

REPORT ON SCOTLAND'S TRANSPORT

1. SUMMARY

The purpose of this paper is to enable the Committee to consider the Council's response to a Scottish Executive consultation on new proposals for the management and delivery of Transport in Scotland.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Committee agree the response to the consultation questions as proposed in the appendix to this paper, as prepared by the Policy Development Group, but consider the further options of

1. In response to Question 3, Trunk Road Management responsibility be held by the National Transport Agency
2. In response to Question 2 that local transport forums should be tied into the community planning process by being linked to the Council's Area Committee devolved level of government.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 As part of the Scottish Executive's Partnership Agreement, a wide range of transport Commitments was set out to improve life for everyone in Scotland, having the overall aim of an 'Accessible Scotland', with a safe and reliable transport system.
- 3.2 The budget to achieve this will grow from £500 million to over £1 billion a year from 2005/06. The Executive is concerned that the right structure is put in place to deliver the improvements effectively, and has issued a consultation paper, which focuses on the government, and public bodies which are responsible for transport in Scotland. The fundamental aspect of the proposals being put forward is that a new national agency be formed, tentatively called 'Transport Scotland' which will deliver Transport in an effective, integrated manner, and take social justice and sustainable transport as central goals.
- 3.3 The consultation paper posed a number of questions as to the form of the agency, its aims and the delivery mechanisms involved. It is these questions which the Policy Development Group have considered, and the draft responses are contained in the Appendix to this paper.

4. IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Policy – The changes in the national and regional delivery mechanism have the potential to affect the Council's ability to influence Transportation Policy, as it affects the Argyll and Bute area. The impact will depend on the Executive's chosen way forward, particularly with regard to the degree of local accountability retained within the system.
- 4.2 Financial - It is clear that there will be increased funding for Public Transportation which will have limited benefits to the rural areas.
- 4.3 Personnel – There may be impacts if functions are remitted to Regional or National level, dependent on the Executive's decision.
- 4.4 Equal Opportunities - None.
- 4.5 Legal – There may be a change to the powers and duties of the Council in relation to Roads and Transportation functions dependent on the outcome of the consultation.

For further information please contact David Duthie, Head of Transportation and Infrastructure (01546 604689).

D.Duthie
Head of Transportation and Infrastructure
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APPENDIX;

Policy Development Group on 'Scotland's Transport'

Consultation Questions – Draft Response

Q1) We seek views on the overall aims for a new national transport body.

The primary aim of a new National transport body must be to create a national transport strategy at an early stage in its development, such that local and regional transport strategies may have a clear focus on the national picture. Coupled with this strategy, a 10 year National Transport Programme should be introduced, with clear delivery targets, and at the same time protected, as far as possible, from future political administration change.

The new body should also introduce a National Concessionary Travel Scheme, although there is no reason why this scheme could not be delivered at a local authority level, provided suitable guidance is produced. There will be local issues within the context of a national scheme; not least of which will be the arrangements for ferry travel which is included in the current local scheme.

The actual body should deliver major national projects and ensure resources are available to provide the schemes. Consideration should be given to the introduction of a Scottish Rail Authority, such that it would have powers to promote major national rail schemes.

Accessibility and Social Inclusion must be prime drivers of the improvements and benefits, which the new arrangements for Transport in Scotland will bring.

Congestion is a major concern in the urban environment, but peripherality is a much larger issue in many parts of rural Scotland. It is critical for the economic development of these more peripheral and generally much poorer regions of the country that the vital link between economic performance and access is recognised, and that funding levels fully acknowledge sparsity factors.

Q2) We would welcome comments on the best way of widening public involvement in the planning of transport services in Scotland.

The Community Planning process is a flagship Executive initiative, and is now slowly gaining momentum. Community Planning Partnerships should be directed to promote active engagement by communities in the development of transport strategy. There is also a case to be made for the introduction of local transport forums linked to the Association of Community Councils, possibly with a small budget such that interested members were encouraged to develop their Transportation interests through appropriate project work.

There needs also to be greater press coverage of the issues involved in the Transportation field to capture public attention and provoke wider debate in this critical area of public service.

