

# The Highland Council

Agenda Item	5
Report No	RDB-02-25

**Committee:** Redesign Board

**Date:** 20 March 2025

**Report Title:** Road Improvement Project

**Report By:** Assistant Chief Executive - Place

## 1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Road Improvement Project – Phase 1 Closure Report provides the Redesign Board with an overview of progress during project delivery.

## 2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:

- i. Note the Road Improvement Project – Phase 1 Closure Report.

## 3. Implications

- 3.1 **Resource:** There are no direct resource implications arising from this report.
- 3.2 **Legal:** There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.
- 3.3 **Community (Equality, Poverty, Rural and Island):** There are no specific Community implications arising from this report.
- 3.4 **Climate Change / Carbon Clever:** There are no direct Climate Change / Carbon Clever implications arising from this report.
- 3.5 **Risk:** There are no direct Risk implications arising from this report. The Road Improvement Project complies with Corporate and Transformation PMO standards in respect of proactive risk management as a key discipline in the controlled and managed delivery of the work.
- 3.6 **Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people):** There are no direct Health and Safety implications arising from this report.
- 3.7 **Gaelic:** There are no specific Gaelic implications arising from this report.

## 4. Impacts

- 4.1 In Highland, all policies, strategies or service changes are subject to an integrated screening for impact for Equalities, Poverty and Human Rights, Children's Rights and Wellbeing, Climate Change, Islands and Mainland Rural Communities, and Data Protection. Where identified as required, a full impact assessment will be undertaken.
- 4.2 Considering impacts is a core part of the decision-making process and needs to inform the decision-making process. When taking any decision, Members must give due regard to the findings of any assessment.
- 4.3 This is an update report and therefore an impact assessment is not required.

## **5. Phase 1 Closure Report**

- 5.1 The attached report provides the Redesign Board with an overview of progress during project delivery. There is a strong appetite to further develop and deliver improvement suggestions. The ongoing work for a Phase 2 Road Improvement Project will build on key objectives highlighted through the work carried out in Phase 1.
- 5.2 The roads review consisted of five project objectives:
- Strategy, Governance, and Project Management
  - Integration and Communication
  - Financial Resources
  - Workforce Planning and Operations
  - Partnership Working

## **6. Project Summary Phase 1**

- 6.1 Phase 1 included the completion of LEAN reviews to improve customer-facing applications and processes, updates to over 60 Standard Detail Design Drawings, and two budget distribution workshops with Councillors and Road Service Management. Additionally, a comprehensive review of 54 policies and guidance documents was undertaken, with several updates completed and committee approval obtained where necessary. Efforts were made to improve communication and responsiveness with the public and customers, including the publication of factsheets to reduce freedom of information requests.
- 6.2 Further details can be found in Annex 1.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive - Place

Date: 7 March 2024

Author: Elias Gilbert, Project Manager  
Elizabeth Maciver, Principal Engineer

Background Papers: [RDB-11-24 Work Programme Update](#)  
[RDB-05-24 Work Programme Update](#)  
[RDB-03-23 Roads Improvement Project - Update](#)  
[RDB-09-22 Roads Improvement Project - Update](#)  
[RDB-01-22 Roads Improvement Project – Project Brief](#)

Appendices: Road Improvement Project – Phase 1 Closure Report

# Road Improvement Project

Closure Report - Phase 1

<b>Project Name:</b>	Road Improvement Project
<b>Date of Report:</b>	February 2025
<b>Project Manager</b>	Elias Gilbert
<b>Project Lead</b>	Elizabeth Maciver; Tracey Urry
<b>Sponsor:</b>	Malcolm Macleod
<b>Version:</b>	V1.0

## Overview

The purpose of this document is to provide a summary of the Road Improvement Project, to review the way the project was carried out and identify any lessons learned for the future as well as follow-on actions for the service post project closure.

## 1. Project Manager's Summary

### 1.1. Background

The project arose from a series of recommendations offered as part of the Engineering Service Review published on the 23rd March 2021 to the Redesign Board. The review reported on the final findings previously highlighted in an interim report on the 17th December 2019 and a final workshop with engineering staff held on the 17th January 2020. The recommendations in the review are aimed at consolidating organisational structures and simplifying and aligning workstreams while fulfilling wide-ranging responsibilities and statutory duties.

A project brief was agreed in February 2022 at the Redesign Board based on Redesign Workshops held on the 8th November 2021 and 20th January 2022 to define the scope, objective and supporting documentation for the Road Improvement Project. The Project Brief reflects the outcomes from this work and the work of the Project Team and aligns with the Roads and Infrastructure Directorate service plan as well as Community Planning Partnership and Strategic, Statutory and Operational priorities.

