



A96 Dualling Programme
Strategic Environmental Assessment
Post Adoption Statement

February 2016





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Document history

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Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)

SEA Post Adoption Statement

Transport Scotland

This document has been issued and amended as follows:

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1.0	November 2015	Discussion Draft	Gwenn Greenwood	Ailsa Collin	Henry Collin
1.1	December 2015	Draft for Client Comment	Gwenn Greenwood	Ailsa Collin	Henry Collin
1.2	February 2016	Issue Version	Gwenn Greenwood	Ailsa Collin	Henry Collin

Limitations

Halcrow Group Ltd, now known as CH2M HILL, has been instructed to provide a Strategic Environmental Assessment of the A96 Dualling Programme on behalf of Transport Scotland.

The assessment is based on the information that has been made available at the time of publication and this Environmental Report is presented as a consultation document. Any subsequent additional information arising during the public consultation period may require revision or refinement of the conclusions.

It should be noted that:

- The findings within this report represent the professional opinion of experienced environmental scientists, sustainability consultants and other specialists. CH2M HILL does not provide legal advice and the advice of lawyers may also be required.
- All work carried out in preparing this report has utilised and is based upon CH2M HILL's professional knowledge and understanding of current relevant European Union, UK and Scottish standards and codes, technology and legislation. Changes in this legislation and guidance may occur at any time in the future and may cause any conclusions to become inappropriate or incorrect. CH2M HILL does not accept responsibility for advising of the facts or implications of any such changes.
- This report has been prepared using factual information contained in maps, documents and data prepared by others. No responsibility can be accepted by CH2M HILL for the accuracy of such information. All maps, illustrations and other sources of data are credited where appropriate.
- Every endeavour has been made to identify data sources, where appropriate.
- This report represents the independent views and recommendations of the consultants conducting the analysis, and may not necessarily reflect the opinions held by Transport Scotland.

SEA POST ADOPTION STATEMENT – COVER NOTE	
PART 1	
To:	SEA.gateway@scotland.gsi.gov.uk
PART 2	
SEA Post Adoption Statement is attached for:	
A96 Dualling Programme	
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PART 3	
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PART 4	
Signature:	
Date:	26/02/2016

A96 Dualling Inverness to Aberdeen SEA – Key Facts

Responsible Authority	Transport Scotland – MTRIPS Directorate
PPS Title	A96 Dualling Programme
What prompted the PPS	Strategic review of the Inverness to Aberdeen transport corridor following a refocus of national policy and changes to planned development on and adjacent to the corridor in recent years. A Strategic Business Case (SBC) identified that dualling of the A96 provided the best infrastructure intervention.
PPS Subject	Transport Infrastructure
Period covered by PPS	Delivery programme to target completion by 2030
Frequency of updates	Live programme – ongoing review
Area covered by PPS	The A96 transport corridor between Inverness and Aberdeen
Purpose and/ or objectives of PPS	<p>The Programme objectives for dualling the A96 between Inverness to Aberdeen are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To improve the operation of the A96 and inter-urban connectivity between the cities of Inverness and Aberdeen and their city regions, through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Reduced journey times; – Improved journey time reliability; and – Reduced conflicts between local and strategic journeys. • To improve safety for motorised and non-motorised users through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Reduced accident rates and severity; and – Reduced driver stress. • To provide opportunities to grow the regional economies on the corridor through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Improved access to the wider strategic transport network; and – Enhanced access to jobs and services. • To facilitate active travel in the corridor • To facilitate integration with public transport facilities • To reduce the environmental effect on the communities in the corridor
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1 Background

In 2008 the Scottish Government published the ‘Strategic Transport Projects Review’ (STPR) which set out transport investment priorities over the period to 2032. The review, which was subject to Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), contained a number of options for the Inverness to Aberdeen transport corridor, including preliminary analysis of an option for full dualling of the A96 between Inverness and Aberdeen. This option was not taken forward at the time, as alternative interventions were considered sufficient to address the corridor objectives at that time.

