THE FORTH BRIDGE EXPERIENCE
An executive summary of its feasibility
INTRODUCTION

Network Rail has completed a feasibility study into the concept of the “Forth Bridge Experience” a visitor attraction proposed by Network Rail and based on public access to The Forth Bridge, one of Scotland’s most iconic structures.
The scope of the study was to:

“Develop a visitor centre and attraction based upon a Forth Bridge climb and more general access to the top of the Bridge by way of an access lift.”

The feasibility study was undertaken in the context of an application for World Heritage Site status for the Forth Bridge which will be made in January 2014. The recent report commissioned by the Forth Bridges Forum and conducted by Rebanks Consulting into the benefits of world heritage status highlights that:

“The Bridge is not yet a destination in its own right.”

The Forth Bridge Experience goes a significant way towards achieving one of the Forth Bridges Forum’s key goals of making the Forth Bridge a destination and enabling the general public to engage with a major heritage attraction.

**Strategic Context**

The study examines the strategic background against which the development proposal is set. We conclude that whilst the proposal has many merits it will be required to operate in a highly competitive visitor market.

**Study Methodology**

The study methodology was as follows:

- Undertake an appraisal of all options for the Forth Bridge Experience
- Identify the preferred options
- Develop the preferred options – to include market assessment, business feasibility and building design to RIBA Stage C

The study focus was on developing on Network Rail owned land but included identification of impacts and mitigation required beyond that.
THE FORTH BRIDGE EXPERIENCE

Options Appraisal
The options appraisal identified three preferred options. These are:

- Visitor access via the bridge walk from the South Queensferry side of the bridge
- A visitor centre at North Queensferry
- A viewpoint at the top of the Fife cantilever accessed via a public lift on the Bridge at North Queensferry

Evidence of Demand
Initial research, based on a small sample, indicates that there is significant evidence of demand in descending order for:

- The visitor centre and lift (82%)
- The bridge walk (80%)
- A grand bridge walk from end to end (63%)

In general, the more challenging the visitor experience becomes, the lower the level of interest from respondents although interest in all three elements is very high.

THE BRIDGE WALK

Description
The bridge walk would start from a reception centre at the south side of the Forth Bridge located on land owned by Network Rail. The route would be to the top of the Queensferry (south) cantilever and return and would take around three hours to complete. The walks would be led by fully qualified visitor guides.

Building Requirements
There would be a minimum requirement for a 750m2 visitor reception centre on Network Rail owned land beneath the south approach viaduct.

Estimated Visitor Numbers
It is estimated that the bridge walk could attract between 75,810 and 126,350 visitors per year on a sustainable basis.

Transport
We are committed to encouraging and incentivising use of sustainable transport, particularly rail, to reach the Bridge. Car parking provision will be provided, however, we will work with local community and councils to assess the best transport solutions.
THE VISITOR CENTRE

Description
A fully accessible, wheelchair friendly visitor centre which incorporates two public access lifts could be developed on Network Rail land beneath the Fife cantilever at North Queensferry.

The lift would convey visitors to a viewing platform at the top of the Fife cantilever. This would be a tour guide led visitor experience. The centre could also offer a Forth Bridge exhibition, shopping and dining areas and an education room. In addition, the centre could also be available for hire as a unique venue for banquets, conference dinners, functions and events.

Externally the centre could be set in an attractive landscaped riverside park in a dramatic setting immediately beneath the steel cathedral of the Forth Bridge. Thus for all visitors, the Bridge becomes an immersive and dramatic experience.

Building Requirements
There would be a requirement for a visitor centre to include retail, catering, Forth Bridge exhibition areas, education room and lift tour departure point on Network Rail owned land.

Estimated Visitor Numbers
It is estimated that the visitor centre and lift could attract between 136,910 and 230,162 visitors per year on a sustainable basis. Of these, there could be 78,895 to 133,472 visitors paying an admission fee to use the lift to visit the viewing platform and tour. Visitors who do not pay for the tour can visit the other facilities in the visitor centre.

Transport
As with the South Queensferry proposal, we are committed to encouraging and incentivising use of sustainable transport, particularly rail, to reach the Bridge. Car parking provision will be required, however, we will work with the local community and councils to assess the best transport solutions.

The visitor centre and lift could attract between **136,910** and **230,162 visitors** per year. While the bridge walk could attract between **75,810** and **126,350 visitors** per year.
Experience an executive summary of its feasibility image by W Architecture.
ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY IMPACT

Economic Impact
It is estimated that the full scale Forth Bridge Experience could create or safeguard between 229 and 432 FTE jobs in the local and Scottish economy.

Community Impact
There are a number of community benefits through creation of employment opportunities, increase in visitor spend locally and provision of new venues which could have community uses.

Stakeholder Consultations
A range of statutory agencies and local authorities were consulted. All are broadly supportive of the project concept and await further developments.

Conclusions
Based on the feasibility study we have concluded that:

- There is scope to develop a viable Forth Bridge Experience based around a bridge walk, public access to the bridge via a lift and a visitor centre
- The bridge walk is viable as a stand alone attraction
- As is the visitor centre and lift

Next Steps
Network Rail is now committed to:

- Undertake more detailed market research
- Undertake community and stakeholder consultations
- Develop the building concepts and visitor experience ideas
- Undertake pre-application discussions
- Develop a detailed business plan and funding plan
- Assess the best transport solutions for both elements of the proposal