

NORTHERN ROADS COLLABORATION JOINT COMMITTEE

WOODHILL HOUSE, ABERDEEN, 29 NOVEMBER, 2019

Councillors: Councillor Brenda Durno, (Vice Chair), Angus Council; Councillor Robin Currie, Argyll and Bute Council (by Skype); Councillors Peter Argyle and David Aitchison, Aberdeenshire Council; Councillors Gordon Cowie and Theresa Coull, Moray Council (by Skype); and Councillor Allan Henderson, The Highland Council (by Skype).

Officers: Paul Finch, Ruth O'Hare, Robert McGregor, Philip McKay, Jan McRobbie, and Ewan Wallace, Aberdeenshire Council; Douglas Hill, Angus Council; Jim Smith, Argyll and Bute Council (via Skype); Calum Mackenzie, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (via Skype); Mark Atherton, Moray Council; Robin Pope and Tracey Urry, The Highland Council (via Skype); and Shaun Millar and Angus Bodie, The Improvement Service.

Apologies: Councillor Ellen Morton, Argyll and Bute Council; Councillors Michael Hutchison and Ross Grant, Aberdeen City Council; Councillor Ron Sturrock, Angus Council; Councillor Trish Robertson, The Highland Council; and Councillors Uisdean Robertson and Kenneth MacLeod, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar.

1. WELCOME AND HOUSEKEEPING

In the absence of Councillor Morton, for whom apologies had been submitted on the grounds of ill health, Councillor Durno took the Chair and welcomed Members to Woodhill House, Aberdeen.

The Joint Committee **agreed** that best wishes be sent to Councillor Morton wishing her a speedy recovery.

The meeting heard from Mr Wallace, Chief Officer, of the housekeeping arrangements.

2. SEDERUNT AND DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Apologies were intimate from Councillors Morton, MacLeod, Uisdean Robertson, and Sturrock.

No interests were declared.

3. STATEMENT OF EQUALITIES

In making decisions on the following items of business, the Joint Committee **agreed**, in terms of Section 149 of the Equality Act, 2010:-

- (1) to have due regard to the need to:-

- (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, and victimisation;
 - (b) advance equality of opportunity between those who share a protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; and
 - (c) foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; and
- (2) where an Equality Impact Assessment was provided, to consider its contents and take those into account when reaching their decision.

4. MINUTE OF MEETING OF 6 SEPTEMBER, 2019

There had been circulated the draft Minute of Meeting of 6 September, 2019. Having noted that apologies had been recorded from Councillor Currie, instead of from Councillor McCuish, of Argyll and Bute, the Joint Committee **agreed** to approve the Minute as a correct record, subject to that amendment.

5. THE VALUE OF THE LOCAL ROADS NETWORK IN SCOTLAND – PRESENTATION

With reference to the Minute of Meeting of 21 June, 2019 (Item 6), when it had been agreed that a presentation be made on the SCOTS “Value in Local Roads” project, the Joint Committee heard from Angus Bodie, of the Roads Collaboration Programme, an update on the work.

Whilst originally envisaged as a short, distinct piece of work, the focus of the research had expanded, including more detailed consideration of what was meant by “value”, in terms of the intrinsic impact of roads on rural economy, beyond a direct correlation made in 2010 of the £1 spend on roads translating to £1.50 impact on Gross Domestic Product (GDP). It was necessary to consider more than an economic value, by looking at journey time and reliability, and speculate as to what would happen to our country and our communities if the roads network did not exist.

Mr Bodie spoke of the research’s methodology, with the work shared across three individual experts rather than a single firm, and to begin with a desktop assessment of existing policy and literature, followed by interviews with 60 stakeholders and a survey of over two hundred community councils. From this, initial work had been undertaken on the information sets and values, linking activities in terms of outputs and outcomes in a greater detail than had previously been considered, including Councils’ work in community planning partnerships in developing Locality Outcome Improvement Plans.

It was reported that the research was already improving understanding of the linkages between investment in infrastructure and non-infrastructure outcomes, including social issues beyond the previous assumptions of roads safety and community safety. This would allow officers to consider how to better assess future investment priorities across their authority area. Mr Bodie stressed that there would be a need to consider these local impacts in the context of a wider national roads

system, and ultimately align this with national performance indicators and the policy framework for Scotland's roads.

The desired way forward was to develop a model that would ensure the capture of values, seen initially in the context of the local economy. This model would require to take cognisance of the differences in geography, both locally, regionally, and nationally. It would also need to be flexible to be able to absorb new data when known.