The Road Improvement Project initiated in September 2022, once the Road Service recruited the necessary staff to commence the delivery of the project. The initial priority of carrying out several LEAN reviews focused on where the public interacts with the Road Service.



## 1.2. Timescales

The project team recognised this was an ambitious project to deliver within the proposed timescale, particularly due to uncertainty on how improvements could be delivered. It was therefore decided to initially focus on customer facing applications, and a more defined action plan was agreed with Councillors representing the Redesign Board in February 2023.

Overall, most objectives outlined in the detailed project plan have been delivered to the timescale's set out at the start of the project. However, several project objectives have slippages, particularly where interdependencies with Council wide initiatives around ICT solutions are currently considered.



ProjectPlanV2\_WORKI  
NGDOC.pdf

The project progress was constrained in part due to operational service delivery taking priority, project scope changes and data availability and consistency.

## 1.3. Resources

The project had the benefit of a dedicated project manager from the Strategic Improvement Team assisting the delivery of objectives. Additional resources were recruited by the Road Service consisting of a Senior Engineer, a Senior Technician, a Technician and two Operational Support Officers. Additional personnel were brought in made up of officers from the Road Service, who supported project work packages whilst undertaking their service responsibilities. The team was led by the Road's Principal Engineer.

Due to operational service delivery taking priority, the team was often faster than the Road Service could accommodate. Resources were used to update a significant number of policies for the service as well as over 60 Standard Detail Design Drawings.

## 1.4. Financial

The project was funded through the Roads revenue budget. The PM was initially funded through the Roads revenue budget and then transferred to the Strategic Improvement Team.

## 1.5. Governance

During the project there were the following governance changes:

- Head of Roads & Infrastructure, acting up with no replacement.
- Communities & Place ECO changed, new Project Sponsor.

## 1.6. Summary

Overall, the project team performed well despite resource challenges. The project has not completed delivery of all project objectives, due to dependencies outside of the project space and scope, therefore several pieces of work remain open. The project has provided the service with suggestions for process improvements, documentation, and recommendations on further opportunities for service improvement.

As of October 2024, there is work ongoing to clarify objectives and establish benefits for a future Road Improvement Project. The appetite to further develop and deliver improvement suggestions is high, with significant political pressure to improve service delivery and reporting. The project objectives are summarised below including recommended further opportunities. Key priorities will be to integrate the Asset Management System into business as usual, which will have a knock-on effect on reporting and availability of data. In December 2024 the Redesign Working Group has decided to run a third workshop in 2025 to explore the topic of budget distribution further.



## 2. Project Status Summary

Project Objective:	Planned/Agreed Target Date	Status	RAG
<b>1 – Strategy, Governance and Project Management</b>	30/09/2024	Ongoing	●
<b>What was included in PID?</b>			
<p>This project objective is a summary of overarching goals the Road Improvement Project is attempting to achieve.</p> <p>Improved Road Condition and Strategic Road Asset Management Plan.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Move from reactive to cyclical maintenance.</li> <li>• Early intervention and getting it right first time to double the useful life of a road surface.</li> <li>• Improved Winter Service delivery and updated relevant policy to alleviate annual pressure on the Roads revenue budget.<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Review and analyse the Roads Service's role in the achievement of the Council's climate change mitigation ambitions.</li> </ul>			
<b>What was delivered?</b>			
<p>1.0 – Strategy, Governance and Project Management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As mentioned above, even though listed as a separate workstream within the PID, the above are long term goals. Members and Senior Management initial focus was on customer facing applications and processes, as well as Budget Distribution.</li> <li>• As part of the Budget Distribution Workshops, initial discussions have started on moving to a risk-based approach, which is foundational to move from reactive to cyclical maintenance.</li> <li>• A previous update to the Winter Service Policy was rejected, hence it was deemed unfeasible to propose to update the policy again within the project timeframe. However, Members agreed that the Road Service could review the Winter Budget arrangements and what effect it has on the Revenue Budget throughout the year.</li> </ul>			
<b>Ongoing / Business as usual</b>			
<p><u>Ongoing</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Road Improvement Programme</u> The above items included in the PID remain active topics for the Road service which require further resources.</li> </ul>			
<b>Further Opportunities</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As the Service explores the continuation of the Road Improvement Project the above topics require to be addressed and resourced.</li> </ul>			

<sup>1</sup> Please note that this line from the PID has been updated for clarity.

Project Objective:	Planned/Agreed Target Date	Status	RAG
<b>2 – Integration and Communication</b>	30/09/2024	Completed / ongoing - business as usual	●
<b>2.1 – Improving Customer Based Applications (LEAN Reviews)</b>	30/09/2024	Completed	●
<b>2.2 – Policies and Guidance</b>	30/09/2024	Completed / business as usual	●

#### What was included in PID?

A more responsive service and improved communication with our stakeholders.

