

NORTHERN EXPOSURE – A TRANSPORT STRATEGY FOR SHETLAND

Paul Finch, BEng (Hons), MSc, CMILT, MIHT
Principal Consultant, Faber Maunsell

1. A TRANSPORT STRATEGY FOR SHETLAND

1.1 Introduction

Shetland is the smallest transport partnership in Scotland, and one of two partnerships covering a single Local Authority area. Faber Maunsell has been working closely with Shetland Islands Council and Shetland Transport Partnership in the development of their Transport Strategy which will be submitted to the Transport Minister at the end of March 2007.

The paper will cover the following key areas relating to Shetland's experience over the last 18 months in developing their Transport Strategy, covering:

- a) the legislative context;
- b) the case for Shetland being designated its own partnership;
- c) background to Shetland and its transport network;
- d) the development and finalisation of Shetland's Transport Strategy; and
- e) the lessons that have been learnt during the development of the strategy.

1.2 Policy and Legislative Context

The Scottish Transport White Paper *Scotland's Transport Future (2004)* heralded significant changes to how transport policy, and transport schemes in Scotland are developed and delivered. The Scottish Executive remains responsible for setting overarching policy, and published their National Transport Strategy on 05 December 2006. At the national level, many (but not all) of the main transport functions have been transferred to Transport Scotland, an agency of the Scottish Executive. Transport Scotland is currently undertaking a Strategic Transport Projects Review, to determine major infrastructure investment priorities for the medium term.

At a regional level, enactment of the Transport (Scotland) Act 2005 saw seven new Statutory Regional Transport Partnerships created, covering the whole of Scotland. Each are now currently finalising their statutory Regional Transport Strategies. Local Authorities still retain the majority of Local Transport and Roads Functions, and many are preparing, or have prepared, non-statutory Local Transport Strategies.

1.3 Shetland Transport Partnership

During 2005, a successful campaign was mounted by Shetland Islands Council and partner organisations to see Shetland formally recognised as a Regional Transport Partnership in its own right. Subsequently, Shetland Transport Partnership (STP) began work as a statutory Transport Partnership on 1 April 2006. Its purpose is to develop and deliver a long-term Transport Strategy for its area.

Shetland Islands Council was previously a member of the voluntary Regional Transport Partnership HITRANS. Key reasons for Shetland seeking to be its own RTP were set out in their document *Case for a Shetland Transport Partnership (Shetland Islands Council, 2005)*

- a) Shetland's remote location imposes major difficulties and disproportionate costs in sharing of resources and the achievement of synergies. The scope for efficiency improvements were considered to be minimal and more than offset by the costs of maintaining and contributing to a widespread statutory organisation.
- b) The transport issues for Shetland were viewed as not being shared across the HITRANS area. Shetland's key issues are a long-distance, deepwater ferry service which is packaged for technical reasons in a separate PSO contract and longer range air operations directly to Aberdeen and the central belt. Similarly Shetland has no direct interest or concern with rail services which do not serve its inhabitants, or the upgrading of the A9, or congestion issues, or again the impact on the roads of forestry extraction from Argyll.
- c) The key transport partners with which Shetland has a real need to consult and collaborate are outwith the HITRANS area. Aberdeen is currently by far Shetland's most important provider of services of all types, and is the main gateway for sea and air access to Shetland, and by Shetlanders to the rest of the world. Thereafter, Shetland is increasingly looking to direct links with Edinburgh and Glasgow.
- d) Proposed arrangements for transport decision-making and investment in HITRANS were viewed as diluting the robustness and transparency of decision-making in Shetland, unless the HITRANS was kept virtually powerless. Neither of these outcomes was viewed as being helpful.
- e) A Shetland RTP would be aligned with the wider policy direction which Shetland has adopted. It would add another powerful dimension to its ambitions for inter-agency working within the Efficient Government initiative, itself of major importance for a small population reliant on pooled resources.

