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Our ref: 2019/0009139
1st May 2019

Dear Ms Steele,

Thank you for your letter of 15 March, to the First Minister of Scotland, Nicola Sturgeon MSP, regarding existing road and railway connections to Cairnryan and Stranraer. I am responding as the leading minister for transport.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Belfast City Council for engaging with the Scottish Government on this issue. I welcome the major investment Stena Line and P&O have made in their respective routes between Northern Ireland and Scotland in recent years and acknowledge their on-going commitment to the routes.

You may be aware that Transport Scotland have been taking forward the South West Scotland Transport Study, in line with Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance (STAG). The draft emerging findings from this work are expected to be published on Transport Scotland's website shortly. This work has been undertaken with a particular focus on access to the ports at Cairnryan. Publication of the draft study report will offer an opportunity for stakeholders, the public, and anyone with an interest in transport in South West Scotland to review and provide comments before the final report is published later this year.

Extensive stakeholder engagement and data gathering have been undertaken in the study area to develop a detailed understanding of the issues and opportunities facing South West Scotland's strategic transport links across all modes. The corridors including the A75 and A77 and railway linking the ports at Cairnryan to surrounding markets have, as to be expected, featured prominently in this work.

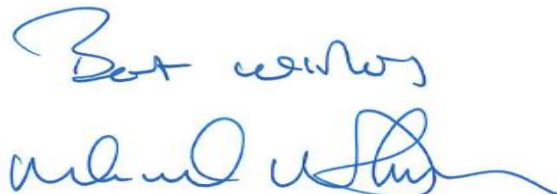
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The recommendations will set out potential transport interventions and will inform the Strategic Transport Projects Review (STRP2). This national multi-modal appraisal will be delivered during the lifetime of the current Scottish Parliament and will identify potential transport investment as part of a Scotland wide appraisal of strategic transport options for the next 20 years.

The Council may also be interested to hear that Scotland's National Transport Strategy (NTS2) is currently being reviewed. The new Strategy will set out a compelling vision for the kind of transport system we want for Scotland over the next 20 years. Our approach to the review is focused on collaborative working with our partners, developing a robust evidence base and engaging with stakeholders and citizens across Scotland to give them a greater say in the development of transport policy.

The Review will work towards a public consultation on a draft strategy, which is a further opportunity to engage on connectivity between Scotland, Northern Ireland, and England. The consultation will be opening in summer 2019 and we will be publishing the successor strategy by the end of 2019.

I would like to thank the Belfast City Council their interest and have asked my officials at Transport Scotland to consider the points you have made in the South West of Scotland Transport Study.



MICHAEL MATHESON

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