

2<sup>nd</sup> February 2012

Provost Jimmy Gray  
The Highland Council  
The Town House  
High Street  
INVERNESS  
IV1 1JJ



**Inverness City – West Link Canal / River Crossing**

I am pleased to provide some comments on behalf of Inverness Chamber of Commerce. Firstly, can I thank you and your officials for the briefing you provide to the business community on 24<sup>th</sup> January. Particular thanks should go to Sam MacNaughton, Head of Transport and Infrastructure, for the rigour and process he has applied to this vital project.

Our most pressing concern at this point in time is that The Highland Council makes a positive decision to proceed with this work at their meeting in March. This project is absolutely critical to the development of both the City of Inverness and the whole of the Highlands and, as such, cannot be allowed to be deferred to the next Council. As the city and region continue to develop both physically and economically, it is clear that the lack of this connection is already long overdue and, even more so, is already significantly hampering the development of the Highlands. For too long this project has suffered from being a 'political football' within the Highland Council, Scotland and increasingly at a UK level. We find this both frustrating and unacceptable; Inverness and the Highlands deserve better.

We believe this crossing needs to be built within the shortest possible timescale. The completion of this link will benefit the City of Inverness and the whole of the Highlands. The uncertainty around this work is having a damaging impact on our reputation with those from out with the area. The provision of this link will 'complete' the development of the city and open up residential and commercial development opportunities. Only once this link is in place will we truly be able to develop a proper and appropriate solution to the chronic traffic challenges besetting Inverness city centre.

The short-listing of the three options for this project made by you and your colleagues last week is most welcome. While we recognise the other options were listed as part of your 'due process', the rejection of the other possible routes should help focus minds and do away with some of the unhelpful debate we have witnessed of late.

**inverness**  
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Inverness Chamber of Commerce  
PO Box 5512  
Inverness  
IV2 3ZE

Tel: 01463 718131  
Fax: 01463 231523  
[info@inverness-chamber.co.uk](mailto:info@inverness-chamber.co.uk)  
[www.inverness-chamber.co.uk](http://www.inverness-chamber.co.uk)

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Callum Grant

**Chief Executive:**  
Stewart Nicol

**Membership & Events Manager:**  
Paula Nicol

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Registered Office:  
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67a Castle Street  
Inverness IV2 3DU

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Of the three remaining options under consideration, we have a clear preference. 'Option 6', we believe, presents the best opportunity for the city and region. This option will open up the 'Ness-side' area of the city for housing and commercial development. In addition, it will also relieve traffic flows on the stretch of Dores Road between the entrance to Holm Mills Road and the roundabout at the western end of the Southern Distributor Road. We also presume that this option will most easily facilitate the provision of flood defences on the River Ness for the length of the proposed new road immediately adjacent to the south side of the River Ness.

One feature of all of these remaining options which we particularly support is the creation of the proposed twin bridge arrangement where the A82 crosses the Caledonian Canal. It is essential that a 'fixed crossing' of the canal at this point is established. In addition to effectively providing this fixed crossing, we agree with the suggestion that the tandem operation of these two bridges, from a single control point, will be an attractive feature of this project.

I trust these comments are of help to you and your colleagues. We assure you of our full support on this important project. If you require any further information at this stage, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,



Stewart Nicol  
Chief Executive

cc Neil Gillies, Director of Transport, Environmental and Community Services,  
The Highland Council, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness IV3 5NX

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