

REPORT TO KINCARDINE AND MEARN'S AREA COMMITTEE - 24 SEPTEMBER 2019

FEASIBILITY STUDY - LOWERING OF SLUG ROAD AT RAILWAY BRIDGE

1 Recommendation

The Committee is recommended to:

- 1.1 Determine whether to instruct the Head of Transportation to investigate further the lowering of Slug Road.**

2 Background / Discussion

- 2.1 Following an incident on the A9 near Inverness in late 2016, involving a Stagecoach double deck bus making low speed contact with the underside of a bridge, the company immediately instructed a repeat risk assessment of all routes that go under bridges.
- 2.2 The risk assessment undertaken in Stonehaven raised an issue with the railway bridge on Slug Road. The height restriction warning sign stipulated a maximum height of 13' 9", whereas Stagecoach Bluebird had been operating double deck vehicles up to a height of 13' 10" under the bridge. It later transpired that the warning sign should actually have stipulated a maximum height of 13' 6" and this was quickly rectified by the Council. However, it should be noted that there are, of course, safety margins for such signs.
- 2.3 Stagecoach Bluebird immediately suspended operation of double deck vehicles via this section of Slug Road. 'Through' services between the area west of the bridge and Aberdeen were replaced by a town service operated by single deck buses, connecting with the mainline services on Barclay Street. At the same time, the company requested that consideration be given to increasing the operational clearance between the road deck and bridge parapet through civil works (i.e. lowering the road) to facilitate the return of double deck vehicles and, in turn, a direct service to/from Aberdeen.
- 2.4 In October 2018, the Council undertook a feasibility study into the lowering of Slug Road to allow the reinstatement of double deck buses. Trial holes were excavated to determine the location of existing public utilities and the level of cover for each pipe/cable at these locations. The purpose of the trial holes was to confirm if the carriageway and footway surface levels could be lowered and still retain sufficient cover for the public utilities in order for double deck vehicles to safely clear the underside of the railway bridge.

- 2.5 The carriageway was excavated first with the two footways excavated thereafter. The findings were as follows:
- * Initial excavation uncovered a 150mm water main within a protective collar at a distance of 800mm from the kerb line of the north footway and at a depth of 850mm below the carriageway surface.
 - * Although the plans supplied by BT indicated that there was an existing BT cable near to the south footway, this was not found.
 - * An existing 150mm cast iron gas pipe was found at a distance of 750mm from the kerb line of the north footway and at a depth of 920mm.
 - * Within the north footway, mainly Scottish and Southern Electric cables were found at varying depths and distances offset from the kerb line. Another cable was found which is thought to be possibly BT although this was not confirmed at the time of excavation.
 - * An existing BT cable and Aberdeenshire Council street lighting cables were found within the south footway.
- 2.6 In order for double decker buses to pass under the railway bridge with a safe clearance, it is anticipated that the road surface level would have to be lowered by up to 200mm. The adjacent footway surface levels would also have to be lowered to accommodate the lower road surface level and associated kerbs. Due to the number of pipes and cables located in the carriageway and footways, the cost of lowering any affected public utilities could be quite significant, as the level of cover between the cable, or pipe, and the road or footway surface, would have to be maintained. The works would also include a 50m tie in point at either side of the bridge in order to achieve a smooth transition from the existing level to the new road surface level.
- 2.7 The estimated costs for the road works as at October 2018 were in the region of £100,000, but the total costs would depend on the works required to lower the affected utilities. This is difficult to estimate at this time without specific surveys by the utility companies but is anticipated as being between £200,000 and £400,000, but likely to be at the top end of this estimation. Details of the initial costs of the road works are provided in **Appendix A**.
- 2.8 In addition, approval of any works would need to be sought from Network Rail's Asset Protection Team. If approved, it is anticipated that the section of Slug Road between Academy Road and Westfield Road would need to be closed, except for access to East Glebe and West Glebe, for a period of no less than 3 weeks.
- 2.9 It is considered that works such as this do carry particular risks, due to the interaction with bridge foundations, buried utility apparatus, and road drainage. Should these manifest themselves, which is quite likely, there would be a significant uplift in the cost of, and timescale for, the works.

