



REGIONAL TRANSPORT STRATEGY

HCC has recently responded to the Hitrans Regional Transport Strategy consultation. We started with an introduction outlining our concerns about the document as a whole. These concerns were:

- the overarching priority of economic growth
- that environmental issues seemed to be limited to effects on landscape and localised pollution due to congestion
- that a commitment to active travel was not evident throughout the document

(Active Travel (AT) was considered a ‘horizontal theme’ – relevant throughout the region – with a small section devoted to it in an appendix. Whilst this section was good, it was not clear that AT had been considered as an essential part of the thinking behind the strategy.)

We advised:

- making ‘economic activity’ (not ‘growth’) equal with the other objectives (participation/social inclusion, safety, health and environment)
- widening the environmental objective to include the challenge of climate change and resource depletion. We suggested ‘Minimise emissions and the consumption of resources and energy’.
- ensuring that AT was considered throughout and not merely left to the appendix

We then gave detailed comments about the content, suggesting additional wording where appropriate. Since this will be a project-based strategy, much of Hitrans’ document consisted of identifying transport problems in the region. We were concerned that the ‘measures of adequacy’ used to assess whether

transport infrastructure was ‘fit for purpose’ did not include provision for AT. Many of our comments here, therefore, were concerned with specifying lack of provision for active travel and lack of integration of public transport with AT. We pointed out how providing for AT would work towards Hitrans’ objectives. We also emphasised the actual and potential benefits of cycle tourism to the region.

A programme of ‘strategic and regional network interventions’ was included in the Hitrans document. Four of these interventions mentioned provision for cycling. We added an appendix to our response with a list of interventions that specifically provide for AT (e.g. the provision of segregated shared use routes on sections of main roads). We hope that this list can form the basis of a coherent plan of work to improve the infrastructure for walking and cycling throughout the Hitrans area. We also asked that all of the interventions should be required to have an AT audit, and that no intervention should make conditions worse for active travel.

RTS working group: Stewart Campbell, Ged Church,
Rebecca Kail, Ron Stewart and Jim Towers.

RK

QUEBEC BRIDGE COLLAPSE, TAIN

The Alness to Tain section of NCN 1 has been severed due to the collapse of the Quebec Bridge near Tain. According to press reports, engineers consider the bridge damaged beyond repair, and there is no estimate of when, or if, works will commence to build a replacement. There are alternative routes for motor traffic, but the light motor traffic on this route previously made it a pleasant alternative to the busy A9. Now cyclists have no choice but to take the A9 between the Garrick Bridge and Tain, a section which does not even have a One Metre strip.

RS

INTEGRATION OF MODALITY

I was asked to write something on Cycle Parking at Inverness Station but as you see from the title I have broadened it out a bit. Integration of Modality (IM) is something we are very keen on in HCC but we don't get much of it and sometimes when we get it, it is less than we had before. This might sound a bit like a combination of 'Alice in Wonderland' and 'Bilbo Baggin's' farewell speech to Hobbiton so I shall try to clarify it. IM is transport-think-speak for organising things to make it easier to combine different transport methods in a journey. It therefore includes secure cycle parking at railway and bus stations and at some bus stops, and also carriage of bikes on buses and trains. Getting to the bus and train must also be considered in terms of providing safe, attractive routes. This is important for walkers as well as cyclists. Lack of a safe, coherent route and poor 'trip end' facilities are the two major dissuaders identified by CTC in preventing people from using bikes for work.

Imagine this attractive scenario: a quiet road followed by a segregated path taking you to the station. You can lock your bike on one of the many Sheffield stands in an easily accessible sheltered area visible to staff where the station has any. Or if you need to take your bike with you, you may have a folding bicycle which fits an ordinary luggage space or you may need to put a standard bike on the train. You would have been wise to book in the latter case, but most of the time, since there are 6 spaces, you could get on without trouble.