This might be expressed in a pyramid of values; from utility (evidence based); social value (reflective and evidence based); and future value (predictive and responsive to policy changes and future trends).

From the work done to date, it was possible to confirm that, a basic utility value, including personal, business, and social use, including public transport, had an estimate of £6.4 Billion per annum nationally. From a total level of spend across Scotland of about £1.8 Billion, this was a crude approximation of 1:3, but this would be clarified further when wider social values had been assessed and incorporated.

The next steps, Phase 2, would be the build up from utility values to identify and test social and future value components; the refinement and testing of the theoretical models, potentially in three different areas, (urban, rural, and island) and the inclusion of the trunk roads to inform a "whole network" approach. From this, a standardised approach, with guidance, would be developed and demonstrations made, including to the Joint Committee, of how the model works to embed local roads.

Mr Bodie reported that Transport Scotland were also interested in the holistic network approach, as this could alter the traditional reliance on journey time alone as the sole value focus.

There was discussion of the inclusion of an assessment of the impact of industrial transport on local roads, including that of distilleries on islands, impacting on both commercial ferries and roads built for horse and cart; the process through which a new model might interface with the established Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance (STAG) assessments, currently subject to consultation, potentially allowing for additional funds to be allocated to rural areas which were not currently able to access Government funding; where tourism would sit in terms of the utility valuations; the role of Transport Scotland officers in advising Ministers of the work and its potential assistance in considering the Strategic Transport Projects Review (STPR) processes, and the requirement for Partners to reference the ongoing work in any engagement events in which they participate.

The Joint Committee **agreed:-**

- (1) to note and welcome the update provided; and
- (2) to have a further detailed report on the project progress in due course.

6. NATIONAL ROADS COLLABORATION PROGRAMME UPDATE

With reference to the Minute of Meeting of 6 September, 2019 (Item 6), there had been circulated a report dated 19 November, 2019, by Angus Bodie, Programme Manager, National Roads Collaboration Programme, providing an update on progress being made with collaboration, nationally and locally, through the Roads Collaboration Programme (RCP).

The report highlighted the various stages of governance partnership working across Scotland, with other joint working under early development; cited the updating of the 2017 National Workforce Improvement Plan, reflecting the staff survey which had identified, amongst other matters, a 20% reduction in roads staff across Scotland as well as increasing apprenticeship opportunities; the ongoing work with the Scottish Road Network Management Forum, including representatives from SCOTS (Society of Chief Officers of Transportation in Scotland) and Transport Scotland in delivering the shared action plan of opportunities to work across trunk and local road boundaries, with meetings held with BEAR Scotland in May and November; the progress of various technical projects, including the joint Asset Management Project, the initial stage of SCOTS' "Value of the Local Roads" project and its further development, and bids for Scottish Roads Research Board funding for (a) the use of recycled materials in road construction, (b) sustainability in the use of aggregates in roads construction and maintenance, (c) the impact of industrial transport on local roads, and (d) the Value of Local Roads (Phase 2); and spoke of other training events for staff and ongoing projects to develop sharing of information and best practice around gully maintenance, street lighting (LED) maintenance, and standard construction details.

The Joint Committee heard from Mr Bodie further of additional work with the Roads Work Commissioner to be done on roads management with the advent of a revised Transport Act; how the Northern Roads Collaboration was still the exemplar of good practice to other embryonic governance groups; that the Scottish Roads Training Programme was expected to be complete by January 2020 and would potentially be of benefit to over 2000 roadworkers; and that the research bid projects would all have a significance in the Collaboration area, including work on quarries where it was anticipated that slight amendments to specifications might impact positively on waste arisings and cost savings for each authority.

There was discussion of the impact of reduced or restricted gully cleaning on the roads and its potential impact on flooding and Members heard from officers that often water on roads was not a result of this or of failure of other drainage.

The scope of the assessment of industry on roads was raised, and its potential expansion to consider not only roads infrastructure but harbours and bridges was promoted, potentially as an area where additional funding might be achieved from government, from the taxation of operations such as the whisky industry.

In respect of the Joint Committee's previous consideration of the use of plastics in road works, Mr Bodie advised Members that a report by the Australian Environmental Agency, which paralleled the licensing and monitoring work of the Scottish Environment Protection Agency, had concluded that there was still no

evidence base that the materials used made any difference, good or bad, when added to the aggregate: however it had made it clear that there was no domestic plastic or bags in the process, as the manufacturer had suggested, but rather that virgin plastic offcuts were being used. In the United Kingdom, testing on site had not yet been undertaken, and the results of a pilot in Ayrshire had not yet concluded to clarify what the short and long term outcome would be and its implications for future maintenance sustainability, cost, and regimes. Concerns had been raised on the issue of Health and Safety for roadworkers working with an unknown combination of materials and the end use question had still to be resolved, as, at some point in the future, the material would require to be disposed of to landfill. A sound evidence base was needed to be able to answer these questions.