Q3) We have an open mind at present on any transfer of powers but would welcome views on whether changes should be made to the existing balance, In particular;

a) Are there any transport powers currently with Scottish Ministers that might more effectively be exercised by local government, whether at regional partnership or local authority level?

b) Will Transport Scotland need to attract powers that are currently with local government – especially in relation to concessionary fares and quality contracts now that these are to be co-ordinated nationally?

c) Would it be helpful for Transport Scotland to have powers to promote new railways or tramways in Scotland at its own hand?

a) The substantial majority of routes within the Caledonian MacBrayne undertaking lie within the HITRANS local authority grouping, primarily, Argyll and Bute, Highland and Eilean Siar Councils. Other than through involvement in Shipping Services Advisory Committees, Councils have no role in the strategic planning of these ferry services which results in little local accountability. There is therefore a strong case for the Undertaking, at the strategic level, to be controlled by this Regional Partnership, such that decisions on long term planning, route development, fares and service frequencies could be taken by the Partnership. There should not, however, be any involvement with operational management which would best remain with the Company. There may be a case for the management of the larger, capital elements such as procurement of vessels/ infrastructure, to remain with the National Agency, such that a nationally strategic view could be taken on priorities across all Transportation fields.

Highlands and Islands Airports Limited and PSOs for Air Services – A similar view is held to that for Caledonian MacBrayne, in that the Regional Partnership with its air services aspirations, should have input into the development of airports, and be in a position to set service levels and negotiate additional business with carriers.

Trunk Road Management – It is considered that the maintenance of trunk roads should be managed at the most local level that is appropriate to ensure effective integration of all operations across the local and trunk network. In many parts of Argyll and Bute, the trunk road acts as both the strategic route and the local road, and local communities do not differentiate between the 2 networks. Development of the network in terms of strategic improvements would best be coordinated through partnerships at regional level. Strategic roads within the partnership area might also be dealt with in this way. Inter-regional road networks, such as the motorways and dual carriageway trunk roads should continue to be provided and maintained by the national body.

b) Powers to introduce concessionary fare schemes currently lie with local authorities. Commitments have been given that a National Free Bus Travel Scheme will be introduced and so a transfer of powers may be appropriate to the national body for this area of travel concession. It is recommended that, as mentioned previously, local authorities should generally continue to be involved in the administration and delivery of the national bus concessionary scheme, although negotiations with larger operators on National networks may best be dealt with at regional or national level.

Bus Quality Contracts – Where such mechanisms are agreed as necessary, there are likely to be some situations where delivery may best lie with the Local Authority, others where cross boundary workings would point to delivery by Regional partnerships. Guidelines/ Policy should be produced nationally.

A number of Piers and Harbours with a solely transportation function are currently owned and operated by the local authorities. There may be a case, to ensure fuller integration of ferry operations, that consideration should be given to transferring responsibility for some of these assets to the body responsible for delivering ferry services. In a similar context, there are a number of local ferry services operated by the Council which may be more efficiently operated as part of a larger undertaking, at regional or national level, especially in the context of difficulties encountered by Councils in obtaining stand-by vessels, for example at times of annual refit.

- c) Powers to promote new railways reside currently with the SRA and local authorities. Large-scale Scottish infrastructure improvements have not to date been adequately supported by the SRA, such as the major development at Waverley station. There is a strong case to introduce a Scottish Strategic Rail Authority with powers to promote railways.

Q4 We welcome views on the management framework options for regional partnerships (paragraph 63):

- a) **existing local authorities working together through voluntary partnerships**
- b) **new Passenger Transport Executives across Scotland, repeating the SPT model in the rest of Scotland. while leaving responsibility for local roads with existing Councils**
- c) **the creation of new Joint Committees across Scotland, made up from existing local authorities, building on the benefits of the voluntary partnerships, with more formal structure and constitution, but without strong decision-making and budgetary powers**
- d) **the creation of new Joint Boards, also made up from local authorities, properly maintaining the link with the constituent Councils, but with the powers and budget to plan and take difficult decisions on transport matters for their area**
- e) **the active creation of further special purpose bodies to work with local authorities and the voluntary partnerships.**

Voluntary partnerships are not sufficiently robust to take on significant functions such as ferry undertakings and management of budgets. New SPT's require new primary legislation to form and do not have an adequate spread of powers to carry out all regional Transport functions.

Joint Committees are generally dependent on constituent authorities for finance, and are not regarded as being sufficiently influential to assume the role of a transport delivery body. The Joint Board model is strong but elected members are concerned that full local accountability is retained. There is also concern that a joint board would function with solely local authority membership, whereas one of the strengths of existing voluntary partnerships is the spread of membership, including land use planning interests, the Enterprise network and the private sector.

