

HIGHLAND COUNCIL
WRITTEN SUBMISSION

Issues relating to accessing Inverness Rail Station

1. Inverness station has the advantages of being located in the city centre and being built on one level, with no footbridges or track crossings. Because of this, it has advantages in terms of access compared with other main stations.
2. However, the station also has disadvantages, including:
 - Unattractive pedestrian accesses;
 - Compact concourse, where a good deal of space has been taken up by the ticket barriers installed in 2014;
 - Links to bus stops which are not clear to visitors;
 - Very limited car parking.
3. The main issues raised by station users, and user groups such as Access Panels, are the ticket barriers and the link to the bus station.
4. The station has three accesses. The front opens into Station Square and Academy Street; it is adequate at best but is of 1960s design and not in keeping with the surroundings. Station Square is congested with private parking but has space for a few taxis. The Council has aspirations for a significant environmental improvement in Station Square and in Academy Street.
5. The south-east access opens towards the Eastgate shopping centre and short-term (20 minute) car parking, but consists of a small opening in a high metal fence. Signage is very poor. The connection with the main concourse is narrow and can be crowded, particularly since the installation of ticket barriers.

	
The front of the station	The unappealing south-east entrance

6. The north access is along Platform 7 and is also narrow. It links to the bus station and to car parks, including one within the station premises and the Council's multi-storey car park which is adjacent to the bus station. However, the walking route conflicts with moving vehicles, including access to shop service bays, and most pedestrians prefer to use the route via Academy Street which is marginally longer.



The walking route from the bus station and multi-storey crosses this road...



...and enters the station along this platform.

7. The concourse benefits from level access to the booking office and to all platforms, but space is restricted. There is no connection from Platforms 1 & 2 to Platforms 3 to 6 without exiting through a ticket gate and re-entering through another ticket gate, which is inconvenient, especially for passengers with heavy luggage or mobility difficulties. Given that many journeys are long-distance, Highland Council believes that installation of ticket gates was ill-advised, as the potential to avoid paying fares is much less than where there are frequent short-distance commuter services. However, we do not know what effect they have had on revenue protection.



The concourse, viewed from the platform end (ticket barrier visible in foreground) towards the front entrance. Impact of queueing passengers can be clearly seen. It has been known for passengers to miss trains because a long queue for one train concealed the view to the platform entrance for another, earlier, train.

8. Access to bus services is variable. Buses heading eastwards use a stop at Falcon Square, which is an attractive area easily and conveniently reached from the south-east access. Other city buses use various stops in the city centre streets, which are all a short walk away. Most out-of-town buses leave from the bus station, for which the access route has been described above. There has long been a desire in the community for a new bus station adjacent to the railway station, but there is no available land or finance for what would be a major investment. Interchange with rural buses is believed to be of lower volume than with city buses.
9. There is a small taxi rank just outside the station in Academy Street. At busy times, taxis often queue beyond the confines of the rank.

	
<p>The view from Falcon Square to the south-east entrance</p>	<p>A staff car parked beside the south-east entrance. Short-term public parking is visible beyond the pillars.</p>

10. There is a desire, particularly from residents of more distant parts of Highland with limited public transport, for long-term parking which they would use when travelling south by train. The car park within the station confines was originally intended to be specifically for train users, but instead has become a general-use car park with relatively high charges by the standards of Inverness.

11. Relations between the Council, HiTrans and the rail industry are generally constructive. The Council participates in the Rail User Group meetings convened by HiTrans and is involved with specific projects. The constraints are largely those of limited space, both within the station and in the adjoining area. The Scottish Stations Fund and the City Deal present opportunities for worthwhile improvements.

12. Highland Council and HiTrans plan to work with the Network Rail Commercial team, the train operators, Transport Scotland and adjacent businesses including the Royal Highland Hotel and Eastgate Centre to support improvements. We have met with the new operators recently and intend taking a joined up master-planning approach to station improvements over the coming year. Any support the Committee are able to give would be welcomed.

13. Clearly, passengers from Inverness and the Highlands also have interests in access at other main stations, particularly Aberdeen, Perth, Edinburgh Waverley and Haymarket, and Glasgow Queen Street. The recent major improvements in Waverley and Haymarket are very welcome, although lack of access to taxis in Waverley remains a problem. In Perth, northbound trains use the remote and draughty Platform 7 in Perth, which affects many passengers changing trains when travelling from Glasgow and Edinburgh. Bi-directional use of Platform 4, along with more southbound use of Platform 3, would be welcomed.

Highland Council
16 June 2015