- 2.10 Stagecoach Bluebird's core network in Stonehaven features buses which cover the school contracts in the a.m. peak, then move onto the operation of commercial local bus services in the daytime. However, the limitations imposed by the height restriction at the Slug Road bridge, means that any double deck vehicles required for the school contracts, cannot be fully integrated into the local bus network in the most efficient way. This has a particular impact on the Farrochie Road area on the west side of Stonehaven, as it has a limited number of through services to Aberdeen, with the remainder of the service being provided by the local town service, with onward connections being available to/from Barclay Street.
- 2.11 The company has confirmed that if the Slug Road bridge works were to go ahead, they would take the opportunity to review their Stonehaven network, including the operation of Mainstream School Transport services, Local Bus services to/from both Portlethen and Aberdeen, and the local Stonehaven Town service, in consultation with the Council. They would be able to increase the number of through journeys to/from Aberdeen, by utilising vehicles, including the double deck vehicles referenced above. Another potential outcome would be the reduced requirement for a tendered town service, as the overall costs of operating these services may be reduced.
- 2.12 Stagecoach Bluebird have also confirmed that feedback from their customers in Stonehaven, including discussions at the Kincardine and Mearns Area Bus Forum, suggests that the requirement to change buses in the town centre dissuades some people from travelling to/from the numerous facilities in Aberdeen, including Aberdeen Royal Infirmary, which already involves interchange in the City, and also Portlethen, where there is Asda superstore, the largest shopping facility of its kind in the area. The introduction of more through journeys between Stonehaven and Portlethen/Aberdeen may therefore deliver social benefits, although it is not possible to quantify these.
- 2.13 Stagecoach Bluebird have not been specific about the financial savings which could be accrued to the Council, if all the current journeys on Stonehaven town service were covered on a commercial basis. Prior to the withdrawal of double deck operation, the town service required support of £40,000 per annum from the Council and the current contract rate, following a recent procurement exercise, is £48,360 per annum
- 2.14 The Head of Finance and Monitoring Officer within Business Services have been consulted in the preparation of this report and their comments have been reflected in the report. They are satisfied that it complies with the Scheme of Governance and relevant legislation.

3 Scheme of Governance

- 3.1 Under Section B.1.1 of the List of Committee Powers in Part 2A of the Scheme of Governance, the Committee is asked to consider, comment on, and, if appropriate, make recommendations to the Infrastructure Services Committee.

4 Implications and Risk

- 4.1 An equality impact assessment will be carried out if Committee decides to instruct the Head of Transportation to investigate further the lowering of Slug Road at the railway bridge.
- 4.2 There are no specific corporate or service strategic level risks which have been separately identified with respect to the asset management of Aberdeenshire Council's road network.
- 4.3 There are no direct staffing implications.
- 4.4 The estimated cost of the works is between £300,000 and £500,000, whilst there could be recurring annual savings of between £10,000 and £50,000. Depending on the nature of the works, these could be funded from revenue or capital budgets, therefore a business case would require to be drawn up and authorised as appropriate.
- 4.5 A Town Centre First Impact Assessment (TCFIA) was carried out and is appended as **Appendix B** to this report. The impacts of undertaking the works would be as follows:

Positive: Double deck buses and additional higher sided vehicles, than at present, would be able to access the entire town of Stonehaven without having to divert via A90 and A957 to move between the east and west sides of the railway.

Negative: Disruption to road users during the works.

Stephen Archer
Director of Infrastructure Services

Report prepared by Neil Stewart, Principal Officer
12 September 2019

Appendix A

Estimated Costs of Road Works

The total estimated costs of the project will depend on the works required to lower the affected utilities but in relation to the road works are as follows:

Nature of Works	Est. Cost
Traffic Management	£1,500
Resetting of existing gullies x 6	£3,500
Excavation of existing road / footway surface	£5,050
Disposal of material	£17,150
Pavements	£69,000
Kerbs	£5,000
Road markings	£450
TOTAL	£101,650

In accordance with The New Roads and Street Works Act 1991, any budget estimates required for the lowering of the public utilities will have to go through an initial C3/C4 enquiry from the public utility company which will incur costs.



TOWN CENTRE FIRST IMPACT ASSESSMENT (TCFIA)

Aberdeenshire Council recognises that town centres have an important role to play in the sustainable development of local economies.

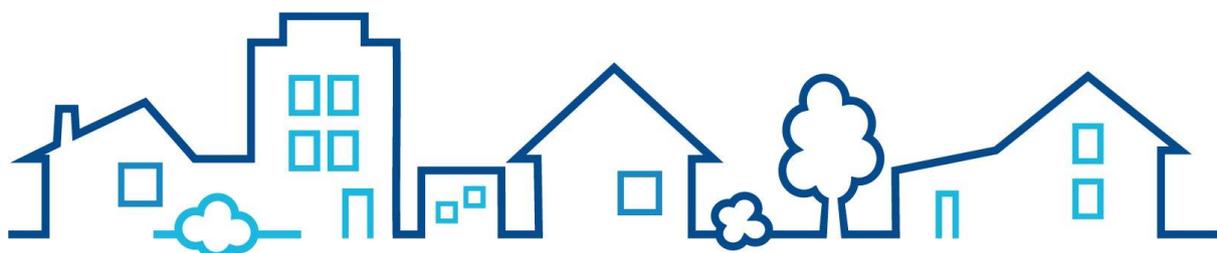
The Town Centre First Impact Assessment (TCFIA) allows officers in all services to identify the detrimental and beneficial effects that decisions we take may have on our town centres. It will allow officers to consider any implications that council decisions may have on Aberdeenshire’s key town centres. Examples of this include changes to: the provision of civic and community facilities, employment land, retail, residential buildings, cultural assets, transportation, leisure and tourism.

