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CD02: National Planning Framework 3, Jun 2014
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CD37: Far North Line Review Group
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CD47: 2017 Strategic Timber Transport Fund (STTF) additional funding

Issue 5	CONNECTIVITY AND TRANSPORT	
Development plan reference:	Connectivity and Transport section, page 17	Reporter:
Body or person(s) submitting a representation raising the issue (including reference number):		
<p><u>Proposed Plan:</u> Amelia Walker (931321) Bill Badger (967160) Brenda Herrick (966977) Caithness Chamber of Commerce (983321) Carl Beck (980040) David Doohan (980228) HITRANS (1031672) late response from a Key Agency (17 May 2016) Ian Walker (979716) Network Rail (980184) Wind Prospect Ltd (971514)</p> <p><u>Modified Proposed Plan:</u> HITRANS (MPP1031672)</p>		
Provision of the development plan to which the issue relates:	Connectivity and Transport section (paragraphs 66 to 69)	
Planning authority's summary of the representation(s):		
<p><u>Carl Beck (980040)</u> Supports the North Coast 500 referred to in paragraph 55 but thinks the road infrastructure is inadequate as a major tourist attraction and requires major improvements to fulfil the tourist potential.</p> <p><u>Wind Prospect Ltd (971514)</u> Objects to bullet point 3 of paragraph 68 and would like it recognised that renewables projects provide an opportunity for better roads, as the projects fund repairs & upgrades, and planning conditions ensure no net degradation of the road system as a result of a project.</p> <p><u>Brenda Herrick (966977)</u> Transport in Caithness is deteriorating rapidly. The train service is appalling but probably outwith Council control. Bus service is deteriorating partly due to the Council policy of awarding contracts to the lowest bidder which has the knock-on effect of reducing Stagecoach routes. Roads are in a bad state and getting worse, in some cases also due to Council policy of using Caithness as a rubbish dump for other parts of Highland. This is supposed to reduce cost of building more landfill sites but has not taken into consideration the damage to roads along the route. Materials used to repair roads now are not fit for purpose. The delay to the Berriedale Braes work is causing problems and at worst dangerous. How is industry and tourism supposed to flourish in these conditions? Efficient transport infrastructure by rail and road is essential for any economy. There seems to be no</p>		

joined-up thinking.

Network Rail (980184)

There are a wide range of fronts upon which climate change needs to be tackled including the need to protect the existing infrastructure as we all adapt to more severe weather events. In addition to addressing climate change through sustainable development there is a need to recognise that some major infrastructure (i.e. communications, utilities, roads and railways) are currently located in vulnerable areas (such as the Caithness and Sutherland coastline) and represent considerable public investment. Plans which anticipate and support the need to protect the significant investment in existing infrastructure foster sustainable development and policy support should be given for enhancements where required. This section should be changed to add: CaSPlan addresses these challenges by; Supporting the functional and operational requirements of providers of existing infrastructure to maintain and repair transport and communications networks.

Core Path Plans can be adapted as circumstances change and where development or the operations of statutory undertakers may dictate. The Plan should note this and the following clause should be added to this section: "The Council may remove or amend paths in the Core Paths Plan and this is most likely to occur on proposed development sites. If this happens an amendment to the plan will be published in accordance with set procedures."

Network Rail broadly supports the last bullet point of paragraph 69 as the concentration of development, directed towards settlements with railway stations/transport hubs, is a sustainable approach to demand.

Ian Walker (979716)

Caithness and Sutherland is largely dependent on private companies prepared to apply themselves to rural areas which are generally not profitable and therefore place the burden of transport costs on the poorer and more remote areas of the Highlands.

David Doohan (980228)

Better roads are required and a more reliable train service.

Amelia Walker (931321)

Supports this section of the plan. Employment is a vital factor to any area. Over the years it has become increasingly difficult to advance and retain industry because the population is too small. There is also a tendency to drift everything towards Inverness and the South. Caithness does not get a fair share of revenue and facilities, medical, administrative and transport has all been diminished.