Shetland Transport Partnership is now currently assuming many of the transport functions previously head by Shetland Islands Council. These include the provision, management and development of local bus services, the provision and development of the inter-islands air service (from April 2007), and the provision and development of the inter-island ferry service (from April 2008). Roads services remain outwith the Transport Partnership

1.4 Shetland Transport Strategy

The Transport Strategy is intended to be a long-term document that will contain actions for the short, medium and long term. It will also provide a framework for the wider transport related activities of the local authority, and other stakeholders. It has a principal implementation timeframe of 10-15 years, although responds to immediate ongoing actions, as well as longer term goals. It covers all links related to Shetland's transport – external links, inter-island links, and internal links. The strategy will be used to:

- a) accurately represent the vision for Shetland's Transport;
- b) provide an assessment of the existing situation;
- c) set out a programme of activities, projects and interventions, making the case for investment and infrastructure;
- d) guide and co-ordinate transport-related activities in Shetland; and
- e) make the case for specific projects that meet funding criteria from the Scottish Executive through specific grants.

In parallel to the development of the Transport Strategy, a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) has been prepared to identify and assess any potential environmental impacts caused as a result of the strategies proposed within the Transport Strategy.

2. SHETLAND

2.1 Location

Shetland is at the very top of Britain. Located within the North Atlantic Sea, Shetland sits 220m due east of Bergen (Norway), 220m north of Aberdeen, and 210m south-east of Faroe Islands. Kirkwall (Orkney) is 106m south, and the Scottish Mainland 103m south.

Shetland is an archipelago which encompasses over 100 islands, 15 of which are inhabited. As the crow flies, the distance from Hermaness in Unst, to Fair Isle in the South is almost the same as that from Edinburgh to Aberdeen (just under 100 miles). Shetland covers an area of 567 square miles with over 900 miles of coastline. Many areas of Shetland are particularly indented by deep sea lochs / fjords.

2.2 Population

The total population of Shetland is just under 22,000, and has remained stable over the last decade. The population is centred around the island's principal town of Lerwick, and within a series of scattered settlements within in and around the island's Central Belt, typically within 30 minutes drive of the main town. Around 3,000 of Shetland's population are resident on the nine principal off-shore islands. Populations of these islands vary from around 1,000 on Whalsay and Yell, to little over 20 on Foula and Papa Stour.

2.3 Economy

Traditional Shetland industries include knitware, fishing, fish processing and crofting. All three sectors have seen decline in recent years, and a focus is now placed upon "adding Shetland's value" to specific products. Aquaculture is seeing a recent rise in fortunes, aided by the development of high quality products such as organically farmed salmon and cod.

Public sector (public administration, health) dominates, and is important in many of the more remote areas, including the employment provided by island-based ferry jobs. Since the mid 1970's the oil sector has also contributed in terms of employment, but crucially in terms of income. Oil flow through the Sullom Voe terminal has now have peaked, and are in a phase of gradual decline. New economic prospects include tourism, renewable energy, oil rig

decommissioning, and niche opportunities arising from improved ICT facilities in Shetland.

2.4 Environment

Shetland has 900 miles of dramatic coastline, which is home to many important and rare species of plant and animal. In addition, there are numerous specific sites of geological interest. There are also many well-preserved historic sites including Viking settlements, brochs and ancient crofts – all of which are important contributors to Shetland's strong and unique cultural identity.

Severe weather conditions are frequently experienced in Shetland. The area is often subject to very high winds, and severe sea conditions. Furthermore, during the summer, the island's airports and smaller airstrips can often be affected by fog. These weather conditions can seriously disrupt transport arrangements to Shetland, and within Shetland.

2.5 Culture

One of the key characteristics commonly used in references to what makes Shetland's culture is the strong sense of community spirit amongst Shetlanders. Many sporting, social and music events take place in Shetland, with particularly high community participation. These events help to maintain the islands' strong community spirit and identity.

Another characteristic of Shetland's culture are the links with its Scandinavian neighbours. Shetland's Norse links are evident through various means, whether this be the Up-Helly-Aa festival, or the distinctive local Shetland dialect which is derived from Old Norn.

3 SHETLAND'S TRANSPORT LINKS

3.1 Introduction

All transport links contribute to sustaining social and economic opportunities within Shetland. Each route is unique, but issues of commuting demands, facilitating access to health / social care / education and other essential services, providing reliable freight services, and promoting tourism all need to be considered.