Mr McKay spoke of additional research being undertaken by KIMO (Municipalities for Sustainable Seas) on the potential for off-run by micro-plastics into water courses and the marine environment; this information was to be shared with Mr Bodie to tie all the research together.

The Joint Committee heard that The Highland Council Members had been keen to explore the options and, against officer recommendation, and in the awareness of potential concerns of Health and Safety issues, had approved a trial of the plastic material, not on a housing estate, but on an area of commercial road. This would be reported in due course to the Joint Committee.

In respect of the continued evolution of the Joint Committee itself, Mr Wallace spoke of additional engagement with the Western Isles to explore the reality of collaboration for them: this would be reported to a future meeting. In addition, Aberdeen City were currently exploring the implications for increased use of hydrogen as a fuel; this would also be reported to a future meeting.

There was discussion of the increasing availability of electric vehicle charging points and whether this might expand from current prominent sites in towns and cities to be more generally available close to roads. Officers advised that some charging sites were located outwith centres, some in transport interchanges, with others being promoted by private sector at petrol stations. Additional locations would continue to be considered, but at present sites were chosen to maximise access by the most people.

The Joint Committee **agreed:-**

- (1) to note the ongoing progress being made with collaboration nationally and locally through the Roads Collaboration Programme (RCP); and
- (2) await further updates on the various projects cited in the report.

7. JOINT ASSET MANAGEMENT UPDATE

With reference to the Minute of Meeting of 21 June, 2019, (Item 8), there had been circulated a report dated 19 November, 2019, by the Programme Manager, Roads Collaboration Programme, providing an update on the joint project to consider opportunities for collaboration in the collection, management, and reporting of asset data.

The Joint Committee heard from Mr Bodie of progress on the initiative, with the project plan signed off and a SWOT (Strength/Weakness/Opportunity/Threat) analysis of the current situation, compared with SCOTS guidance and world-based best practices across each authority undertaken. Results varied across the partnership and an individual assessment had been shared with each authority, but the overall findings supported a clear case for collaboration in due course, with a shorter term option recommended to create a soft hub to share practice and opportunities to align both systems and the form in which data was gathered. Transport Scotland had been engaged in the process as they were currently developing a new asset management system, to be launched in autumn 2020 when new operating companies would be added. BEAR Scotland were aware of these proposals and were tracking developments.

There was discussion of the increasing ability to be able to prioritise works such as bridge management in the light of the joint working on asset management and sharing of good practice, and the requirement for some authorities to further consider the detail of what would be expected in the proposals, before submitting a formal response for ongoing support for the Phase 2 of the Business Case with the Asset Management Hub.

The Joint Committee **agreed** to:

- (1) note the outputs from the completed first phase of this project, noting that each partner authority should now consider their individual responses to the recommendations;
- (2) seek from each authority, by 31 January, 2020, confirmation (or otherwise) of ongoing support for the project along with authority to take forward Phase 2 of the Strategic Business Case, i.e. to introduce an Asset Management Hub across the Northern area during early 2020, and to explore new funding opportunities and approaches; and
- (3) note that officers would continue to engage with Transport Scotland and BEAR Scotland around the potential to collaborate on asset management across the local and trunk network.

8. A9/A96 DUALLING PROGRAMMES

There had been circulated a report dated 19 November, 2019 by Robert McGregor, Strategic Transport Officer, Aberdeenshire Council, providing an update on the Scottish Government's progress in its commitment to completing the dualling of (a) the A9 between Perth and Inverness, to be undertaken at 11 sections of the route, and (b) the A96, in four sections, between Inverness and Aberdeen by 2030. The report detailed Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Councils' experiences of recent working with the Government on the Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route (AWPR) and The Highland and Moray Councils' experience of the A9 dualling and the A96 programmes to date, where issues including impact on Council staff resources; communication with communities and Elected Members; and the knock-on impact on other travel routes and implications for additional future maintenance of de-trunked roads were highlighted.

Although previously identified as a common issue for partnership authorities, it was noted that, given the proximity to the General Election, Transport Scotland had been unable to attend the meeting, but would continue to be invited to future meetings.