In 2011, two key documents were published by the Scottish Government, signifying a change in policy; ‘Scotland’s Cities: Delivering for Scotland’ (the Agenda for Cities) and the ‘Infrastructure Investment Plan’ (IIP). The Agenda for Cities sets out the vital contribution that Scotland’s major population centres can make in delivering the Government’s Economic Strategy, and identifies the aim to connect our cities with strong, reliable and resilient transport infrastructure. The IIP outlined plans for infrastructure investment over the coming decades and includes a commitment to complete the dual carriageway network between Scotland’s cities by 2030, including full dualling of the A96 between Inverness and Aberdeen.

In response to these policy developments, in 2014 Transport Scotland undertook a strategic appraisal of the Inverness to Aberdeen transport corridor to build upon the evidence base of the STPR and seek opportunities to address the growing economic and transport demands along the corridor.

An SEA has been undertaken in parallel with this appraisal to inform both a Strategic Business Case and the development of dualling improvement strategy options, ensuring the environmental assessment process was integrated with both the plan and programme development throughout.

1.1 Approach to the A96 Dualling Programme SEA

A two-tier approach to the SEA, see Figure 1-1, was agreed as appropriate with the SEA Scottish Government Gateway and Consultation Authorities¹ in October 2013.

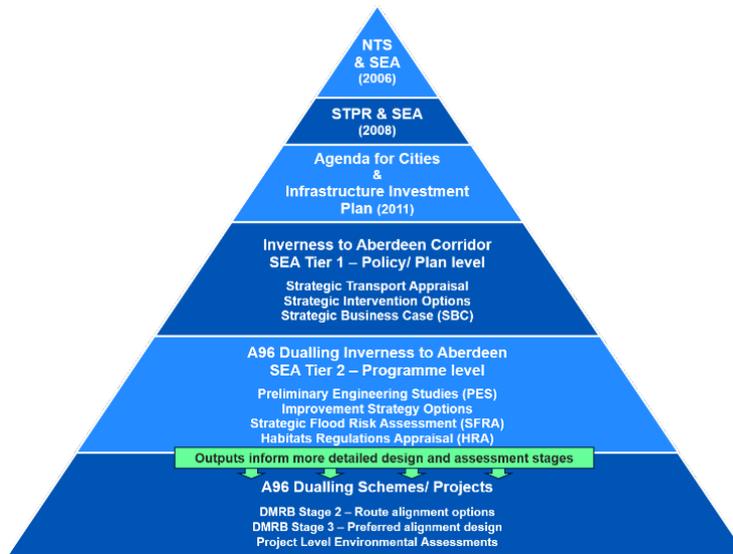


Figure 1-1 Overview of tiered approach to SEA

¹ Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) and Historic Environment Scotland (HES)

At the plan level, Tier 1 SEA involved the analysis of a range of road and rail options for the corridor following a Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance (STAG) appraisal to inform the development of a Strategic Business Case (SBC) for the corridor. This ensured that potential environmental effects were robustly examined alongside economy, accessibility and social inclusion, safety, and integration topics.

The SBC concluded that, overall, full dualling between Inverness and Aberdeen was the best way to meet the future needs of those living, working and travelling along the A96 transport corridor in the 21st Century.

The Tier 1 SEA Environmental Report was published for consultation on 25 September 2014 and the consultation period closed on 6 November 2014. The SBC and Tier 1 SEA reports can be downloaded from Transport Scotland's website at www.transportscotland.gov.uk/a96dualling.

At the programme level, Tier 2 SEA considered a range of broadly defined 'Improvement Strategy Options' for the A96, which were developed via a separate Preliminary Engineering Services (PES) workstream, to consider alternative means of providing dual carriageway connectivity between Inverness and Aberdeen. The SEA assessed the potential effects of these infrastructure options within the Inverness to Aberdeen transport corridor on a series of environmental constraints in line with SEA topic headings. The Tier 2 SEA was aligned with Stage 1 of the multi-stage Design Manual for Roads and Bridges² (DMRB) design and assessment process.