A Town Centre Ambassador has been nominated within your service, you can locate your Town Centre First Ambassador through the Town Centre First Principle Arcadia pages.

Project Information	
Title of Committee Paper	Feasibility Study – Lowering of Slug Road at Railway Bridge
Service	Infrastructure
Department	Transportation (Passenger Transport Unit)
Author	Neil Stewart
Have you consulted your Town Centre First Ambassador?	Yes

1) Could your Project Paper cause an impact in one (or more) of the identified town centres? – Peterhead, Fraserburgh, Inverurie, Westhill, Stonehaven, Ellon, Portlethen, Banchory, Turriff, Huntly, Banff, Macduff.	
Yes	Stonehaven and perhaps Portlethen

2) If approved would your project cause an impact (either positive or negative) with regards to the footfall of any of these town centres?	
Yes	It is possible that Stonehaven bus users may choose to travel to Portlethen (for Asda) and Aberdeen (for various facilities) instead of Stonehaven town centre, if a through bus service to/from Aberdeen replaces the existing town service facility. However, it is not considered that numbers would be significant.



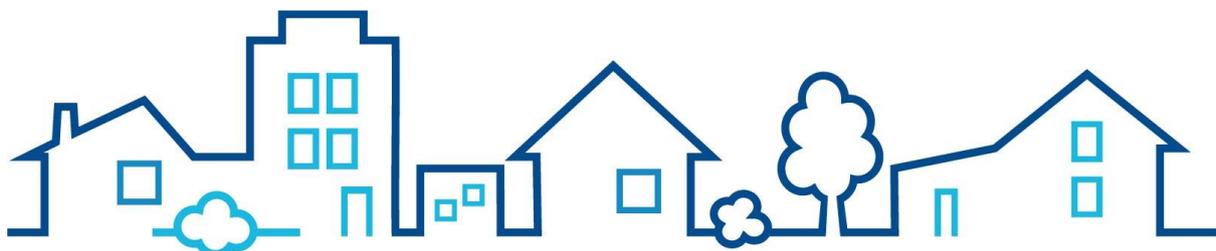


3)	
Please describe the aims of the committee paper?	The aim is to provide as much information as possible relating to the possibility of lowering Slug Road at the railway bridge and to advise that the costs to the Council are likely to outweigh the benefits which could potentially be accrued to bus passengers if double deck buses could operate under the bridge.

4) What are the positive and negative impacts?		
Impact	Describe the positive impact?	Describe the negative impact?
Please detail any potential positive and negative impact the project may have on Aberdeenshire's Key Town Centres.	None specifically affecting Stonehaven town centre unless Stagecoach increase the frequency of services within the town.	Disruption during any works to road users and possibly businesses. It is possible that more people will travel from Stonehaven to Portlethen and Aberdeen, instead of Stonehaven town centre.

5) What mitigating steps will be taken to reduce or remove negative impacts? If none see Q6	
Mitigating Steps	Timescale
None	n/a

6) Set out the justification that the activity can and should go ahead despite the negative impact.
It is considered that the activity should not go ahead in view of the estimated net additional cost to the Council and the uncertainty over future bus service provision on a commercial basis, both outweighing the initial benefit of through bus services between Stonehaven and Aberdeen.





Question 7: Sign off and Authorisation

<p>3) Author: I have completed the TCIA impact assessment for this policy/ activity.</p>	<p>Name: Neil Stewart Position: Principal Officer Date: 17/07/2019 Signature: </p>
<p>4) Consultation with Service Managers</p>	<p>Name: Richard McKenzie Position: Passenger Transport Manager Date: 5 September 2019 Name: Paul Finch Position: Strategic Transportation Manager Date: 5 September 2019 Name: Peter MacCallum Position: Roads Development Manager Date: 5 September 2019 Name: Brian Strachan Position: Roads and Landscape Services Manager Date: 5 September 2019</p>
<p>5) Authorisation by Director or Head of Service</p>	<p>Name: Ewan Wallace Position: Head of Transportation Date: 5 September 2019</p>
<p>6) Have you consulted with your Town Centre First Ambassador?</p>	<p>Yes: Ewan Wallace and Philip McKay 5 September 2019</p>
<p>7) TCFIA author sends a copy of the finalised form to: tcfia@aberdeenshire.gov.uk</p>	<p>Date Sent: 12 September 2019</p>

