Agenda Item	12
Report No	PDI 46/16

The Highland Council

Planning, Development and Infrastructure Committee

17 August 2016

Regional Transport Strategy Main Issues Report – Consultation Response

Report by Director of Development and Infrastructure

Summary
The purpose of this report is consider the Council's response to the draft Regional Transport Strategy Re-fresh Main Issues Report for the HITRANS area.

1.   Background

1.1   The Highlands and Islands Transport Partnership (HITRANS) is the statutory regional transport partnership covering Eilean Siar, Orkney, Highland, Moray and most of the Argyll and Bute area. In terms of the Transport (Scotland) Act 2005, HITRANS, as a Regional Transport Partnership, is required to produce an overall Regional Transport Strategy.

1.2   The Regional Transport Strategy (RTS), published by HITRANS in 2008, is being refreshed to incorporate significant developments in transport policy and to provide strategic direction at local, regional and national level.

1.3   HITRANS invited feedback on the RTS Re-fresh Main Issues Report (available on the HITRANS web-site here), with a closing date for feedback of 17 June 2016. An extension to this time period was sought to allow for committee consideration of the Main Issues Report.

2.   The Main Issues Report

2.1   As outlined in the Regional Transport Strategy (RTS) Re-fresh Main Issues Report, there have been a number of transport policy changes over recent years which have been applied at local, regional and national levels. The transport policy changes resulted in a refresh of the National Transport Strategy by Transport Scotland in January 2016 which subsequently requires the HITRANS Regional Transport Strategy and the Council's Local Transport Strategy to be updated thereafter to align local, regional and national objectives.

2.2   Six main issues for HITRANS have been identified. These are the economy, connecting communities, lifeline transport, reliability and resilience, roles, relationships and responsibilities, and carbon reduction.

2.3   Following consideration of the National Transport Strategy refresh and the work of the five Community Planning Partnerships, the draft new objectives for the HITRANS Regional Transport Strategy are:

- support an increase in the rate of sustainable economic growth; and widen participation in the labour market for those constrained by transport;
- increase independence and individuals' participation in learning, social leisure and cultural activities, and access to employment and healthcare;
- reduce journey times and improve reliability and resilience across the network, including to national gateways and direct links to destinations outside Scotland;
- tackle congestion in Inverness and at other crunch points in the network;
- improve the quality, accessibility and affordability of transport;
- improve the attractiveness of bus and rail as an alternative to the car and improve connections particularly for those without transport or at risk of isolation;
- maximise opportunities for walking and cycling, particularly in towns and cities, and supporting the development of active tourism;
- protect the environment and minimise emissions and consumption of resources and energy; and
- improve the health and wellbeing of people across the region.

2.3   A response to the consultation is set out in **Appendix 1**. Member feedback is sought on the response and any changes will be incorporated before submission to HITRANS.

3.   Implications

3.1   Resource
The Council makes a contribution of £90k to HITRANS annually. It is therefore essential that the strategy documents and key work areas of the Partnership integrate well with current and future Council priorities.

4.2   Equality and Climate Change/Carbon Clever
There is a key link between the RTS and the Council's priorities for carbon reduction.

4.3   Legal and Risk
There are no known legal implications arising from this report.

4.4   Rural
The MIR addresses a range of transport-related rural issues, including lifeline routes issues.

4.5   Gaelic
There are no Gaelic implications arising from this report.

Recommendation

The Committee is invited to agree the response to HITRANS as set out in **Appendix 1**.

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Date: 1 August 2016

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Background Papers: HITRANS Regional Transport Strategy

HITRANS RTS REFRESH - Response to the Main Issues Report by Highland Council

1. **Does the draft Main Issues Report fairly reflect the changes in policy and trends since the publication of the first RTS in 2008? Are there any other policy or trends that will or should influence the delivery of the RTS that need to be considered?**

    Yes in part. The Main Issues Report provides a useful reflection on what the key trends and changes have been with recognition of the key successes in a decrease in the number killed or seriously injured, growth in ferry carryings and increase in rail passenger numbers particularly at Nairn and Invergordon.

    There is however little mention of the role of ports and harbours in the MIR document, e.g. Cormarty Firth, Nigg, Scrabster, Inverness and Wick all of which have seen change, and which will continue to play a vital role in the future.

    The Infrastructure Investment Plan supports the A9 and A96 Dualling. Reference should be made to work being undertaken on the A9 and A96 Dualling. Acknowledgement of the formation and activities of the Scottish Cities Alliance should be included in the MIR. Although the MIR predated the announcements of the Inverness City Region Deal, the revised RTS should make reference to it, and particularly to the transport related elements.

2. **Does the draft Main Issues Report fairly reflect the changes in key issues since the publication of the first RTS in 2008 described in Sections 5 through to 10?**

    If any issues are not covered or captured adequately, please describe the nature of the issue(s), and what this means to you, your business and / or your community?.

