

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

**PLANNING, DEVELOPMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE
COMMITTEE**

Agenda Item	11
Report No	PDI 32/15

3 JUNE 2015

STROME FERRY BYPASS ROUTE OPTION APPRAISAL AND EXTERNAL FUNDING UPDATE - JUNE 2015

Report by Director of Development & Infrastructure

Summary

This report will summarise the progress since publication, in November 2014, of Part 2 of the STAG appraisal carried out for the Strome ferry Bypass. The Funding Strategy group approved by members has been formed and is working towards identifying funding streams to implement one of the options contained within the STAG appraisal.

Additional stakeholder and public consultation has been carried out to obtain feedback on the published Options Appraisal.

Members are invited to support the reduction of the options being considered from three to two. The online construction is considered too disruptive to road and rail services and is, following consultation, deemed unattractive. In addition members are invited to provide continuing support in efforts to obtain external funding for the project.

1. Background

- 1.1 The Strome ferry Bypass was developed in the 1960s to replace the small car ferry that operated for many years across the Strome narrows to the west of Lochcarron in Wester Ross.
- 1.2 Over the period since the road was opened there have been a number of rock face failures. These failures, and the need to secure the rock face, have required significant investment from the Council's capital programme to provide stability and protection works.
- 1.3 The Council allocated £500k for an Options Appraisal using the Strategic Transport Assessment Guidelines (STAG), Parts 1 and 2.

STAG Part 1 - Options generation and sifting, and selection of options was completed in May 2013 and was presented to Committee (TEC39-13) with nine routes taken through to Stage 2.

1.4 At the PD&I committee on 5 November (PDI 45/14) consideration was given to the STAG part 2 and the recommendation that only three routes be considered further:

- **Option N9 North - Lochcarron Bypass.** This option requires a bridge crossing of the Strome Narrows and a bypass road around Lochcarron village.
 - The options which passed through the village of Lochcarron have been rejected as they do not significantly reduce construction costs and there was a strong feeling amongst the local community that a route through the village would be unacceptable.
- **Option O2 Online – Viaduct.** This route would relocate the existing railway onto a viaduct constructed on the southern side of Loch Carron. A new road would then be formed on the land vacated by the railway.
 - All of the online options have the problem of disruption during construction. Closure of the road and rail links, to a greater or lesser extent, would be required for all schemes which are constructed online. The closure of existing transport links was seen as a significant dis-benefit by the local communities.
- **Option S4 South - Glen Udalain.** This option involves a diversion of the existing road corridor to the south. The route will lead to an increase in journey distance for the majority of road users.

1.5 Members agreed that officers pursue external funding bodies to develop an overall funding package to enable the project to proceed, this report seeks to update progress on the potential for external funding.

1.6 Full Council considered the capital programme on the 12 March 2015, report HC/5/15, and the £10m allocation for Stromeferry was maintained in the capital programme. It is clear that this funding will not provide a solution to the Stromeferry bypass rock fall issues. The capital programme also made an allocation of £1.44m over the 10 year life of the programme to continue stabilising the existing rock face.

2. Funding Strategy Group

2.1 Following committee approval a funding strategy group was established to review and investigate the potential for external funding.

2.2 Highland Council Team:

Name	Council Role	Responsibility
Thomas Prag	Elected Member	Liaison with members
Stuart Black	Director of Development & Infrastructure	Chairman
Colin Howell	Head of Infrastructure	Lead Officer
Garry Smith	Principal Engineer	Coordination
Gordon Summers	Principal European Officer	European Funding
Ruth Cleland	Corporate Communications Manager	PR
Mike Mitchell	Finance	Advisory

In addition there are representatives from:

- Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE); and
- Highlands and Islands Transport Partnership (HITRANS)

2.3 The funding group considered all potential sources of funding and these included:

- Renewable energy It was initially thought that renewable energy and specifically tidal stream devices attached to the bridge, may offer opportunities. Notwithstanding the fact that the tidal flow was deemed insufficient to economically generate electricity, funding was limited and would be recovered if income was made, this solution would add significantly to the capital cost and not recover income and as such was deemed unviable.
- European Funding European funding was investigated and road schemes are no longer supported, other European funding opportunities were not available for such a project.
- HIE / HITRANS HIE and HITRANS have been very supportive and recognise the potential economic benefits but do not have any substantial projects or funding mechanisms to make a significant contribution to scheme costs.
- Scottish Government Historically Scottish Government have indicated that as a local road it would not attract Government money but an approach to Derek Mackay MSP, Transport Minister, has been made by Cllr Thomas Prag, Chairman of PDI Committee with the aim of engaging in discussions on the problems and potential funding options.

It is recommended that officers should continue their efforts to seek external funding.

3 Stakeholder Group and Public Opinion

3.1 Since publication of the Part 2 of the STAG Options Appraisal In November 2014, there has been the opportunity for all interested parties to examine the contents which are available on the Council's website. Following a meeting the Stakeholders were formally invited to comment on the findings in March of 2015.

3.2 A review of the three remaining Options was undertaken by the Stakeholders. Online Option O2 which involves moving the Railway out into the loch and using the space vacated by the railway to provide a corridor for the road was rejected. The Stakeholders were concerned by the disruption to road and rail services during the construction period. In addition the residual risk of the infrastructure being constructed below the rock face was considered unacceptable.

It is recommended that the Online Option be rejected from further consideration.

3.3 Following discussions with the stakeholders and to provide an update to the wider communities, public meetings in Lochcarron and Achmore, the two communities nearest to the Stromeferry Bypass, are to be held on the 28/29 May. A verbal update of the results of these meeting will be brought to Committee on the 3 June.

3.4 Following stakeholder consultation and also the public meetings outlined above, a review of the target outcomes of the project should be undertaken to determine if a more cost effective, or phased solution, may be found in recognition of the funding challenges.

It is recommended that officers consider, through consultation with the communities, if modifications to the two remaining routes and/or phasing can be undertaken to aid funding issues.

4 Option Selection

4.1 The northern route N9 and the southern route S4 still remain viable options but funding opportunities should be further explored prior to route selection.

4.2 The timetable for reporting the outcome to Committee will be determined by the funding success.

5. Implications

5.1 Resource

The existing capital programme identifies £10m of funding for the project. A report shall be brought to a future committee on an overall funding package for

consideration.

5.2 Legal

It is likely that objections will be received to any preferred route selected, and that the scheme would be subject to a Public Local Inquiry as part of the approvals process. The Council will be required to justify the selection of the preferred option during the Public Local Inquiry.

5.3 Climate Change/Carbon Clever, Risk, Equality, Gaelic and Rural

These are considered as part of the STAG process, and will influence the preferred option and subsequent design development.

Recommendation

Members are invited to:

- agree that officers should continue their efforts to seek external funding;
- agree that the Online Option be rejected from further consideration; and
- agree that through consultation with the communities, consideration be given to modifications to the two remaining routes and/or phasing to aid funding issues.

Designation: Director of Development and Infrastructure

Date: 3 May 2015

Author: Garry Smith/Colin Howell

Background Papers: May 2013 (TEC39-13), (HC-18-13), PDI 45/14, HC5/15.