A recurring theme for the supply Shetland's external links, inter-island links, and internal transport provision is the relatively high cost of providing the necessary lifeline transport services. Issues include:

- a) High capital investment required for vessels, ferry terminals and airports;
- b) High operating costs due the dispersed population, large distances, and severe sea and weather conditions;
- c) High recurring capital costs, particularly in terms of ferries and their terminals; and
- d) Relatively small market size for the transport services.

Particular issues are also faced by users of lifeline links, such as external and inter-island ferries, external and inter-island air services, and even communities linked by a single track road with no alternative route. This has been explored in recent research work commissioned by Highlands and Islands Enterprise. Key issues for users include:

- a) Total travel time – often longer and slower;
- b) Direct travel costs (fares, petrol) – increases travel costs;
- c) Out of pocket costs – there can be the necessity for over-night stays;
- d) Schedule delay – the inconvenience associated with low frequency of services / inconvenient timetabling;
- e) Journey time variability – such as on single track roads compared to two land roads, impact of weather delays;
- f) The direct impacts of being dependent on “non-secure” link – ferry or air service, which can be susceptible to disruption or delay, forcing significant changes in travel arrangements;
- g) The longer term impacts of being dependent on a “non-secure” link, which may suffer reductions in service levels, or increases in fares, or changes in overall quality; and
- h) Restrictions on choice of onward mode.

3.2 External Links

There are daily overnight passenger Ro-Ro and freight services between Shetland and Aberdeen, provided by Northlink Ferries, operating the Northern Isles lifeline ferry contract tendered by the Scottish Executive. A range of fare and freight subsidies are available. These services are supplemented by a regular commercially operated Load on – Load off freighter service. A seasonal ferry service links Shetland to Faroe, Norway, Denmark and Iceland, however the level of service has recently been significantly reduced.

All air services between Shetland and UK Mainland are operated on a commercial basis, from a base at Sumburgh Airport at the south of the island. Loganair is the main operator, with the most frequent links (up to 5 per day) to Aberdeen. Edinburgh, Inverness (via Kirkwall) and Glasgow are also served with between 1 and 2 flights per day. The Air Discount Scheme provides reductions for island residents. A new seasonal link operated by Atlantic Airways direct to Stansted Airport was particularly successful this summer, and is to be continued in the coming year.

3.3 Inter-Island Links

SIC currently operates a fleet of ferries to provide services to 8 islands with a total population of approximately 3,400 people. The services operate from a total of 15 terminals. Seven Ro-Ro vessels operate the services to the islands of Yell (2), Unst and Fetlar (2), Whalsay (2) and Bressay (1). Two Ro-Ro ferries are kept as spares for overhaul and breakdown relief duties. Two Ro-Ro/Freight ferries operate the services to Out Skerries and Papa Stour, whilst one freight vessel carries loose cargo and up to 12 passengers to Fair Isle. In addition, SIC has recently procured the services of Atlantic Ferries to operate the ferry service between Foula and Walls / Scalloway. This utilises a

SIC owned freight vessel, under a bare-boat charter, to carry loose cargo and up to 12 passengers.

Inter-Island Air Services are provided by Directflight, who operate a contract tendered by Shetland Transport Partnership. Flights are provided to Fair Isle, Foula, Skerries and Papa Stour from a base at Tingwall Airport.

3.4 Internal Links

The topography of Shetland has enabled the development of a “Spine Road Network”. This is a high quality two lane road network, predominantly running north to south, linked to the main inter-island ferry services. Other roads are typically single lane with passing places, the key issue is not traffic volumes, but managing the impact of HGVs which typically require to access all houses/crofts and remote fish farms / piers.

Walking is popular within the main settlements, but can be constrained in smaller settlements due to lack of continuous footways. Cycling is popular seasonally, mainly with tourists.

All bus services are contracted by Shetland Transport Partnership. The network comprises a hub and spoke network of mainline and feeder services designed for workers in Lerwick. This is supplemented by weekday shopper services (many non fixed route, dial-a-ride) providing links to local centres and Lerwick. An integrated ticketing system has recently been launched.