Caithness Chamber of Commerce (983321)

Agree that this is a key issue for the continued success and growth of Caithness and Sutherland and any support that the Plan can provide with regards to key transport infrastructure in the region is welcome. The Council should engage with groups such as Caithness Transport Forum and Wick John O'Groats Airport Consultative Committee to ensure that developments in this area are aligned with the priorities of local stakeholders. Agree in general that any proposed developments should look at existing infrastructural connections, but not all developments may be able to do so and flexibility should be applied when considering any proposed development. Agree that communities can play a key role in providing transport solutions in areas with limited infrastructure but would caution against

over-reliance on community-provided transport and note that it remains the responsibility of the Council to ensure that socially necessary public transport is provided for those living in remote areas.

Bill Badger (967160)

Generally supportive of this section of the plan. Suggested that perhaps not all single tracks roads need to be twin tracked.

HITRANS (1031672) late response Key Agency (17 May 2016)

Welcome reference in Thurso and Wick to the need for new development to consider Active Travel town Audit/masterplans. Hitrans is currently out to consultation on a Region-wide Active Travel Strategy and the final version will hopefully incorporate reference to the need to improve Active Travel provision along the A9 corridor especially on sections where the link between communities such as Golspie and Brora is commutable.

Include more references to the trunk road network in strategy diagrams and under the connectivity and transport section. In particular with regard to the Far North Line which has suffered from very poor performance in recent years.

Note reference to Branchliner and challenges posed by timber extraction on fragile local road network.

Highlight opportunities for improving connectivity with Orkney especially whereby improved connectivity between Caithness and Orkney could lead to increased market size and opportunities for business. Also context of implications around new Northern Isles Ferry Services contract and increased traffic/business if Road Equivalent Tariff ferry fares introduced on Pentland Firth plus the need for national government to ensure an integrated approach with rail and bus linking with new services.

HITRANS (MPP1031672)

Submitted an updated version of their previous (late) representation to the Proposed Plan. Minor amendments were made to their submission which included highlighting that HITRANS are currently exploring the feasibility of a sleeper service to Caithness. In the context of their request for stronger reference to the trunk road network in the strategy map and in the connectivity and transport chapter, they sought similar emphasis in respect of the rail network.

Modifications sought by those submitting representations:

Carl Beck (980040)

Acknowledge investment is required in the North Coast 500 road infrastructure.

Wind Prospect Ltd (971514)

Paragraph 68 bullet point 3 should acknowledge that renewables projects provide an opportunity for better roads.

Network Rail (980184)

Add the following text: "CaSPlan addresses the challenges of climate change by; Supporting the functional and operational requirements of providers of existing infrastructure to maintain and repair transport and communications networks."

Add the following: “The Council may remove or amend paths in the Core Paths Plan and this is most likely to occur on proposed development sites. If this happens an amendment to the plan will be published in accordance with set procedures.”

HITRANS (1031672) – late response Key Agency (17 May 2016)

Include reference to Active Travel potential along the A9 corridor, in particular between Brora and Golspie.

Include more references to the trunk road network in strategy map and in connectivity and transport chapter.

Highlight opportunities for improving connectivity with Orkney.

HITRANS (MPP1031672)

Include more references to the rail (as well as trunk road) network in strategy map and in connectivity and transport chapter.

Summary of responses (including reasons) by planning authority:

The general support for this section from some respondees is noted.

The North Highland Initiative’s (NHI) North Coast 500 coastal route is focused on encouraging more people to visit the north of Highland. It is acknowledged that this will also result in higher numbers of vehicles using the road network, including many narrow single track roads. Concerns over traffic volumes, road safety and general etiquette on rural roads have been raised in the local press recently. As a result on the North Coast 500 website the NHI have included a section dedicated to driving safely and responsibly on the route and particularly on single track sections. The Local Development Plan cannot make commitments for road infrastructure investment at this point; however if the Reporter is so minded, the Council would be agreeable to the following extra bullet point being added to paragraph 68 which highlights transport ‘challenges’: “The continued growth of the tourism industry may put increased pressure on the road network, particularly in rural areas.”

Paragraph 68, bullet point three currently only says that the renewables industry may put increased pressure on the road network. It is acknowledged that the renewables industry can provide an opportunity for enhancing sections of roads through projects which fund repairs and upgrades. Planning conditions attached to developments often also ensure no net degradation of the road system. As a result the Council would be agreeable to the Reporter adding the following text to the end of this bullet point: “In some cases renewable energy projects may result in repairs and upgrades but it is essential that the Council ensures there is no net degradation to infrastructure from these projects.”

