ACTIVE TRAVEL DEBATE -

HIGHLAND COUNCIL ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE 2 February 2023 Julian Paren

Before the Economy and Infrastructure Committee was [a paper](https://www.highland.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/81056/item_13_active_travel_prioritisation_and_funding_bids) that laid out the Council’s plans for active travel. It was based on a Report by consultants Arup who outlined a rationale for choosing between routes and then prioritising many options to a short list. The Committee was presented with a Council paper that asked its members to note the methodology and approve the priority list.

TBI’s reading of the document which was echoed by one Councillor at the Meeting was that the document was severely flawed and should never have been included in the Agenda papers. Our own promoted route - Avoch to Munlochy - had been omitted from any consideration because it was in progress. Newspapers had already advertised the 10 top routes and had expected the Committee to approve them.

In the event, Councillors and Highland Council Officers alike noted that the priority list had not been subject to any proper scrutiny nor had there been any consultations over them. Before the meeting’s end it was clear that the officials were back-tracking, and downplaying the importance of the priority list.

The motion before the committee was

Members are invited to:

- i. Note the evidence-led approach used to set out how to prioritise the delivery of Active Travel infrastructure across Highland; and

- ii. Agree that officers proceed with the delivery of this network, following the processes and prioritisation explained in sections 5 and 6 of the report

The motion was passed unanimously with the second paragraph being replaced by

- ii Agree that officers proceed to the delivery of this network by developing a clear, open and inclusive strategy that will achieve the outcome.

In the debate at the meeting TBI was greatly supported by Kate Willis (Green, Fort William and Ardnamurchan) and Angela MacLean (Lib Dem, Dingwall and Seaforth) who had been briefed at the last moment by Anne Thomas and Gordon Adam respectively. They spoke up for the Avoch to Munlochy route and Transition Black Isle. We should be very grateful to Anne and Gordon for ensuring our position was recognised. Their interventions played an important part of the discussion that led to the resolution that removed the prioritisation list. It was sad that none of the Black Isle Councillors were able to attend the meeting.

In the summing up Malcolm Macleod, Highland Council’s [Head of Infrastructure Environment and Economy](https://www.highland.gov.uk/info/695/council_information_performance_and_statistics/387/council_structure/5) said that Highland Council is working hard with Transition Black Isle to deliver the Avoch to Munlochy Route. We should hold him to that.

There were some real nuggets in the 25-minute debate. The meeting was webcast and the relevant 25 minutes lies between 2hr 23min 57s and the item goes on to 2hr 46min 51s

<https://highland.public-i.tv/core/portal/webcast_interactive/720517>

Julian Paren 03-02-2023