4 STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

4.1 Introduction

The core processes required for the development of the Shetland Transport Strategy were prescribed within guidance issued by the Scottish Executive, building upon Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance. However, guidance developed with larger regional units in mind had to be carefully interpreted for the Shetland context, ensuring a breadth of coverage from local issues, to strategic issues.

4.2 Initial Consultation - Methods

Early emphasis was placed on effective consultation with communities and stakeholders. This was considerably assisted by the high levels of interest and engagement in transport issues locally, but also by the very well defined network of community groups and stakeholders. The principal method of consultation was through face to face qualitative consultation, backed up a discussion theme on the Council’s web site “Have Your Say”, a questionnaire distributed via the mobile library service, and reviews of previous research.

Stakeholder consultation was invaluable in informing the strategy, and included transport operators, key community organisations, and businesses. It did not in itself raise many new or unexpected issues, but did aid in understanding the particular perspectives of the different stakeholders.

Communities consultation was among the most rewarding work - particularly were the face to face discussions and group meetings with the individual island communities, and the more remote areas of Shetland. Hearing the experiences of the islanders, and having first hand experience of Island transport links, gave the process a degree of credibility. Meanwhile, discussions with community councils on Shetland Mainland, typically confirmed that those with access to cars in the more accessible parts of Shetland have relatively few transport issues.

Opportunities to go “off the beaten track” were also taken. They included the Shetland Youth Executive group, a Young Persons drop-in session, a child/toddler morning, a WRVS lunch, an English as an Additional Language Class, a stand at a Flu Vaccination clinic held in the local sports complex, and an “Initiative at the Edge” community workshop / open day. These provided excellent opportunities to confirm and validate outcomes from stakeholder and community council consultation, and make contact with a population that would easily be missed by more conventional means.

4.3 Initial Consultation - Key issues

For *external links*, four issues dominated. The first issue was the relative cost to users of external links – be it freight, or for passenger transport. . The second issue related to capacity, the difficulty of booking a cabin on the Northlink Service during busy periods. Accessibility of ports/airports was also frequently highlighted, be it car parking at the Lerwick Ferry Terminal, bus timetable co-ordination at Sumburgh, or lack of physical integration of modes at Aberdeen.

The consultation also drew out a debate on the most appropriate future UK Mainland port for Shetland. Alternative ports highlighted included Peterhead, Tayside, or Rosyth. There were many strongly held views on the situation, although there was no clear consensus. This perhaps reflects the broad range of users, both freight and passengers, using the service. Reasons for a preference for an alternative port came from the desire to see more direct links to the central belt, opportunities to introduce larger freight and passenger ferries on the route, and a desire for a service less disrupted by unfavourable sea conditions affecting the mouth of Aberdeen Harbour. Opponents maintained that Aberdeen has excellent onward links, has seen passenger numbers soar, and state that any disruption is relatively rare.

Discussions in reference to inter-island links revolved around the life-line role that the inter-island air and ferry services play in sustaining Shetland’s outer isles. A recurring issue for outer islands was the role that transport services played in ensuring the continued vitality and viability of each island. This issue was perhaps most acute on the most remote islands (such as Foula, Fair Isle, Papa Stour, Skerries, Unst and Fetlar), but was also a feature of discussions on Yell, Whalsay and Bressay. It was recognised that a secure and long-term commitment was required from the Council for supporting transport links by ferry and (where appropriate) air, whilst acknowledging that other factors (such as education, access to health, employment opportunities, housing, and community strength) were also vitally important.

There was a strong desire for the ferry service to be as responsive and as reliable as possible, noting the constraints imposed by the weather. This was translated into a desire, where at all practical, for the ferry crews and ferry to be based on each island being served, supported, where appropriate, with the necessary infrastructure. Consultation revealed an almost universal willingness to pursue a fixed link (tunnel) between Yell and Unst. The desirability of a link between Yell and Shetland Mainland was frequently mentioned, along with plans for a fixed link between Lerwick and Bressay.

Discussion on internal transport issues identified a wide variety of comments related to walking and cycling facilities, as well as road safety and road maintenance issues.