- Complete the integration of the various elements of the Roads Service that were separated across 2 services until the formation of the Infrastructure, Environment and Economy service.
- Implement targeted communication management with stakeholders.
- Ensure effective management of stakeholder satisfaction levels.

#### What was delivered?

##### 2.1 – Integration of Engineering Functions - Service Restructure

- Due to the restructure at Senior Management level the restructure of the Road Service was put on hold.

##### 2.2 – Improving Customer Based Applications (LEAN Reviews)

- See 4.1 regarding LEAN Reviews.
- Apart from reviewing the general processes, the reviews carried out focused on how information was presented to Customers and how Customers engage with the Road Service.
- The project expanded the number of factsheets published, providing responses for frequently asked questions. These reports on Compensation Claims, Works Instructions, Roads Budget, etc. will be updated quarterly as resources allow and are expected to reduce the amount of freedom of information requests received by the Road Service.
- Several improvements to the website and forms have been identified. These identified actions are now being considered and delivered under the MyCouncil Programme as well as a future Road Improvement Project.

##### 2.3 – Policies and Guidance

- A programme of work to review policies and guidance has been developed. As of October 2024, 54 policies and guidance documents have been established as being in the Road Service remit with the following status:

Updated and approved by E&I Committee	11
Finalised and prepared for E&I Committee	18
Update process started	6
Refused by Highland Council Committee	1
Policy not required	1



No revision required	1
To be updated	16
Total	54

### **Ongoing / Business as usual**

#### Ongoing

- Delivery of identified LEAN Actions
- The Road Service is communicating with ICT and the MyCouncil Programme to ensure that identified improvements are being delivered. The Road Improvement Project is expected to continue once project replanning has completed.

#### Business as usual

- Policies and Guidance
- A programme of work covering 54 policies and guidance documents has been developed. This will need continued effort to keep up to date. Future workshops with Members will be required to support the Service in delivering policy updates.

### **Further Opportunities**

- Improve data & reporting
- Software implementation
- Research of new technology
- RAMP



Project Objective:	Planned/Agreed Target Date	Status	RAG
<b>3 - Financial Resources</b>	31/03/2023	Completed	●
<b>3.1 – Rapid Review Sconser Quarry</b>	31/03/2022	Completed	●
<b>3.2 – Budget Distribution</b>	31/03/2023	Ongoing	●
<b>What was included in PID?</b>			
<p>A more efficient use of resources and value for money.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review the efficiency of capital and revenue budgets to deliver the Roads Service functions.</li> <li>As a priority, identify and seek agreement to an objective and more sophisticated methodology for budget / fund allocation.</li> <li>Establish criteria for prioritising resources across the Highlands based on empirical evidence, considering factors like geography, winter service demands, population, and intensification of use.</li> <li>Review the charge out regime and multiplier of technical in scope staff.</li> </ul>			
<b>What was delivered?</b>			
<p><u>Rapid Review Sconser Quarry</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A rapid review into Sconser Quarry has been delivered by the project team.</li> <li>The outcomes have been summarised in a report to Senior Management with two key recommendations for improvement. One key point is considering optimisation of transport, storage and back-haulage to reduce the number of empty HGVs. Another key point is improving communication between the Road Service areas and Sconser Quarry by publishing charges / transport cost and putting in orders earlier.</li> </ul> <p><u>Budget Distribution</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Two successful Redesign Workshops have been held with Councillors, Road Operations Managers and HQ based Road Service Management.</li> <li>The project team designed several briefing documents for Councillors providing insights and overview of the Road Service.</li> <li>The first workshop focused on Revenue Budget Allocation, the focus of the second workshop was Capital Budget Allocation.</li> <li>A third workshop has been requested by the three representative Councillors for the Road Improvement Project. The third workshop is to further discuss a risk-based approach as well as giving more time to discuss amendments to the Budget Allocation.</li> </ul>			
<b>Ongoing / Business as usual</b>			
<p><u>Ongoing</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Preparation for the third workshop</li> <li>Initial preparation for the third workshop has started, however delivery of the workshop is on hold due to the replanning of the Road Improvement Project as well as the lack of resources to deliver the workshop.</li> </ul>			

#### Business as usual

- Delivery of Workshop Actions
- Where possible as part of business-as-usual activities, actions identified by Councillors during the workshop are being progressed. It is expected that the Road Service will communicate with Members about actions taken so far during the third workshop.

#### **Further Opportunities**

- Improve reporting to SMT / Cllrs.



Project Objective:	Planned/Agreed Target Date	Status	RAG
<b>4 – Workforce Planning and Operations</b>	31/03/2022	Completed	●
<b>4.1 – LEAN Reviews</b>	30/09/2024	Completed / Future Road Improvement Project	●
<b>4.2 – LEAN Review Actions</b>	30/09/2024	Ongoing / Future Road Improvement Project	●
<b>4.3 – Review Statutory Duties</b>	30/09/2024	Completed / ongoing - business as usual	●

#### What was included in PID?

Improving cross functional and service collaboration. Using Lean to improve service delivery.

