unaccompanied. At present policy is based upon the pupil being accompanied by parent or guardian. This change would be to recognise medical circumstances where parents or guardians may legitimately not be able to accompany a child, which in turn could alter the outcome of the safety assessment. * Transport to/from more than one address – the policy will make provision for transport to be provided where a child is routinely resident at more than one address e.g. due to parental separation.  The arrangements would be based upon both addresses being within the same ASG (to avoid introduction of new routes/additional costs for cross ASG travel), and based on notice/agreed travel patterns, to ensure adequate capacity on vehicles. * Privilege (concessionary) places – clarifying current policy and arrangements in relation to concessionary places (audit recommendation).  And subject to the Council budget agreeing a saving target on this income stream, proposing the implementation of a distance related charge, rather than the current flat rate £1 per day regardless of distance. * Gaelic Medium/Denominational Transport – proposing in principle the establishment of ‘transport entitlement zones’ for these schools.  To replace the current policy which is not clearly defined, has evolved over time, and could be challenged on grounds of consistency or equality.   With regard to how to make school bus services more cost-effective a common suggestion was to make more or all services mixed use (where there are extra seats and where it is safe and practical to do so). This has been built into the mini-competition documents, where feasible. |

**4 options – please detail which of the 4 options relates to this proposal**

1. No impact
2. Negative impact but mitigation identified – please state nature of mitigation - or positive impact identified, again state what this is
3. Potential rural impact – further consideration required
4. Other – under development, rural impact assessment required at later stage

|  |
| --- |
| Option 3, ‘Potential Rural Impact’ is most likely to be relevant, as the true impact cannot be accurately ascertained before the contracts have been awarded.    Option 2 ‘Negative Impact’ would also be relevant, the mitigation being route specifications based on serving statutory requirements, listening to the results of the consultations undertaken and then purchasing as extensive a set of public bus services as the budget will permit.  Mitigation is also served by the Community Services Committee making decisions on the range of public bus services to ‘buy’ when it meets on 18th August 2016. |