Carriage

Currently on the North Highland line, most trains carry a maximum of two bicycles. This is a reduction in capacity over recent years. The same is true for Scotrail trains south from Inverness, although some have space for 4. However it is not possible to predict which ones. From Fort William the situation is better with six spaces available. Of course it would be nice to have more spaces but given current constraints and demands, this seems reasonable. With minimal co-operation from staff and fellow travellers, Scotrail trains could easily carry 3 bikes. In fact some staff are as accommodating as possible and deserve our warm thanks for their efforts. I've seen 5 bikes and 3 folders on one of the evening commuter trains north. (Two tourers were swiftly unladen and the 5 bikes sat strapped neatly head to tail on the hanger arms, leaving room for even quite large people to pass by in comfort.) Other staff are disinclined to go beyond stated capacity; thus to be sure of making a journey, a group of

more than two cyclists must book on separate trains, making family cycling holidays and outings in the north a severe logistical challenge.

We and others (notably Sustrans & Spokes) have pointed out, many times over the years, that upgrading to 3 bike spaces simply requires a change in policy: no additional infrastructure. Top officials, consultants etc., nod their heads, go away and nothing changes. However, the good news is that after a few false dawns things are about to change. My understanding is that with funding from Transport Scotland and Hitrans and the help of Frank Roach of the Northern Rail Partnership, the 158 trains in question are to be re-furbished. This should result in the creation of a minimum of 4 spaces for cycles. This is not the 6 we had asked for but is nevertheless welcome news.

Things have improved on buses too. Coach style buses are becoming more cycle-friendly. The Stagecoach (Bluebird) No. 10 Aberdeen to Inverness bus carries bikes provided there is space.

Parking

Cycle parking has improved. Every station now has cycle parking. However, this has been done as a blanket policy without looking at individual stations. We are glad to see that un-manned stations such as Beaully have good sheltered parking but rather wonder why Carroul has been fitted with Sheffield stands? There are reports of Sheffields being badly sited (up against a wall, too close together etc.). The fitters should have been referred to “Cycle by Design” guidelines.

So we come to Inverness. Parking provision here is awful. With ample space on sheltered platforms or the concourse, a substandard shelter with ghastly butterfly attachments was sited outside the roof in the corner of the car park on the Rose Street side. Recently four Sheffields (unsheltered) were added.

Some years ago it was the custom to attach bikes to the ample lengths of wall rail within the station. This was a far better provision. It is now prohibited and thus reasonable informal provision has been replaced by a poor formal arrangement. Here too, however, things are due to change. Transport Scotland and Hitrans are once again involved in a scheme to refurbish the station. This plan will include new cycle-parking under the main roof. (For those of you who feel that the new “Colditz” style fence separating the access to Falcon Square from the station is an unwelcome addition, it is interesting to note that Hitrans do not care for it either.)

GC

BIKES TO WORK

It is not often that the Chancellor allows something for nothing without the law being involved. If it is the case, you should take advantage. He allowed it with home computers for the purpose of increasing IT literacy and then bikes (presumably to get the same people away from their keyboards for a while). At least that's what he did for my employer (THC).

The idea is easy. You buy a bike that you use primarily for commuting, and the money to pay for it comes off your salary. The good bit is that you don't pay VAT, Tax or National Insurance on it and you end up saving around 35% on the price of the bike. This means several things:

- You can get a better bike.
- You can pay it up over several months and not really notice it coming off your salary.
- You get into the alternative reality of cycling.

509 of THC's employees thought the same and took up the offer and the scheme was reasonably easy to administer (I will not bore you with the details). That's another 500 people commuting by bike all over the Highlands. They spent over £300K in local bike shops, boosting trade at a slack time of year, and generated a phenomenal amount of goodwill.

Some things surprised us. We had a husband and wife team in Caithness who bought a tandem (lived together, commuted together and worked together!), a chap in Alness who bought a recumbent and a lady in Corran who bought two bikes. (The scheme was designed for city commuters in the south, who could cycle from home to the railway station and then pick up their other bike to get into the City.) She tooters along to the Camusnagael ferry, sails across Loch Linnhe and then pops on her other bike again at Fort William. Admirable Highland ingenuity!

The scheme also helped us to make savings in employers' National Insurance and we ended up in the happy situation where everyone was a winner. Except the Chancellor, but that's what happens when you're a Raith Rovers supporter!

I would recommend this scheme to any employer, and there are already others in Highland with successful schemes going on. Tell your Employer about it, contact www.cyclescheme.co.uk and get going.

David Balfour THC Project Manager

CYCLE PARKING AT LIDL STORES

Recent years have seen the arrival of Lidl stores in the Highlands. I have been disappointed at the poor provision for cycle parking. It appeared “Butterfly” wheelbenders were to be the standard Lidl provision. I wrote to the Highland Council Planning Office in the hope they could enforce provision of Sheffield Stands, but as is often the case, heard no more.

“Butterflies” were installed at Inverness and Alness Lidl branches, and I know they are also used in other parts of Scotland. I visited a Lidl Open Day in Tain in order to express my concerns, but there were no representatives there from their building construction division. I left them with my thoughts on the subject although I really do not know if they understood. Recently, a Lidl branch opened in Dingwall (excellent cycling gloves - £4.99 a pair) and I was pleased to see Sheffield Stands installed. However, when trying to park my bicycle it was soon obvious the stands had been erected considerably closer to each other than recommended in the guidelines. At least Lidl were now using approved stands.

I wrote to the Lidl HQ in Wimbledon expressing my pleasure at seeing Sheffield Stands at Dingwall and my displeasure at the way they were installed. I pointed out there was no need to spend more money on cycle parking; just install the Stands a minimum of one metre apart. An encouraging letter came back quite promptly from their Scottish HQ saying their Regional Director had been made aware of my comments, and these would be passed to their Construction Director during the next Board meeting. We wait now for the next Lidl shop opening to see if they will get it right next time.

RS

LETTERS - OPINIONS - ACTION - PARTICIPATION

Chairman: **Dick Langridge** 6, Rowan Park, Carrbridge, PH23 3BE 01479 841633
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NEW REGIONAL TRANSPORT PARTNERSHIP HITRANS - ACTIVITIES

Exit Highland Cycle Forum ~ Enter Active Travel Advisory Group

On page 1 of this Newsletter you can read HCC's response to Hitrans' Regional Transport Strategy consultation. In the guidelines to new Regional Transport Partnerships (RTP) the Scottish Executive noted that the new Boards could use Advisory Bodies for specific issues. HCF were aware of this and, thanks to the work of Roger Humphry (Chair) and Cllr. Ron Lyon (former Chair), we made sure that the Highland interest in cycling could be transferred to Hitrans by leading the setting up of an Active Travel Advisory Group (ATAG). Since the RTP area of activity includes Argyll & Bute, Western Isles, Orkney & Moray as well as Highland, HCF members decided that our local interests might best be served by gaining representation on this new advisory group.

There have been four Hitrans ATAG meetings so far. The first two in the earlier part of last year, were concerned with its establishment and agreeing a constitution. At the third meeting on 13th November it was necessary for a Chair to be appointed and Chris Thompson (School Travel Co-ordinator, Moray Council) kindly agreed to take this on. With ATAG up and running Colin Simpson of THC & Vice-chair HCF, called a meeting that afternoon to dissolve the Forum. Arrangements were made for remaining funds to be transferred to the ATAG budget.

This may all sound rather tedious but it is worth pointing out that these procedures required the time, watchfulness and diligence of a number of people. Our thanks go to all those mentioned above for getting this new regional group off the ground in good order and in time for the group to submit a view to Hitrans' Board regarding the Draft RTS. This important first task has been well attended to by the chair and other members as well as a small working party. The meetings on 13th November and 15th and 23rd January, have ensured that the case for funding Active Travel will be made by the new group within the required deadline.

The first meeting had representatives from all areas but ensuring future regular attendance is likely to be a problem over such a far-flung region. More environmentally friendly ways of keeping communications open and working are being looked at.

GC

UPDATE ON TORE – MARYBURGH CYCLE ROUTE

HCC has received an outline of the proposals (+plan) for the above route from Cathy Kay, Halcrow Group Ltd.

Current proposals consist of :

- Using the existing housing access road from Tore roundabout to connect with the existing cycle track to the eastern side of the A835
- Widen the existing cycle track to 3m to the Kilcoy junction
- Provide a new 3m wide cycle track from Kilcoy to Leanaig junction
- From Leanaig junction to Corntown junction, use the old road currently signed as Route 1 of the National Cycle Network
- Introduce islands to make Corntown junction easier for pedestrians/cyclists to cross
- Provide a new 3m wide cycle track from Corntown to Maryburgh roundabout
- Destination signing for pedestrians and cyclists

Several members who use the route regularly have submitted comments. All responses have been collated by Halcrow and reported to Transport Scotland. Further consultation will then be made with HCC, CTC Scotland and Sustrans when more detailed designs become available.

The main objection is the use of the old road from Leanaig junction to Corntown junction. This has a poor surface and we would prefer the cycle track to continue beside the A835.

Any member who has additional suggestions, please send them to Moira Broadhead (moirabroadhead@hotmail.com) or Dick Langridge (see p.5)

MB

POTHoles

A new web-site has been established by the CTC to enable cyclists to report pot-holes and other defects. See www.fillthathole.org.uk. By clicking on maps to pinpoint the problem and adding a few more details the CTC can report the hazard to the appropriate service who should deal with it.

IN TOWN , WITHOUT MY CAR

INVERNESS – 19TH SEPTEMBER 2007

If you live or work in Inverness, book this date into your diary **now!** Jim McCreath (Inverness and Nairn Transport Forum) is working with a variety of organisations to encourage people to leave their cars at home for the day. The aims are to encourage sustainable transport and to make our streets more pleasant places to be. The day is part of European Mobility Week, and many UK cities have successfully taken part in previous years (see www.itwmc.gov.uk).

Ideas for Inverness include a mass cycle ride from Beauly to Inverness, laying turf on an area of road for a street party, concessions and ‘freebies’ on public transport, temporary bus lanes, and competitions for businesses and schools (based on the reduction in car journeys made that day).

Whilst a single day event is symbolic rather than a real shift towards sustainable transport, Jim hopes that the publicity surrounding the event will encourage people to begin to think about the transport choices that they make.

Please support this event. Mention it to your friends and colleagues. Ask your employers if they are involved. Start talking about it now! And if you have any ideas to support In Town, Without My Car! please contact:

admin@intrans.org.uk

RK

Area HCC representatives:

Easter Ross: Ron Stewart (See p.5)

Badenoch and Strathspey: Dick Langridge (See p.5)

Isle of Skye: Jim Towers 3, Carbost Mor, Carbost, Isle of Skye IV47 8ST
fjit@fish.co.uk

Lochaber: Neil Parrish Nevis Cycles, Spean Bridge PH34 4EP

Sutherland: Steve Carroll Creag Charrach, Rockfield Village Portmahomack, IV20 1RF
biker_carroll@hotmail.com

Details of the next quarterly meeting and the Annual General Meeting
are shown on page 12.

FREE BIKE HIRE AT INVERNESS STATION?

A new scheme offering the free use of bikes is planned to start this summer. Jim McCreath (Inverness and Nairn Transport Forum) hopes to have ten bikes available, with the possibility of increasing both the number and range of sites if the scheme prove popular. Details have not been finalised, but users will need to register in advance. They can then book a bike (by phone/e-mail) and simply pick it up from the station and return it later.

The free bike ‘hire’ is designed to appeal to those who need to get a little way out of the town once they have reached Inverness (the industrial estate, or the hospital, for example) but who would not normally think of taking their bike on the train. Similar schemes work well in many other European countries.

The project should be up and running well before “In Town, Without My Car! Day”. (p.9) Indeed, Jim has planned the launch for between National Bike Week and “In Town, Without My Car! Day” in order to keep sustainable transport in the news.

Watch this space (and the local press) for further details.

RK

SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT AND LOCAL ELECTIONS

HCC will be writing to all major political parties (Conservative, Greens, Labour, Lib-Dems, SNP) to ask what their policies are for sustainable/active transport. However, it is important that individual members lobby their councillors and MSPs, if standing for re-election, and other candidates to ask them what they would do to promote active transport and cycling in particular.

The web-site: *www.WriteToThem.com* makes this task less arduous.

Abbreviations Used in Newsletter

CO	Cycling Officer	SE	Scottish Executive
CTC	Cyclists’ Touring Club	TEC	Transport, Environment Services
HCF	Highlands Cycle Forum	THC	The Highland Council
HIE	Highlands and Islands Enterprise	RTS	Regional Transport Strategy
NCN	National Cycle Network	AT	Active Travel
SCF	Scottish Cycle Forum	ATAg	Active Travel Advisory Group
LA	Local Authority		

‘OV-FIETS’-DUTCH TRAIN BIKE HIRE

In December 2006, my wife, daughter Fiona, and I took the tram from Fiona’s flat to Amsterdam Central Station where we caught the train to Baarn. Fiona bought the tickets for all of us using her 40% discount ‘Season Ticket’ swipe card. We met a friend there and had lunch at the excellent restaurant beside the Station.

It was a mild sunny day so when we returned to the station Fiona swiped her card again and we picked up new, single speed bikes, with coaster brakes and a ‘bottle’ dynamo for back and front lights. These were ideal for the job, where the highest ‘hill’ was a kerb. The cost was €2.75 each for 20 hours. (This allows commuters to pick up a bike on their way home and return it next morning.)

We followed a leisurely route through fields, forests and an area of dunes. There was a ‘mushroom’ at every intersection of the track or road, clearly indicating the distance to the next village or town. We could safely ride two abreast and rarely saw a car. It was a most enjoyable and sociable ride. We met several other cyclists, and walkers. At the right moment we came on an Inn where we enjoyed gluhwein and savoury snacks, before cycling back in the dark to the station, dropping off the bikes (with little formality-the card covers insurance etc) and catching the train back to the city.

That use for a pleasant day out illustrates the ease with which the new Dutch ‘public transport bicycles’ can be used.

OV-fiets are rental bikes which are part of the Dutch public transport system. They can cover the journey from home to the station and from the station to work. They are fast to pick up and drop off and are available at 100 railway stations at present. The number of stations, and other transport locations, is increasing rapidly.

The facility is targeted at commuters rather than tourists, and is accessed by an enabled Netherlands Railway annual season card (discount, concession, student etc.) or an OV-fiets membership card. It only takes a minute to collect the bike since all the relevant information is computerised via the card and bar code on the bike. Payment is by monthly direct debit. There is an annual subscription fee of €9 (£6).

This service is provided jointly by ProRail (‘Railtrack’), NS (‘Scotrail’), Fietersbond (‘CTC’) and several public authorities (equivalent to Hitrans, Cycling Scotland etc).

How about starting here with Nairn, Aviemore, Inverness, Dingwall, Wick and Thurso?

Bikes on Dutch Trains

Folding bikes are carried on all Dutch trains free of charge if they are completely folded. A special bag is not required.

Other bicycles are carried during non-peak hours, at an extra charge of €6 per day. During July and August bikes can be carried during rush hour as well. Bikes must be put in the special area reserved for them.

Civilised!

JDSC

MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS

January is the time of year when we ask all our members to renew their membership. No subscription is required, but we do request a donation to help cover the administrative costs of the campaign, which includes responding to planning applications, commenting on local plans and major developments, attending meetings and responding to consultations. If you have made a donation to the Campaign in the last couple of months, please ignore this request. If our records are correct and you have not made a donation for at least 12 months, a personal reminder is enclosed with this Newsletter.

QUARTERLY MEETING

The next quarterly meeting of the Highland Cycle Campaign will be held on **Thursday 1st March** at Spectrum Centre, Farraline Park, Inverness (6-8pm)

N.B. As the Spectrum Centre was unavailable on the Tuesday this meeting has been changed to Thursday.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The AGM of the HCC will be held on **Thursday 29th March** at the **Spectrum Centre**, Farraline Park, Inverness.

A speaker, yet to be announced, will open proceedings at 7.30 pm followed by the business part of the meeting at 8.30 pm.

~ All members are encouraged to attend ~