

NORTHERN ROADS COLLABORATION JOINT COMMITTEE**MEETING BY TEAMS, 28 AUGUST, 2020**

Councillors: Councillors Robin Currie, Argyll and Bute Council; Ross Grant (as substitute for Councillor M Hutchinson) and Sandra Macdonald, Aberdeen City Council; David Aitchison and John Cox (as substitute for Councillor Peter Argyle), Aberdeenshire Council; Brenda Durno and Ron Sturrock, Angus Council; Theresa Coull, Moray Council; Allan Henderson and Trish Robertson, The Highland Council; and Uisdean Robertson, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar.

Officers: Douglas Ritchie, Aberdeen City Council; Ruth O'Hare, Robert McGregor, Philip McKay, Jan McRobbie, Mark Skilling, Kirsty Street, and Ewan Wallace, Aberdeenshire Council; Douglas Hill, Angus Council; Jim Smith, Argyll and Bute Council; Calum Mackenzie, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar; Mark Atherton, Moray Council; Mike Mitchell, Robin Pope and Tracey Urry, The Highland Council; and Angus Bodie and S Millar, The Improvement Service; Rab Dickson, NESTRANS; Mark Speed, TACTRAN; and Donald Morrison, Transport Scotland.

Apologies: Councillor Ellen Morton, Argyll and Bute Council; Councillor Michael Hutchison, Aberdeen City Council; Councillor Peter Argyle, Aberdeenshire Council; Councillor Gordon Cowie, Moray Council; and Councillor Kenneth Macleod, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar.

1. SEDERUNT AND DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

In the absence of Councillor Morton, Chair, Mr Wallace welcomed all to the first meeting of the Joint Committee to be held on TEAMS.

Apologies were submitted from Councillors Peter Argyle, Gordon Cowie, Michael Hutchison, Kenneth MacLeod, and Ellen Morton.

No interests were declared.

In the absence of Councillor Morton, a letter of resignation (as appended) was read on her behalf, commending partners for their trailblazing collaboration to date, and wishing the Joint Committee every success in meeting the challenges which lay ahead.

Members of the Committee expressed their gratitude for the support and guidance which Councillor Morton had provided the Joint Committee from its earliest days, and wished her improved health.

2. 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.

3. MINUTE OF MEETING OF 21 FEBRUARY, 2020

There had been circulated and was **approved** as a correct record, the Minute of Meeting of 21 February, 2020.

4. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR AND VICE CHAIR

With reference to the Minutes of Meeting of 21 June 2019 (Item 4) and 6 September, 2019, (Item 4), there had been circulated a report dated 21 August, 2020, by the Principal Solicitor, Aberdeenshire Council, requesting the appointment of a Chair and Vice- Chair to the Joint Committee, to take effect from 6 September, 2020.

Councillor Coull moved, seconded by Councillor Henderson, that Councillor Durno be appointed as Chair. Councillor Durno having indicated that she would be happy to accept the nomination, the Joint Committee unanimously **agreed** that Councillor Durno be appointed Chair, effective from 6 September, 2020 for a period of 12 months.

There being no nominations for the position of Vice-Chair, the Joint Committee **agreed:-**

- (1) to defer consideration of the matter to the next meeting of the Joint Committee; and
- (2) that, in the interim, all member Councils consider who they might wish to nominate to the position of Vice-Chair.

At this point of the meeting, Councillor Durno took the Chair.

5. REVIEW OF GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS AND FINANCIAL MONITORING

There had been circulated a report dated 21 August, 2020 by the Principal Solicitor, Aberdeenshire Council, requesting Members' consideration of a proposed review of the Joint Committee's governance arrangements, established on 6 October, 2017, and financial monitoring. Having heard from officers of the requirements to be assured that arrangements were fit for purpose, in the context of the continuing development of joint working and in the light of the potential increasing need for collaboration arising from the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, there was discussion of the impact on project costs of officers working mainly from home.

The Joint Committee **agreed:-**

- (1) to note the financial information as detailed in paragraphs 2.6 and 2.7 of the report; and
- (2) that the Lead Officer commence a review of the governance arrangements for the Joint Committee and report back in due course.

6. UPDATE FOR NORTHERN ROADS COLLABORATION ON THE PROCUREMENT OF NETWORK MANAGEMENT CONTRACTS (NMCS) FOR THE SCOTTISH TRUNK ROAD NETWORK

With reference to the Minute of Meeting of 29 November, 2019, (Items 7 and 8), there had been circulated a report dated 21 August, 2020 by Donald Morrison, Head of Asset Management and Procurement for Transport Scotland, The Chair welcomed Mr Morrison to the meeting, which thereafter heard of the ongoing work on the procurement of network management contracts (NMCS) for the Scottish Trunk Road Network.