There was discussion on how the sharing of experiences as detailed in the report was a very helpful tool for officers in preparing to support new road works. The Joint Committee heard that Aberdeenshire Council's Infrastructure Services Committee had, the day before, heard a public petition that, on the basis of climate change, the A96 be not dualled in its entirety, and had referred the issue simpliciter to the Scottish Government for consideration.

The meeting heard from Mr McGregor that meaningful intervention for change in roads projects could only be achieved before a contract had been awarded, and also that there should be a clearer focus on the implications for de-trunking in terms of future maintenance, actual effectiveness, and drainage.

The Joint Committee **agreed** to:

- (1) note the ongoing progress of the Transport Scotland Dualling programmes for the A9 and A96, within the overall commitment to completing the dualling of the A9 between Perth and Inverness by 2025, and the A96 between Inverness and Aberdeen by 2030; and
- (2) welcome the opportunities afforded for collaboration and information sharing to ensure the best outcomes for neighbouring communities, future maintenance, and traffic management of the existing road network.

9. NATIONAL GULLY MAINTENANCE PROJECT UPDATE

There had been circulated a report dated 19 November, 2019, by Shaun Millar, Project Officer, Roads Collaboration Programme, providing an update on the national gully maintenance project, from which relevant information for the northern roads' authorities had been extracted, as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report.

The Joint Committee heard further from Mr Millar that some of the survey results were surprising; for example, there was only one "backup" vehicle across the seven authorities; of the move to single person machines, and the implications of this; and of the great potential for collaboration as gully work was generally undertaken across planned routes, with the exception of responsive works. There were challenges in so far as there were differences in the four mapping systems currently used across the authorities, but this could be an opportunity for change.

The Joint Committee heard from officers that the gully maintenance work was done in terms of road safety and dealing with flooding of properties, but there was a need to counter any perception that roads should be free from water during heavy rainfall: the systems were not designed that way and roads were designed to be used to channel that flow. This was an area where expectation and aspiration required to be managed, as sometimes when a gully was backing up, this did not indicate a system failure, but rather that the water could not get away. Gullies were expected to

surcharge once a year, with the system every five years, but could not cope in terms of flooding incidents recorded as 1:200 years.

The Joint Committee **agreed** to:

- (1) note the results of the survey as detailed in Appendix 1;
- (2) welcome the establishment of a short life Officer Working Group to explore further collaborative opportunities;
- (3) that officers report to a future meeting on flood alleviation measures in terms of road surface safety; and
- (4) to receive an update on gully collaboration options at a future meeting of the Joint Committee.

10. DRAFT ACTIVITY PLAN AND FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES FOR NORTHERN ROADS COLLABORATION JOINT COMMITTEE

There had been circulated a report dated 26 November, 2019, by Ewan Wallace, Head of Transportation, Aberdeenshire Council, reporting on the successful collaboration achieved as part of the Scottish Government/ Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (CoSLA) Joint Agreement 2018, resulting in the further development of Regional Improvement Collaboratives (RICs) and seeking consideration of the potential for the Joint Committee to seek funding support across several areas of its Draft Collaboration Action Plan.

The Joint Committee heard from Mr Wallace as to the learning from the successful funding achieved for the collaboration in Education in North East Scotland, albeit that these had been in response to specific Scottish Government invitations for grant. The potential applications would be set in the context of the work undertaken across the northern collaboration to date, and had been extracted from the approved activity plan.

Having noted that the cumulative total of funding requested across all the potential collaborations across the seven authorities was £300,000, the Joint Committee **agreed** to:

- (1) note the example of the positive collaboration achieved as part of the Scottish Government/COSLA Joint Agreement (2018) which resulted in the further development of Regional Improvement Collaboratives (RICs);
- (2) approve in principle the potential for Northern Roads Collaboration Joint Committee to seek funding support from Transport Scotland/Scottish Government as set out in the Draft Collaborative Activity Plan (Appendix 1); and
- (3) delegate to appropriate officers to fine tune the submissions prior to their being put to the Scottish Government.

11. FUTURE MEETINGS AND ARRANGEMENTS

The Joint Committee heard from officers that there had been no consensus returned on dates circulated on potential availability for the quarterly meetings for 2020.

It was **agreed** that the dates to be considered for each of the meetings be recirculated and locations identified as appropriate by officers.

In considering the agenda for future meetings, and noting the request that officers report further on technical considerations regarding road surface water issues, it was **agreed** that future meetings consider the undernoted topics as appropriate:

- Electric vehicles; and
- Signage on the network and interrelationship with linkages to trunk roads.

Councillor Brenda Durno

Vice Chair