Many aspects of the public transport service were appreciated. However, it was recognised that the existing public transport network primarily serves “9 to 5” workers in Lerwick, as well as day time shopper services. Night and evening services, more frequent links during the daytime, and services appropriate for trips to local shops/services were highlighted – however, it was realised that the cost and feasibility of providing this, against the numbers who would use the service and benefit would not always be balanced. There was therefore interest in supporting demand responsive and community transport schemes as a way of meeting the demand in a cost effective manner, and in order to respond to the social inclusion agenda.

In addition to the above, some wider issues were raised during consultation including concerns over the future cost and supply of fuel, the links between transport and wider economic development, and how transport should act to centralise or, in contrast, decentralise jobs and services in Shetland and support rural economic development.

4.3 Problems and Opportunities, Objectives, and Options

The initial consultation process was strongly “bottom-up”, and subsequent reviews of problems and opportunities were strongly influenced by this work. Additional issues requiring attention included service delivery issues (balancing investment with benefit and effectiveness, as well as revenue support with improvements in accessibility), policy integration issues (particularly planning and health issues), and issues related to reducing transport related emissions and protecting Shetland’s unique environment.

A vision and set of principles were adopted – these were closely informed by Shetland’s Community Planning Framework, Shetland’s Corporate Plan, and the Scottish Executive’s vision.

Objectives were developed using workshop methods, with the principal aim of addressing the key range of future issues and opportunities. The breadth of issues to be addressed by the strategy (from local to regional issues) and the breadth of modes covered led to a large number of objectives being established. Each objective was deemed to be specific, measurable and relevant. However, a lack of credible trend data led meant that the objectives were not formed as virtual targets.

Option development was generated from a review of the previous LTS (forming the base case / do-minimum), a review of the range of suggestions gathered during the consultation process, and a review of best practice in rural transport delivery elsewhere.

4.4 Appraisal

A three stage appraisal process was adopted. The first stage of appraisal considered five broad policy alternatives, and aimed to usefully inform the broad policy approach to be adopted. The key decisions were not between the relative weightings between the various different transport objectives (economy, environment, accessibility), but between different commitments to capital expenditure, and also the level of support afforded to rural communities. These factors were combined to develop five different scenarios (see table 4.1) – the aim being to test the limits, in order to inform the where the preferred strategic approach would fall.

Table 4.1 – Strategic Options Overview

Do Minimum	A continuation of current spending patterns and approach.
Cut Backs	Options designed to reduce expenditure, and reduce rural accessibility levels, assuming there would be reduced revenue or capital finances available.
Spend to Save	Development of infrastructure and services in the short term in order to save finances in the longer term. This inferred the availability of external capital, but reduced revenue. Could also include measures to generate income.
Comfort	An improvement of current levels of service and hence improved levels of rural accessibility based on increasing levels of revenue expenditure. Built on the premise that the STP would receive more revenue, but no extra capital.
Aspirational	A scenario including potential strategies and options that the STP would wish to implement if there were no financial constraints i.e. reliant on the STP receiving more revenue and more external capital.

The strategic appraisal found that in terms of performance against objectives, the preferred approach would be based around Comfort / Aspirational. In terms of deliverability, the preferred approach was very much based on Cut Backs / Spend to Save.

The second stage of the appraisal considered each of the main options remaining after the option sieving process. More detailed quantitative appraisal was used for the larger scale projects (typically inter-island ferry options), and qualitative appraisal used to consider a much larger number of

lower value options, or packages. Outcomes from this process led to the development of the draft consultation strategy.

The final stage of the appraisal considers the impacts of the preferred transport strategy.

4.5 Draft Strategy

The core of the draft strategy was four chapters, each on external links, inter-island links, internal links, and Environmental Policies. Each of these followed a similar pattern – a couple of paragraphs of context, with a series of statements relating to the action or intervention proposed. Typically these related to policies, an operational commitment, a commitment to undertake a study, or commitment to seek to invest revenue or capital funding.

- a) Key policies for external links were policies to continue to improve ferry and air services to Shetland, with proposals for further origin/destination studies, lobbying for expansion of the Air Discount Fund, and investigation into improved links to UK Mainland, Scandinavia and Continental Europe.
- b) Key policies for inter-island links were ongoing studies into costs and specifications for Scandinavian style sub-sea tunnels, along with completion of STAG studies into links to Whalsay, Unst/Fetlar, and Bressay.
- c) For internal links, key elements included an emphasis on community transport and demand responsive transport, a limited number of road improvements, and some sustainable transport initiatives.
- d) Environmental policies focussed on scheme design, preventing adverse impact on designated sites and species, and investigation into fuel efficiency and alternative fuels.