    Most of the key issues are covered well, and reflect the changes in recent years. More reference should perhaps have been made towards the work undertaken on rail freight at Inverness and the trials undertaken in respect of whisky rail freight.

    The renewables section of the document is the first reference to the port infrastructure in the document, a point which should be picked up in more detail in the RTS when it is refreshed.

The original RTS recognised 'lifeline transport'. This category recognises the essential role for transport connections to key destinations, such as a GP surgery, onwards to hospital, to work, shopping and leisure opportunities.

The statistic that 60% of all of Scotland's road length is within the HITRANS area is a headline that needs to be repeated in the RTS and future documents to highlight the scale of the asset that serves the population, businesses and visitors to the area and the associated maintenance liabilities that accompany it.

Paragraph 7.3.7 highlights the situation with ferry replacements for Orkney and Shetland. Greater reference needs to be made within the RTS on the situation for Highland and Argyll & Bute Councils.

The RTS should refer to the current Business Case being prepared for Skye Air Services that is expected to be published in autumn 2016.

Disruption to lifeline transport in particular has significant negative economic impacts. In this context reference to should be made to the Stromeferry Bypass within the RTS to reflect the scale of such issues which are beyond the scope of purely local funding resources.

It would be sensible to make reference to the network of variable message signs and also the Traffic Scotland web site and Highland Council Travel Information web pages within the RTS – reflecting the opportunity for a much more joined up approach to travel information and the changes to technology that allow these changes to happen to date, but more importantly in the future.

Reference should be made to the potential of 'shared services' initiatives being developed through groups of local authorities. There is also a need for the revised RTS to fully reflect what are the local priorities of constituent local authorities. Although there will continue to be a requirement for a local transport strategy to be prepared by the Council, it is essential that the revised RTS is prepared in the context of reducing resources and the need to avoid duplication. With that in mind, the RTS should more broadly reflect the aspirations of the Council in respect of a whole host of issues, but particularly those with regional significance – examples include:

- the need for upgrades to the A9 along its full length, A95, A96 and A82;
- The development or redevelopment of rail stations including Inverness, Dalcross and the case for the reopening of Evanton;
- Other transport priorities such as the Stromeferry Bypass, the Caol Link Road, Corran Ferry, Uig pier facilities.

- Active travel and tourism infrastructure such as NC500 (and other possible routes) and the Inverness City Active Travel Network which has been submitted for potential Community Links PLUS funding.

It is also essential that the revision of the RTS reflects as far as possible the need to integrate with Community Planning and Land Use Planning across all authorities. The Council is facing resource challenges and the improvement of linkages between the RTS and more localised strategies will avoid the need for duplication and allow a co-ordinated approach to funding opportunities when they arise.

The table on page 44 appears to indicate a Low Carbon Club in Highland where perhaps it should be Moray Council (Findhorn Car Club).

Under the light duty vehicles it would be useful to make reference to low carbon taxi fleet as a potential way forward for carbon reduction especially in Inverness where the Air Quality Management Area has been identified.

3. **Are the new draft RTS objectives (Section 11) appropriate and fitting? How could the objectives better meet the issues that have been described? What do you feel the refreshed RTS should focus upon? Should one or more objective(s) carry more weighting than others, or should all be given the same weighting?**

There are many advantages for the RTS to reflect similar objectives to the National Transport Strategy, however the transport outcomes should include explicit reference to 'lifeline transport'.

The aspect of safety seems to be absent from the proposed Objectives and Transport Outcomes.

4. **HITRANS current responsibility through The Transport (Scotland) Act 2005 place a statutory duty to produce the RTS for their area. The RTS influences all of the future plans and activities of HITRANS and informs future national and local transport strategies. In terms of HITRANS' role and activities, from your perspective what works well and why? Also in terms of HITRANS' role and activities what could be built upon or changed in the future during the term of the refreshed RTS?**

There are many elements of HITRANS roles and activities that work well, and provide a unified approach reflecting the very specific challenges of rural transport. That said, there is always room for improvement in terms of integration and communication.

As set out above, the role of the RTS and LTS needs to be brought closer together given the challenges that all member local authorities are facing. Notwithstanding the legislative basis for each level of strategy, the work that will be undertaken on the RTS (even just as a refresh) offers a real opportunity to more fully integrate with each authority's current priorities in terms of national projects, their own capital programme schemes and current transport initiatives (e.g. rail development, active travel, carbon reduction, air quality management schemes).

5. **The RTS Refresh will go on to consider and evaluate a list of policies and proposals for action for HITRANS and partners to progress in the coming five-15 years. What are the key policies and proposals that you think HITRANS and partners should focus efforts upon and why?**

These have been highlighted to some extent above, but will be discussed in much more detail through the various Partnership Advisory Group meetings and the formal Board meetings over the coming months.