

Agenda Item	6
Report No	CIA/11/21

## THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

**Committee:** City of Inverness

**Date:** 27 May 2021

**Report Title:** Inshes Junction Improvements - Update

**Report By:** Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment

### 1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 Inshes Corridor is one of the busiest parts of the city's transport network and as a result has Capital Programme funding allocated toward making improvements. Since this scheme's initial designs were shown in the adopted Inshes and Raigmore Development Brief national transport policy has shifted focus to support sustainable modes over private cars. This means the approach to how this part of the city is improved needs to change to deliver a modern transport network that meets the needs of all users.
- 1.2 This report seeks approval to proceed with public consultation on options to improve Inshes Junction and the surrounding transport corridor.

### 2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:-
- i. Note the changing priorities for investing in transport set out in emerging local policy and published national policy; and
  - ii. Agree to proceed with a public consultation on design options to improve Inshes corridor.

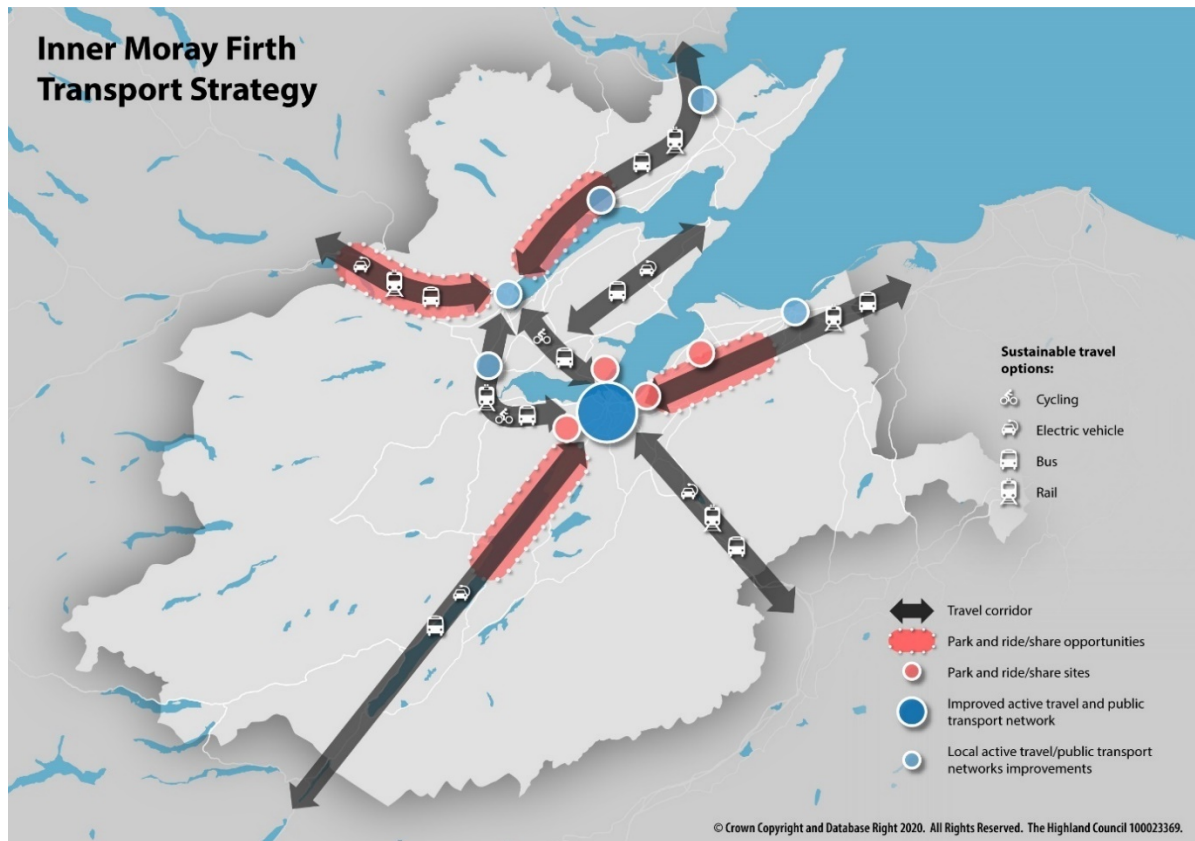
### 3. Implications

- 3.1 **Resource** - The scheme is included in the capital programme [report](#) approved by Full Council on 7 March 2018. This was reviewed and [updated](#) on the 7 January 2021 (rescheduled from the 17 December 2020). The project budget was identified as £6.695M.