- Redress insufficient resources - we must provide a winter service and adequately maintain the road network.
- Create a service wide workforce plan which maintains rigour whilst encouraging agility, flexibility, and diversification across all functional areas.
- Optimise the use of Technical and Admin resources - task orientated approach to be a priority for improved workflow and resource management.
- Streamline process-based functions and associated administrative tasks for increased efficiency, e.g. complaint handling, general customer relations and interactions, and responding to queries.
- Align training and development of staff through CPD and on the job training together with progression to a 'cradle to grave' approach to create a culture of knowledge sharing and nurturing staff development.

#### What was delivered?

##### 4.1 – LEAN Reviews

- 4 reviews have been carried out and finalised covering the following processes: Compensation Claims, Road Permits, Temporary Traffic Orders, Permanent Traffic Orders.
- A review of the Road Construction Consent process has been finalised; however, findings have not been drawn into a report yet due to a lack of resources.
- Findings of the 4 completed reviews have been presented and discussed with the Project Board. The Board decided in September 2023 that the focus of the project going forward would be the delivery of identified actions and preparing and running 2 workshops with Members to discuss the Road

Budget Distribution (see 3.2).

- We will utilise the SCOTS guidance for a Risk Based Approach for road safety inspections. Once the asset management database has been moved to the cloud-based version, this will enable inspections to be undertaken remotely. A trial will be undertaken, then the policy will be updated. This work package will need to be addressed as part of future Road Improvement work.

#### 4.2 – LEAN Review Actions

- Due to the significant changes delivered through the MyCouncil Programme to the Council's website, as well as the customer journey in reporting or requesting a service, several identified improvements have been put on hold until they can be delivered by ICT.
- Improve Roads & Infrastructure website pages with relevant information.
- **Road Permits:** Identified actions have been delivered in part.
- **Temporary Traffic Orders:** Process and guidance have been updated, identified actions have been delivered in part.
- **Permanent Traffic Orders:** Process and guidance have been updated, identified actions have been delivered in part.
- **Compensation Claims:** Where possible identified actions have been delivered. A significant change is the handover of claim handling to the Council's insurer once they have been received.

#### 4.3 – Review Statutory Duties

- The Scheme of Delegation has been reviewed to reflect relevant legislation.

#### 4.4 – Standard Detail Drawings

- As part of the redesign project the team updated 65 Standard Detail Drawings, which will enable the technical teams to use them to be more efficient. They will also be available for developers as part of the RCC process, when the website updates are progressed.

### Ongoing / Business as usual

#### Ongoing

- LEAN Review Actions

As stated above, several actions remain open due to the delivery of other improvements and resources having moved out of the project space.

#### Business as usual

- Scheme of Delegation amendments to be approved at Committee.
- Roads Asset Management System will be upgraded to the cloud-based version.

### Further Opportunities

- Use lesson learned for future opportunities.

Project Objective:	Planned/Agreed Target Date	Status	RAG
<b>5 – Partnership Working</b>	31/03/2023	Completed / ongoing - business as usual	●
<b>5.1 – Northern Roads Collaboration Joint Committee</b>	30/09/2024	Completed / ongoing - business as usual	
<b>5.2 – Scottish Collaboration of Transportation Specialists</b>	30/09/2024	Completed / ongoing - business as usual	
<b>What was included in PID?</b>			
<p>Leveraging partnerships to improve our value proposition.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build on the existing relationships with external parties including Transport Scotland and Northern Roads Collaboration as well as Hitrans and family group of local authorities, to include the potential for sharing of depot resources and reciprocal agreements for the winter service.</li> <li>• Attracting and maximising external investment.</li> </ul>			
<b>What was delivered?</b>			
<p><u>Partnership Working</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Through the reviews the project investigated how other Councils are managing similar problems, this was partly done through the information available publicly as well as through the already established networks such as the Scottish Collaboration of Transportation Specialists (SCOTS).</li> <li>• Raised awareness of the process and highlighted profile of Strategic Timber Transport Scheme (STTS) match funding.</li> </ul> <p><u>Ongoing</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transport Scotland</li> <li>• ROAD EX</li> </ul>			
<b>Ongoing / Business as usual</b>			
<p><u>Business as usual</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partnership Working</li> </ul> <p>Partnership working will continue to be of importance to the Service, there are key partnerships established between Local Authorities which will continue to develop and tackle shared issues.</p>			
<b>Further Opportunities</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Involvement in working groups where possible.</li> <li>• Ensure we develop contracts in collaboration with others where possible.</li> </ul>			