The aim of the draft strategy was effective and open engagement – therefore the aim was a relatively simple policy document, with extensive reference to the suite of background documents and summary appendices. An eight week consultation period included return visits to island communities, stakeholder presentations, and strategy/questionnaire distribution, all accompanied by a local publicity campaign.

5 FINAL STRATEGY

5.1 Responding to Comments on the Draft Strategy

Over 65 individual responses were obtained, yielding over 600 individual comments on the strategy. Overall, the following key themes emerged.

- a) *Concern from Environmental Groups about STPs support for expanding air links at the cost of ferry links.* STP's view is that both forms of links are essential for maintaining Shetland's future social and economic opportunities.
- b) *Support for strengthening the case for fixed links.* Despite a strong support for progressing fixed links, STP cannot commit to them at this stage due to a large number of uncertainties, including standards that

would be applied, wider support for the concept, and reducing ground condition unknowns.

- c) *More emphasis requested on active travel initiatives.* STP recognises the need for encouraging active travel, but that the most effective and efficient initiatives should be pursued.
- d) *More emphasis requested on reducing emissions and travel behaviour change.* Similarly, Shetland has to reduce transport emissions, and encourage travel behaviour change, in the most effective and efficient manner.
- e) *Lifeline ferry and air service issue affecting the smaller Islands.* Concerns were expressed regarding levels of accessibility, future plans for services and STP's future commitment to investment. These issues arise as the balance is sought between seeking to balance value for money, securing an island's future viability and vitality, and also a range of practical service delivery issues. The strategy strives to provide a commitment to genuine community consultation and development, alongside partner organisations.

5.2 Prioritisation and Programming

Prioritisation and programming are statutory components of the Transport Strategy. The approach taken for Shetland had the potential to be more straight forward than that required by other larger partnerships. However, objectivity and transparency are still essential elements.

The first element was to consider the Rationale for Intervention. For each element of the transport network, this considered extent of influence, the function, and the current performance of the element. The second element was to consider any "critical path" issues. These include specific dependencies or deadlines for intervention, or opportunities for funding. The final element was to consider the performance of the planned intervention with respect to the established transport objectives, and external objectives.

The prioritisation process was then used to drive the outline programme. Specific consideration for Shetland include the capacity to undertake concurrent feasibility, design and construction works, a high degree of inter-relationship between different projects, and capital programme management.

5.3 Securing Funding

Over the last three decades or so, with the support of oil-generated revenue, Shetland Islands Council (SIC) has been able to develop and deliver an extensive and affordable network of transport services and supporting infrastructure to a relatively high standard for the people of Shetland. These services and infrastructure have enabled Shetland to lead the field in many areas of transport initiatives and has shown what can be achieved when circumstances and foresight allow.

The specific challenge is now to address specific pressures on capital and revenue resources at both the local and national levels whilst maintaining current service provision.

5.4 Delivering the Strategy

The preparation of the strategy is the first part of the STP's statutory responsibility. The second is to ensure the delivery of the strategy, and it is this second aspect that will be ultimately used to consider the success of the partnership.

The emphasis has accordingly been placed at the current stage on mapping out the implementation paths for each initiative, including lead, partners, funding and statutory impacts. The key is on making strong links between the Transport Strategy, the individual Service Plans of different partner organisations in Shetland, and also the funding and budget setting process. The ability to make these links will ultimately determine the effectiveness of the strategy, particularly for initiatives newly introduced through the strategy.

A lack of reliable baseline information means that there has been a greater emphasis on monitoring key performance indicators, and looking at trajectories, rather than (at this stage) on setting specific targets. Monitoring will be focussed around information that fulfils operational as well as strategic needs such as reliability monitoring of inter-island and external links, utilisation, and road traffic levels. A programme of user consultation will complement these proposals.