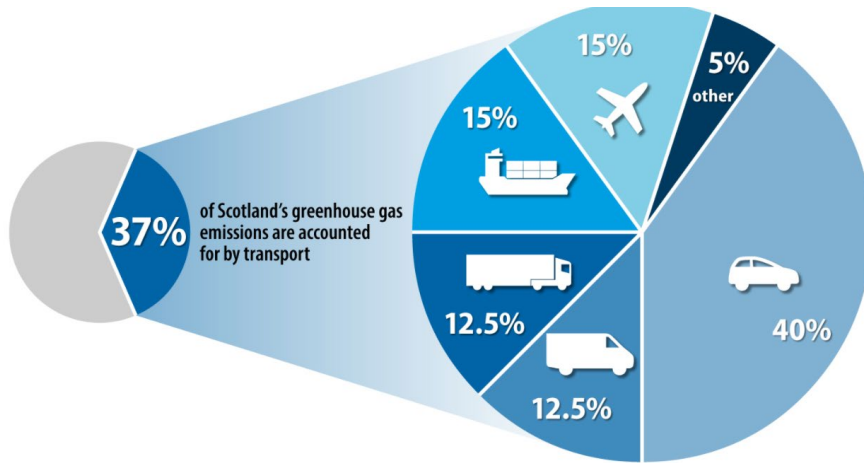
- 3.2 **Legal** - The land acquisition for the project may require a Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) and will therefore require approval from full committee. A separate committee paper will be prepared when the preferred option is selected.
- 3.3 **Community (Equality, Poverty, Rural and Island)** - An Equalities Impact Assessment will be prepared on design options taken forward to ensure that the needs of all users of the corridor are accommodated.
- 3.4 **Climate Change / Carbon Clever** - The scheme focuses on active travel and public transport improvements which offer the opportunity to respond directly to the Climate and Ecological Emergency and reduce the carbon footprint of transport in Highland, as well as reducing other forms of pollution and improving air quality.
- 3.5 **Risk** - The scheme budget relies on developer contributions. The land required for the scheme may require a CPO. The scheme will impact on the existing access for the Inshes retail park, this interface needs to be managed during construction. The improvements planned for Inshes Junction, are essential to ensure a coordinated approach with the planned Transport Scotland A9/A96 Inshes to Smithton project (East Link), both are committed [Inverness and Highland City-Region Deal](#) projects. Without improvements at Inshes, the East Link road cannot connect into the rest of the network. Timescales outlined in the Capital programme are aligned to deliver improvements to Inshes in advance of the East Link project, without which, the committed timescales may not be met.
- 3.6 **Gaelic** - Council policy will be followed regarding bi-lingual signing therefore no impact.

#### **4. Background**

- 4.1 This project was originally included in the [Inshes and Raigmore Development Brief](#) in 2015. The Brief showed an indicative layout for improving Inshes Corridor and its interface with the Transport Scotland proposal for the A9/A96 Inshes to Smithton road project (East Link) which forms part of the Highland City-Region deal.
- 4.2 The Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan which the Brief is included in is currently under review. Members will recall approving the Main Issues Report for consultation at November 2020 meeting. The Main Issues Report sets out an ambitious new approach to transport for the region that addresses the climate and ecological emergency and public health issues associated with transport. The strategy for the city is a focus on walking, wheeling and cycling as well as improving the effectiveness of public transport:-



- 4.3 Transport Scotland will construct the East Link to connect people from the bridge crossing the A9 at Inshes to the Smithton roundabout on the A96/Barn Church Road. Transport Scotland selected their preferred option for the East Link in May 2018 and subsequently published the draft Orders for the East Link Scheme in September 2019. The Council continues to work with Transport Scotland to integrate design proposals with the proposed East Link.
- 4.4 This new East Link road and the improvements to the Inshes corridor need to be designed to support existing journeys as well as major city expansion east of the A9. The Inshes junction is one of the busiest in the city and forms a bottleneck for a lot of people travelling to other destinations, as well as Inshes itself, which is a major employment destination for an estimated 13,000 people. The Council therefore needs to ensure this corridor is designed to enable people to choose the healthiest modes of transport.
- 4.5 The Highland Council has declared a Climate and Ecological Emergency. We therefore need to deliver rapid action to mitigate and adapt to climate change. A large share of greenhouse gas emissions come from cars. Changing how we move around will therefore have a positive benefit in tackling the Climate and Ecological Emergency:-