The Joint Committee heard from Mr Morrison of the success to date of the new contracts recently in place for southern Scotland, with contracts let to AMEY and BEAR, and the contract for North East, and North West, Scotland issued, for a start date of August, 2022. It was highlighted that the contracts had altered and now a bidder could only win one contract per area, to support market resilience. There was a greater emphasis on the quality of service, compared to a previous weighting on price, now due to 40%, compared to the previous 10%, and the contracts would be awarded alongside the implementation of the new asset management approach and IT system being developed.

The development of the proposals had included discussion of shared resources, and some evidence of increased cooperation had already been demonstrated, with an operating company in Edinburgh offering to provide maintenance services for a Council-owned road at Hermiston Gate.

The new contracts in southern Scotland stipulated the establishment of stakeholder engagement plans as a default, and it was hoped that this model would be rolled out in north and west Scotland.

There was discussion of whether contractors would be encouraged to use greener vehicles, and Mr Morrison indicated that any fleet needed a minimum percentage to be ultra-low electric vehicles, rising to 50% in 5 years at Euro 6 emission standards. All depots would also require to be carbon-neutral and sharing of depot resources would also be encouraged.

On the issue of the asset management scheme currently being developed, it was noted that the roll out for testing would be in the current financial year, involving Roads Authorities, with the in-house developed system freely available to those interested, and that a presentation on this could be made to a future meeting. There was discussion of the potential for those companies providing trunk road related services might consider adding further strands of privately arranged joint working, such as grass cutting beyond the road verges, and into open spaces or amenity spaces; the need to ensure in the allocation of contracts between different firms to be aware of cross boundary opportunities and efficiencies; concern about possible lengthy mobilisation times for newly awarded contracts to reach fully operational efficiency.

The Joint Committee **agreed:-**

- (1) to note the current status of the procurement of the Network Management Contracts (NMC) trunk road term-maintenance contracts; and
- (2) to thank Mr Morrison for his welcome update.

7. ANNUAL REPORT ON ACTIVITIES

There had been circulated a report dated 21 August, 2020 by the Lead Officer, providing an update on the activities of the Northern Road Collaboration for 2019/2020.

Having heard further from Mr Wallace that the report reflected the period to the end of March, 2020, before the impact of Covid-19 had impacted on many aspects of normal roads operations, the Joint Committee **agreed:-**

- (1) to approve the Annual Report on Activities 2019/20, as appended to the report;
- (2) to commend officers on the work undertaken under the aegis of the Joint Collaboration; and
- (3) that the report be submitted to each member authority for their consideration.

8. COVID-19 ROADS AND TRANSPORT SERVICE UPDATE

There had been circulated a report dated 21 August, 2020 by the Programme Manager, Roads Collaboration updating Members on the impact of Covid-19 on the Scottish Roads and Transportation sector, and the continuing monitoring, knowledge sharing, and joint planning amongst officers across Scotland.

The report highlighted the initial impact of the national lockdown, with offices closed, staff furloughed or redeployed, supply chains stopped, and a national cessation of all but construction deemed essential, and the lead role taken by Roads Collaboration Programme in sharing of information and advice across all 33 road authorities with weekly updates which had also informed Scottish Government considerations. This would be of critical importance when lessons learnt were to be considered at a future date.

Their increasingly importance role in supporting workforce planning in times of uncertainty, and the continued working with Skills Development Scotland to ensure the continued creation of opportunities for young people in the public sector was reported, as was an initial outlining of the experiences of the past five months and an indication of the current roads situation as the wider construction sector moved through stage 4 to 5 of its own roadmap to recovery plan.

Having heard further from Mr Bodie, there was discussion of the reduction of planned maintenance in terms of surface dressing, and the knock-on impact of delays in major capital programmes; the vulnerability of supply chains, especially those with overseas contractors; the positive engagement with wider collaboration partners over the period of Covid which it was hoped would continue into future joint working; potential impact on winter preparation in terms of grit and salt, with assurances given that supplies were currently not considered to be a concern; the need for effective communication with public to share the understanding of the reasons for the delayed works as a casualty of conforming with national guidelines;

The Joint Committee **agreed:-**

- (1) to note the effects of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic on the Scottish roads and transport sector, and welcome the continuing monitoring and recording, knowledge sharing, and joint planning amongst officers across Scotland;
- (2) to recommend the report be shared with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (CoSLA) and Government for national consideration;
- (3) to welcome the detail of the report; and
- (4) that a further update be provide to a future meeting.