Section 19 of the Local Government Act 2003 permits the formation of special purpose bodies, which allow for wider involvement in community related activities, and this option should be investigated as a means of promoting a Regional approach. Such special purpose bodies might allow for the Enterprise Network and the Private Sector to be involved, although not with overall control, and this would be advantageous. The over-riding consideration should be that the chosen vehicle is sufficiently flexible to represent the full range of interests of all communities within the region while maintaining local accountability.

Q5) We welcome comments on the future of SPT and the challenge of delivering integrated transport in the West of Scotland, particularly if new regional partnerships are established across Scotland (paragraph 69).

The Council's views were touched upon in the previous question. SPT in its present form has no roads, freight or air transport interests.

It does however have a proven track record in project delivery, and this should not be lost. It could potentially form the centre of expertise for public transport matters in the West Central Scotland Transport partnership, but it is important that such a body has a greater involvement in future with local communities in formulating policy and providing services.

Q6) We invite views on the appropriate number and geographical extent of regional partnerships (paragraph 75)

Accessibility is one of the key drivers of economic development and social inclusion. In urban areas the districts which may benefit from common working relate to the 'journey to work' area and the requirements for efficient movement of very large number of people in short periods, and the economic movement of goods within the same area. In rural area the issues are different and relate more to minimum acceptable levels of access, which promote sustainability in the communities and involve the integration of all modes and types of transport.

Regional Transport Bodies, if they are to add value to the delivery mechanism, should reflect these varying criteria throughout the country.

The four city regions have been identified as significant in planning terms and are equally key to the development and management of transportation. In this urban context the partnership areas should reflect the journey to work patterns, which have developed, and the public transportation network which has been developed to reflect this movement of people.

In the case of the Glasgow city region, this should clearly include the whole Clyde valley area and possibly parts of Argyll and Bute and Ayrshire. If accessibility as identified by the availability of access to the SPT rail network is accepted as the natural boundary then Ayrshire, and the Helensburgh, Lomond, Cowal and Bute areas of Argyll and Bute should be included. The eastern Argyll and Bute area has strong employment and service links with the Glasgow conurbation and any actions within that area, both in the planning and transportation fields, has major impact on the viability of this area's local economy. It is therefore important, in terms of accountability and inclusion, that this area retains links in transportation planning terms to the area that drives its economy, the Glasgow conurbation.

The remainder of Argyll and Bute is deeply rural in nature, with some of the most isolated communities in the country, and clearly, while having service linkages with the Glasgow area, it has similar problems, and thus opportunities for joint working, with the Western Isles, Highland and Moray as reflected in the Hitrans partnership grouping.

The Council therefore considers that, should the scale of partnerships be set at a sub-national level, with say 6 partnerships to reflect regional boundaries elsewhere in the European Community, that Argyll and Bute should be represented in both Westrans and Hitrans on a geographic split to reflect the different issues faced by the two partnerships. If however it is decided that differing interests around the country warrant a greater number of partnerships, then this Council would wish its area to be established as a transportation region in its own right. This would reflect the geographical size of Argyll and Bute in the national context, the complexity of the transport challenges faced in the area, and its structure planning status. Such a regional unit could be compared with that of Dumfries and Galloway, which faces similar, if simpler, transportation challenges.

- Q7) We would welcome views on the options for resourcing effective regional partnerships recognising that the preferred method will be informed by what model of regional partnership is chosen (paragraph 81):**
- a) the majority of funding continuing to be provided to local authorities through GAE, with Councils each deciding individually and separately how much to pass on to the partnership (voluntary partnership or Joint Committee)**
 - b) funds still provided to local authorities through GAE and regional partnerships requisitioning their budget from their constituent Councils (Joint Board)**
 - c) section 70 paid direct from the strategic transport authority to the regional partnerships replacing some or all of the transport GAE provided to constituent councils.**

As has been mentioned in previous responses, the principle of delivering transport services should be that they are undertaken locally wherever possible, and the principle of subsidiarity applied. GAE should remain, therefore, as the vehicle for financial distribution of the main transport sector, other than for new functions taken on by the partnership such as for the CalMac undertaking or HIAL, which should be through a new funding stream to the Regional Partnership. This should be through section 70 of the Transport Act as a capital grant, Major infrastructure Improvements should also, be supported through Section 70 Capital Grant. Partnerships should be improved to develop prioritised programmes of strategic improvements, approved by Ministers, linked to both regional and national strategic objectives.