The final strategy is due to be presented to the Scottish Executive prior to the end of March 2007 for Ministerial approval. Feedback and subsequent approval is anticipated in early summer 2007.

6 LESSONS ARISING FROM SHETLAND'S EXPERIENCES

Five lessons have been identified arising from our work with Shetland Islands Council and Shetland Transport Partnership. Principally, the lessons draw on the anticipated long term benefits of an effective ongoing strategy development process.

6.1 Effective Engagement

Both Shetland Islands Council and Shetland Transport Partnership realised early on the necessity for a robust and effective ongoing transport strategy process. This meant effective, honest and ongoing engagement with Shetland's communities and key stakeholders.

Early credibility was important. This was particularly important as the strategy was being prepared by consultants working on behalf of the Council / Transport Partnership. It was also important to help establishing the authority of the newly established Transport Partnership. The benefits of "going the extra mile" and sampling the reality of Shetland's transport links (typically during the winter) was important, as was getting out of the "comfort zone" of Community Council meetings.

For the strategy development process, detailed initial consultation has meant that there have been relatively few surprises to officers or Members as the

strategy has progressed, and also that generally the proposals have also been accepted with a high degree of confidence.

6.2 Application of STAG

A commitment to the principles of STAG (Objective led, Open-Minded, Pragmatic, Auditable and Inclusive) has benefited the process, and has been relatively well accepted by both Members and Officers. The ability of third parties to follow through the strategy development process from initial consultation through to final strategy, with all relevant material placed on the Council's website throughout the process has also helped the credibility of the process.

Challenges in applying STAG have been in faithful development of SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-Relate) objectives at the Strategic level, and appropriately developing an Appraisal Framework that could consistently, yet pragmatically, deal with the wide range of projects / interventions being proposed.

6.3 Engaging the Political Process

The strategy has been tested and endorsed at key stages in its development through a Member/Officer Working Group, comprising of a mix of Island and Mainland Councillors, Members and Observers of the Transport Partnership, and key Officials. Benefits have been that the process has also helped to build political confidence in the process, avoid last minute surprises, but also to provide best practice information on the wider national context.

6.4 Managing Expectations

The prevailing view across Shetland was that the Transport Strategy would produce a costed, justified and prioritised twenty year investment programme for major capital projects. Whilst to a certain extent this has been achieved – the range of capital inventions has been outlined, costed and prioritised – the requirements of STAG for open minded appraisal, key uncertainties (eg related to funding and project feasibility) mean that large questions remain, albeit with a commitment to ongoing work to narrow these uncertainties down.

It is also important to recognise that the strategy is being developed at a time of change in Shetland. In the light of declining oil revenue, there is now more focus on planning for a sustainable future for Shetland. This inevitably means a stronger focus on appraisal and prioritisation. The transport strategy can assist in this wider process – with actions arising from the strategy focusing on the essential rather than desirable, being fit for purpose for Shetland, and prioritisation on the basis of need, benefit and effectiveness.

This again emphasises the importance of the strategy as an evolving document and process.

6.5 Making it Work for Shetland

Despite the statutory requirements, it has been found that the direction and content of the Strategy must firstly be shaped by, and respond to the direct

requirements of Shetland over the next 5 to 15 years. This means an emphasis on external links that meet the needs of its users, securing investment to secure the ongoing integrity of key inter-island links, ensuring that communities have levels of accessibility to maintain their viability and vitality, and that individuals do not suffer social exclusion due to transport issues.

7 CONCLUSION

Over the past 18 months Shetland Transport Partnership has been developing its Transport Strategy. An early commitment to effective engagement and adoption of the principles of STAG has been found to bring subsequent benefits during subsequent stages of strategy development and finalisation.

Particular challenges will be faced in the implementation of the Strategy. These include delivering a number of expensive yet essential inter-island links, developing the public transport network to respond to accessibility and social inclusion requirements of Shetland, as well as promoting and implementing policies to encourage travel behaviour change and reduced emissions. The wider issues of small island communities will also continue to be addressed.

Embracing the philosophy that the Transport Strategy is a process not a product, and continued commitment to the principles of STAG will help to ensure that Shetland's Transport Strategy continues to evolve to address these issues in a changing set of economic, social and environmental constraints.