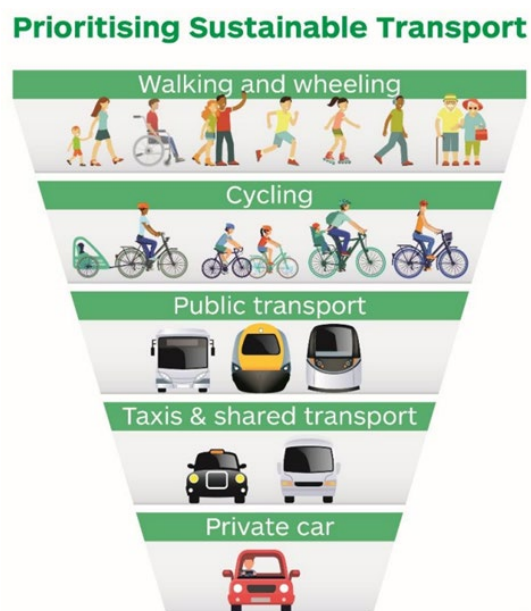


Breakdown of Scotland's transport emissions adapted from NTS2, Scottish Government, 2020

4.6 Covid-19 has demonstrated that homeworking is a realistic option for a lot of people, meaning it is possible that not everyone will return to regular office hours. For transport this means people might work different days at home or start and finish at different times throughout the day, changing how the transport network functions.

Beyond Covid-19, the wider health impacts of transport are broad, and we need to support people to make healthier travel choices wherever possible to tackle the potential impacts the current transport network can cause. As a Council, it is therefore important that we design new infrastructure to make it easy for people to make better travel choices.

The Scottish Government has set out a clear travel hierarchy in the [National Transport Strategy](#) that starts with people walking and wheeling and ends with private car:-



4.7 Building new infrastructure to increase road capacity may therefore not be the most sustainable approach to this project. The latest policy, including the findings of the [Infrastructure Commission for Scotland](#), encourages investment in transport projects that make the best use of existing infrastructure incorporating measures to promote active travel and encourage public transport use. Improving the performance of Inshes corridor to move motorised vehicles is fundamental, but this has to be balanced with the needs of other users. It also has to be rooted in a strategy to support efficient use of the available space.

4.8 A project board was established in August 2016 consisting of officers from across the Council. This Board has developed the following Aim and Objectives for the scheme:-

**Aim:** Redesign the Inshes Corridor to address existing congestion issues and improve efficiency and effectiveness of journeys.

**Objectives:**

- Create a more efficient transport network that makes it easier to get around;
- Better connect our communities to the places they want to go;
- Create convenient and direct routes;
- Connect with the A9/A96 Inshes to Smithton project;
- Address the Council's commitment to the climate and ecological emergency;
- Improve the quality of the natural environment;
- Create an attractive and welcoming urban environment;
- Encourage active and sustainable travel choices; and
- Deliver the project on time in a cost-effective manner

4.9 A key aspect of the project is to improve efficiency for vehicles, which requires removal of one or more of the roads onto the roundabout. To facilitate this, and in line with the initial design concept, work has progressed to design an alternative access into the Inshes Retail park. Consultation with the landowners and retail interests in the area have taken place to consider the necessary agreements. These discussions are still in progress. Since the Brief was published, the retail market has shifted significantly and the future of what the land around the junction may be used for might be different than what already has planning permission or is shown in the Brief.

4.10 The Council has continued to develop the design for the Inshes corridor and have, where possible, progressed enabling works. Part of this involves the current construction project at Beechwood House to provide an alternative access from Sir Walter Scott Drive, and which closes off vehicular access from Old Perth Road.

4.11 Following the publication of the transport policy outlined above a range of design options have been appraised. **Appendix 1** shows the designs that meet the aim and objectives of the project and improve traffic flows using as much of the existing infrastructure as possible whilst making improvements for active travel. Other options which were developed but sifted out due to being undeliverable for one or more reasons are also shown in **Appendix 1**.

## 5. Consultation

5.1 It is proposed to have public consultation on the options being considered in the context of the need to modernise our transport network for a wider range of users. This consultation process will provide details on the issues and options for the corridor and will seek to understand where the public think the balance lies between traffic provision and travel alternatives at what is recognised as an existing congested junction.

5.2 It is proposed, given the ongoing Covid-19 restrictions, to undertake online consultation based on digital information and inviting feedback on the proposals. An interactive on-line website will provide all relevant information and the opportunity for people to comment on the proposals. This page will be available at [this link](#) from 1 June. We will also arrange a series of meetings to engage with directly affected communities, businesses and other stakeholders.

- 5.3 If Covid-19 restrictions allow, face to face meetings will be arranged and advertised. Information will be available in hard copy to be posted out on request to the Council's Call centre.
- 5.4 On conclusion of the consultation, the feedback will be collated and considered, and a paper will be brought to this committee to consider the findings and agree to a preferred option. Following on from the selection of the preferred option officers will progress with the necessary statutory consents and compulsory purchase orders. It is only on conclusion of the statutory consents that the project can progress to the construction phase currently programme to commence in financial year 2023/24.

