



National Developments – Response Form

Please use the table below to let us know about projects you think may be suitable for national development status. You can also tell us your views on the existing national developments in National Planning Framework 3, referencing their name and number, and providing reasons as to why they should maintain their status. Please use a separate table for each project or development. **Please fill in a [Respondent Information Form](#) and return it with this form to scotplan@gov.scot.**

Name of proposed national development	Outer Hebrides Fixed Links & Minch Tunnel
Brief description of proposed national development	<p>Provision of a Tunnel under the Minch to connect the Outer Hebrides to mainland Scotland, and the development of fixed link crossings of the Sound of Harris and the Sound of Barra in order to connect the Outer Hebrides island chain.</p> <p>The Comhairle has a long-standing aspiration to progress additional fixed links across the island chain, and to explore the cost/benefits of a tunnel under the Minch connecting the Islands chain to Mainland Scotland. These major infrastructure projects are complex matters of national interest due to their scale, complexity and potential benefit.</p> <p>Ferry capacity and reliability issues arising from limitations on the size of existing vessels, timetable constraints, weather and tidal conditions, and an ageing fleet, are a growing concern across a number of our routes, and pose a real threat to the sustainable growth of the islands chain. Alternative options for connecting our islands to each other and to mainland Scotland are worthy of exploration due to their socio-economic benefit.</p> <p>While capital funding requirements are high at the outset, a range of funding models such as tolls, borrowing, private sector investment, incorporation of tidal energy devices, would offer a strong proposition and secure payback on the initial investment. In addition, there would be savings to existing Scottish Government expenditure on support to the ferry routes and the cost of ferry replacement.</p>

	<p>Whilst these projects are aspirational the longer term vision of NPF is to Scotland 2050 and thus they should be included. These projects align with a number of NPF4 stated outcomes.</p>
<p>Location of proposed national development (information in a GIS format is welcome if available)</p>	
<p>What part or parts of the development requires planning permission or other consent?</p>	<p>All</p>
<p>When would the development be complete or operational?</p>	<p>These are major projects and would be dependent on significant development work including technical feasibility, costings and a capital funding package.</p> <p>Technical feasibility work of a Sound of Harris link was carried out in 2006 and refreshed in 2018. Similar work would be required for a Sound of Barra fixed link. From this, a potential fixed link option can be explored and appraised in more detail.</p> <p>In respect of the Minch Tunnel, similar technical feasibility would be required, but there is good experience that can be applied from places such as the Faroe Islands.</p>
<p>Is the development already formally recognised – for example identified in a development plan, has planning permission, in receipt of funding etc.</p>	<p>These developments are not specifically referenced within the Outer Hebrides Local Development Plan (LDP) as they are long term aspirations and have been proposed subsequent to the adoption of the current LDP. They will be considered in preparation of the next LDP.</p> <p>However, they align with the transport objectives of the LDP. Policy EI 9: Transport Infrastructure highlights the priority of upgrading and development of spinal and inter island road routes, and mainland and inter-island connections by air or sea.</p>

Contribution of proposed national development to the national development criteria (maximum 500 words):

CLIMATE CHANGE

Given the abundance of natural resources in the Outer Hebrides, the incorporation of alternative and renewable energy technology in the infrastructure will be considered and could make a significant contribution to the respective business cases. There may be opportunities to build in improvements to energy connectivity (inter-island and island-mainland), leading to improvements in island resilience, and increasing the opportunities to harness and export our renewable resource, contributing to the achievement of Net Zero Carbon Emissions in Scotland.

PEOPLE

The Outer Hebrides' location and geography present major social and economic challenges, and while transport infrastructure and services within the islands and to the mainland have improved greatly in the last twenty years, significant challenges remain. The drivers for sustainable change remain the relative and actual cost of living, population sparsity, depopulation and demographic imbalance. The value of effective and efficient transportation networks, including the necessary assets, infrastructure and services, within the islands and to the mainland in addressing these challenges is widely recognized and would be positively impacted on through this improved connectivity.

INCLUSIVE GROWTH

These investments would have a transformational impact on the local economy and community across a range of sectors. The provision of fixed links between islands and to the mainland would increase the attractiveness and accessibility of the islands as a place to visit, live, work and do business, generating economic activity across and within the Outer Hebrides island chain, including in the most peripheral areas. It will also make it easier for residents to access public services, skills, training and employment wherever they live in the Outer Hebrides.

PLACE

There may be opportunities to build in improvements to digital, mobile and energy connectivity between the islands as part of the construction of the fixed links, leading to overall improvements in standard and overall resilience. Investing in this infrastructure could have a transformational impact on overcoming some of the structural and geographic challenges experienced in our communities. It would support existing industries, SMEs and growth in key sectors, in particular tourism & food and drink.

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