9. NATIONAL ROADS COLLABORATION PROGRAMME UPDATE

With reference to the Minute of Meeting of 21 February, 2020, (Item 4), there had been circulated a report dated 21 August, 2020 by the Programme Manager, Roads Collaboration Programme requesting the consideration of the update provided in terms of national roads collaboration programme work since the last meeting and proposing a report come to the Joint Committee on the conclusion of ongoing work into the technical advice note to be drawn up on the use of recycled materials in roads construction.

The Joint Committee heard further from Mr Bodie of the current position with regard to governance first, workforce planning, the collaborative network management, and

technical projects, all revised and reshaped in response to the effects of Covid-19 over recent months.

There was discussion of the Joint Committee being the sole forum in which the Roads Collaboration Project were able to meet directly with Elected Members; the potential need for guidance to be provided for planners in terms of the transport implication of new housing on the verge of existing settlements; and the ongoing need to consider wider industrial sector levies for use of public road and ferry networks.

The Joint Committee **agreed:-**

- (1) to note the ongoing progress being made with collaboration nationally and locally through the Roads Collaboration Programme (RCP);
- (2) that a report be submitted following completion of the technical report and advice note regarding the Use of Recycled Materials in Roads Construction;
- (3) that a presentation on the Value of Local Roads be provided to the next meeting of the Joint Committee; and
- (4) to welcome in all other respects the terms of the report.

10. FUTURE MEETINGS AND ARRANGEMENTS

There was discussion of the dates and agenda for future meetings of the Joint Committee and it was **agreed:-**

- (1) that the next meeting be held on either 27 November, or 4 December, 2020;
- (2) that future meetings be held via TEAMS until circumstances change;
- (3) that the next agenda contain (a) a further update on the Covid-19 response, (b) a presentation on the Value of Local Road Network research, (c) the impact of industrial traffic, (d) electric vehicles, (e) natural stone/ town centre maintenance regimes in addition to the standard partnership updates; and
- (4) that proposed meeting dates for 2012 be circulated for consideration prior to their submission for approval at the next meeting.

Dear friends and colleagues

It is with great sadness that I have tendered my resignation as Chair of the Northern Roads Collaboration Joint Committee. I am undergoing treatment for a serious illness and am unable to give the role the time that it requires.

I had hoped to be able to dial into the meeting today but felt that the best option was to send some words to be read out on my behalf. Thank you to whoever is currently reading my statement (probably Jim Smith or Jan 😊)

My time as Chair of the NRCJC has been very rewarding.

It is unusual for a smaller authority such as Argyll & Bute to get this type of role, but this different approach has been a feature of how we have worked together. We have had common issues to deal with and have done so in a positive way. The support of you, my fellow Councillors, has been excellent throughout and I would issue my heartfelt thanks to Brenda, my Vice Chair, and every member who has put their time and knowledge into our collaboration. Thank you.

This has been and continues to be, a successful collaboration. It has so much potential and I think we have all seen that from back in 2017 when we first came together informally. We were the first Joint Committee of this type in Scotland, first to build in remote participation as standard, and the first to consider issues around plastic in roads (sorry Mr Bodie 😊). Across the 7, we have an excellent mix of skills and abilities as members and officers and I know you will achieve positive things for our communities.

We have been so very well supported by our officers in firstly forming, and then running, this Committee. Their professional approach and knowledge have shone through and I would wish to make special mention of Angus Bodie and his team from the Improvement Service for their exceptional work on our behalf. All of the officers have been patient and dogged in equal measure to ensure we have been well briefed and well organised. At Aberdeenshire, the work of Jan and Ruth to keep us in good legal order has been invaluable and poor Ewan has had the unenviable task of dealing with me as Chair, whilst leading the officer groups as well. He tells me it has been a dawdle really. But thank you to all of you.

I hope that you can take the collaboration to the next level and that we see joint approaches on all things roads across the north. Perhaps we can even persuade Scottish Government to allocate some extra cash in the coming years that allows us to transition from this dreadful pandemic, maintain and improve our creaking infrastructure, and tackle the impacts of climate change such as the landslips on the A83, bridge and road collapses. The challenges have never been greater, and I wish you the best of fortune in all that you do.

Councillor Ellen Morton

First Chair of the Northern Roads Collaboration Joint Committee

28th August 2020