Designation: Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment

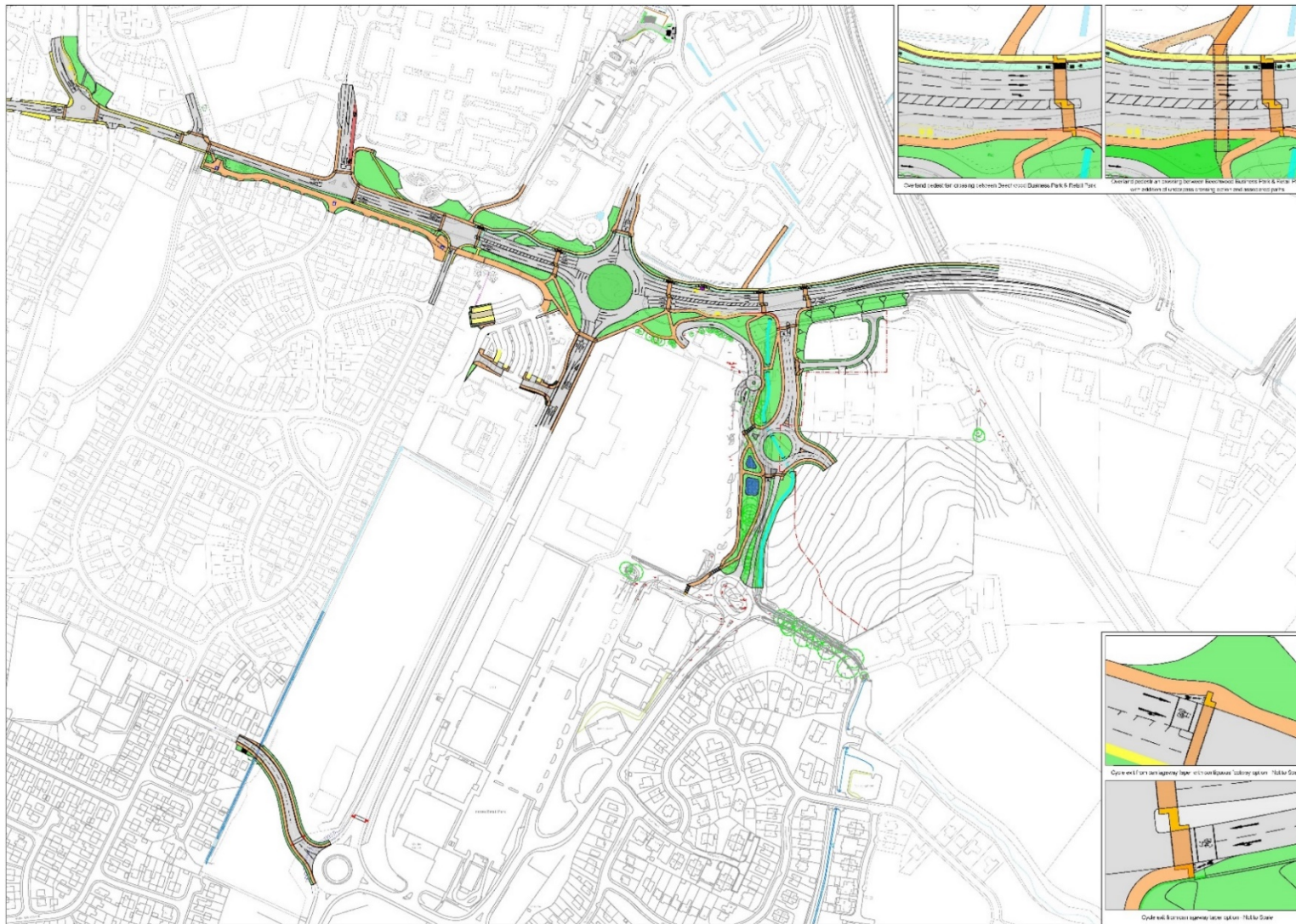
Date: 4 May 2021

Author: Garry Smith, Principal Engineer  
Craig Baxter, Planner

Background Papers: - PD&I Committee 14 May 2014 - Item 9 Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan  
- PD&I Committee – 18 Feb 2115 - Item 17 Inshes and Raigmore Development Plan Adoption  
- PD&I Committee 17 Feb 2016 - Item 4 Capital Programme Approval  
- Highland Council 7 Mar 2018 - Item 3 Capital Programme Approval

# Appendix 1: Design options

## Design Option 1: four-way signalled roundabout



**Design Option 2: four-way signalled roundabout with bus priority lanes**





## Design Options Sifted Out

The following options were sifted out because they did not meet the aim and objectives of the scheme shown at paragraph 4.10. Note, these options will be included as part of the proposed public consultation.