Connectivity and transport is recognised as central to the economy and the communities across Caithness and Sutherland. This is reflected in it forming a core part of the Plan’s Vision and Strategy. The section on Connectivity and Transport (page 17) outlines the key challenges and identifies the ways in which the local development plan can address these issues. The existing issues with public transport provision is noted. As a result if the Reporter is so minded the Council would be content with the first bullet point in paragraph

69 being amended to include reference to the challenges in the provision of public transport.

The Plan already acknowledges the importance of infrastructure and that forms a key part of the Vision and Connectivity and Transport outcome. In paragraph 69 bullet point four sets out how the planning authority will direct development “to locations easily linked to existing connections in the transport network, and utilities and communications infrastructure...” As a result the Council are not minded to make the Rail amendments suggested by Network Rail to paragraph 69.

It is acknowledged that sometimes the development of a site can result in the route of a Core Path having to be moved. However the review of Core Paths is a separate process from Local Development Plans, with a separate consultation to the Local Development Plan. Therefore the Council does not accept that the suggested additional text is necessary in the Plan. No modification is proposed by the Council.

Network Rail’s support for the last bullet point of paragraph 69 is noted.

The first bullet point under paragraph 68 acknowledges that limited transport options and a high dependency on car ownership is a fundamental challenge for many people living within the CaSPlan area.

The comments made by the Caithness Chamber of Commerce are noted. The Plan recognises that not all development can be linked to existing infrastructure but it highlights that development will be directed in the first instance to locations which benefit from infrastructure. The reference to “communities continuing to play a key role in addressing this issue...” is intended to promote community initiatives such as Transport for Tongue as making positive change in a rural area. It is recognised that this may appear to put emphasis on the community as the group responsible for addressing the issue. As a result if the Reporter is so minded the Council would be content with amending the sentence to read “communities *can* play a key role in addressing this issue...”.

Response to: HITRANS – late response Key Agency (17 May 2016)

The Plan identifies the need to provide better active travel connections and the comments from Hitrans are welcomed. The provision of a link between Brora and Golspie is recognised as both useful and feasible given the short distance between the two settlements. As a result if the Reporter is so minded the Council would be content with the third bullet point in paragraph 69 being amended to read “Promoting active travel opportunities, particularly between settlements such as Brora and Golspie...”

The Highland-wide Local Development Plan (HwLDP) (CD18) contains a map on page 108 which shows the Road Hierarchy. It is not felt necessary to repeat this within CaSPlan. At paragraph 69 bullet point one, the Plan already refers to the fact that it aligns with the Highland Local Transport Strategy and supports projects to be delivered by partner agencies. The problems faced by the operators of the Far North Line are noted. As a result the Council would be content if the Reporter is so minded to amend the first bullet point in paragraph 69 to: “...for Berriedale Braes on the A9, and Network Rail’s enhancements to the Far North Line”.

The comment on the Branchliner Project (CD41) (Action Programme – Aspirational

programme) is noted.

In terms of highlighting opportunities for improving connectivity with Orkney, the Plan already recognises at paragraph 66 that the area needs to be well connected to be a competitive and successful place. Paragraphs 11 and 52 also highlights the Pentland Firth and Orkney Waters Energy Hub - Area for Co-ordinated Action as identified in National Planning Framework 3 (CD02). The Council does not think it is necessary to include any further references. No modification is proposed by the Council.

In terms of the implications around the new Northern Isles Ferry Services contract and Road Equivalent Tariff ferry fares, it is more appropriate for these matters to be considered during a review of the Local Transport Strategy. No modification is proposed by the Council.

In response to additional comments made at Modified Proposed Plan stage:
The Proposals Map (Ordnance Survey base) of the HwLDP (CD18) and the diagrams depicting Vision and Spatial Strategy within that Plan all show the rail network. The remaining points raised by the representor are addressed by the already-agreed Council position on the issue. No changes to the Plan are required in response to the representation. However, it can be noted that we have added to the Action Programme references to HITRANS exploring feasibility of a sleeper service to Caithness, to Scottish Government's recent announcement of their intention to set up a Far North Line Review Group to co-ordinate activities and look at opportunities to improve performance on the line (CD37) and to Scottish Government's recent announcement of £5 million additional funding for projects that strengthen public roads and reduce disruption by timber haulage (CD47).

Reporter's conclusions:

Reporter's recommendations: