

## Rail Directorate

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Dear Paul

### **ABERDEEN TO CENTRAL BELT RAIL ENHANCEMENTS**

Thank you for your letter of 12 March 2020 to Bill Reeve, who has passed this to me for response. We are writing to you in your new role as we understand that you retain responsibility as lead for the transport aspects of the Aberdeen City Region Deal.

Apologies for the delay in responding. Transport Scotland resources have been pivoted to respond to Covid-19 and the challenges that it presents. That has resulted in a significant reprioritisation, with a range of policy and project delivery activities paused to be consistent with current guidance and to release resources for Covid-19.

Whilst we do everything we can to support the transport sector - for example our financial support packages for bus and for rail enabling critical services to run - there are inevitably commitments that have had to be put onto the back-burner at this time.

Despite this, the second meeting of the Aberdeen to Central Belt Key Stakeholders took place on 16 April, albeit by tele-conference. Having attended this meeting and the previous meeting in January 2020, you will of course be aware that Network Rail set out the four concept timetables it has developed, each of which could deliver the service specification endorsed by the Aberdeen to Central Belt Reference Group at its final meeting on 12 September 2019. These timetables have in turn identified the signalling and infrastructure enhancements that would be required to deliver them.

Turning to the three areas on which the Joint Committee requested further details:

- i. With regard to our future work programme in relation to this project, Network Rail is, as outlined at the Key Stakeholder Meeting, completing the Governance for Railway Investment Projects (GRIP) 2 stage of the project, which establishes a project's feasibility. The next stage will be GRIP 3, which is option selection, which will be carried out by Network Rail's Capital Delivery team. During this stage, further detail on the estimated costs and a draft programme will be developed for the single option selected for progression. To speed this process up, we have engaged Atkins to assist in this work.

- ii. Moving onto timescales and milestones; as discussed at the Key Stakeholder meeting the GRIP 2 feasibility work has been fast tracked and carried out considerably more speedily than the normal two years timescale. We will be pressing Network Rail to complete GRIP 3 within a similarly accelerated timescale.
- iii. The GRIP 3 process will identify specific measures and their contribution to the journey times stated within the Reference Group's close-out report. As Network Rail confirmed at the Key Stakeholders' meeting, however, each of the timetables developed as part of its GRIP 2 work would deliver the service frequencies and journey times specified by the Reference Group. Initial work by Atkins on the feasibility of the required signalling and infrastructure enhancements provides assurance that delivering these by 2026 is feasible. Whilst cost estimates at this early stage can only be expressed within considerable ranges, this early work suggests that these enhancements would be likely to cost significantly in excess of £200 million.

Work is also on-going to prepare an Outline Business Case, also being undertaken by Atkins in line with Transport Scotland investment governance procedures, and this will need to be approved by our investment decision-making board prior to the project progressing. As Bill explained in his response to Stephen Archer previously, this project, along with other rail enhancement projects, will need to demonstrate value for money and to fulfil the requirements of the Rail Enhancement Capital Investment Strategy (RECIS).

I understand that NR indicated on 16 April that it hoped by the end of May to be in a position to share its GRIP 2 report with you. We have been informed that Network Rail's Capability and Capacity Analysis team in Milton Keynes, which has been quality-assuring the report, has had to re-prioritise its resources to Covid-19-related timetabling work. You will appreciate that there will therefore be a delay in finalising the report.

I would however assure you, and the Aberdeen City Region Deal Joint Committee, that at this challenging time we are doing everything we can to progress the Aberdeen to Central Belt rail enhancements project and that it remains a priority. In addition to fulfilling the commitment by Scottish Ministers, it will be a key enabler to our ambitious de-carbonisation strategy for routes to Aberdeen and beyond

Finally, given that we have committed significant resource to arranging Key Stakeholder Meetings, at which detailed progress updates are being provided by ourselves and our industry partners, and which you attend alongside officials from Nestrans and Tactran, I'd be grateful if any future correspondence could be raised for discussion via this forum. The next meeting has been scheduled for 23 July.

Yours sincerely,



**Damian Briody**  
Head of Rail Delivery

c.c. Amy Phillips, Transport Scotland