Feeding into the SEA process, a number of parallel strategic studies were also undertaken, including Habitats Regulations Appraisal and Programme Level Appropriate Assessment and Strategic Flood Risk Assessment.

It was not the objective of the Tier 2 SEA assessment to identify a clear improvement strategy option 'preference' in overall environmental terms. It instead provided an increased understanding of environmental and land use constraints for each improvement strategy option, identifying any potential for significant environmental effects and providing a framework for mitigation and monitoring throughout future subsequent stages of design and environmental assessment to generate route options and then a preferred scheme.

The Tier 2 SEA Environmental Report was published for consultation on 11 May 2015 and the consultation period closed on 22 June 2015; the Environmental Report and the DMRB Stage 1 Report can be downloaded from Transport Scotland's website at www.transportscotland.gov.uk/a96dualling.

1.2 Purpose of the Post Adoption Statement

This Post Adoption Statement (termed the 'SEA Statement' in Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005) is the last formal output of the A96 Dualling Programme SEA process.

The SEA Post Adoption Statement is an important public document, demonstrating transparency on the iterative and coordinated development of the dualling programme and the SEA, and drawing the strategic environmental assessment process to a close. Section 18 of the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005 requires that the SEA Statement contains the principal elements which are listed in Table 1-1.

² A DMRB Stage 1 Assessment usually involves a broad, strategic approach to the identification and consideration of the environmental, engineering, economic and traffic advantages, disadvantages and constraints of a broad study area within which road improvements are proposed.

Early in the SEA process it was agreed with the Consultation Authorities and confirmed through the SEA Gateway that the Monitoring Framework and Post Adoption Statement would be deferred to the completion of the Tier 2 Environmental Report, and would provide a comprehensive summary of the full two-tier SEA process.

This Post Adoption Statement therefore demonstrates the linkages between the two levels of assessment, summarising the environmental considerations integrated at each stage, the consultation feedback received, the rationale for the plan and programme adopted and provides a detailed monitoring framework for the next stages of assessment.

Table 1-1 Requirements for the Post Adoption Statement

Requirements of the Act	Where Addressed in this Post Adoption Statement?
Describe how environmental considerations have been integrated into the PPS	Section 2, Table 2.1
Describe how the Environmental Report has been taken into account	Section 2, Table 2.1
Describe how the opinions expressed on the Environmental Report during consultation have been taken into account	Section 3
Set out the reasons for choosing the PPS as adopted in the light of other reasonable alternatives considered	Section 4
Set out the measures that are to be taken to monitor the significant environmental effects of implementing the PPS	Section 5
Describe how the results of any transboundary consultations have been taken into account	Not applicable

1.3 Structure of the Post Adoption Statement

This Post Adoption Statement is structured as follows:

Section 2 – Provides an overview of how environmental considerations and both the Tier 1 and Tier 2 Environmental Reports were integrated into A96 Dualling Programme development;

Section 3 – Provides a summary of the stakeholder and public consultation feedback received during Tier 1 and Tier 2 and an explanation of how information received from consultation was taken into account in the development of the A96 Dualling Programme;

Section 4 – Sets out the rationale for choosing the A96 Dualling Programme in light of other reasonable alternatives;

Section 5 – Sets out the Monitoring Framework;

Section 6 – Provides further detail on the approach to environmental assessment which will be undertaken at future DMRB Stage 2;

Section 7 – Provides a concluding summary for the Post Adoption Statement.

2 How environmental considerations were integrated into the SEA and the A96 Dualling Programme

This section provides an overview of how the SEA process considered a range of environmental issues and ensured that these were integrated into the plan and programme levels of A96 Dualling.

Figure 2-1 below illustrates the integration of key stages and deliverables throughout the A96 Programme, highlighting how the two tiers of the SEA process integrated first with the development of the Strategic Business Case (SBC), and then with the DMRB Stage 1 assessment.

The documents reporting the outputs of the SEA and the DMRB Stage 1 process can be accessed online from Transport Scotland’s A96 Dualling Programme website at the following address: www.transportscotland.gov.uk/a96dualling.

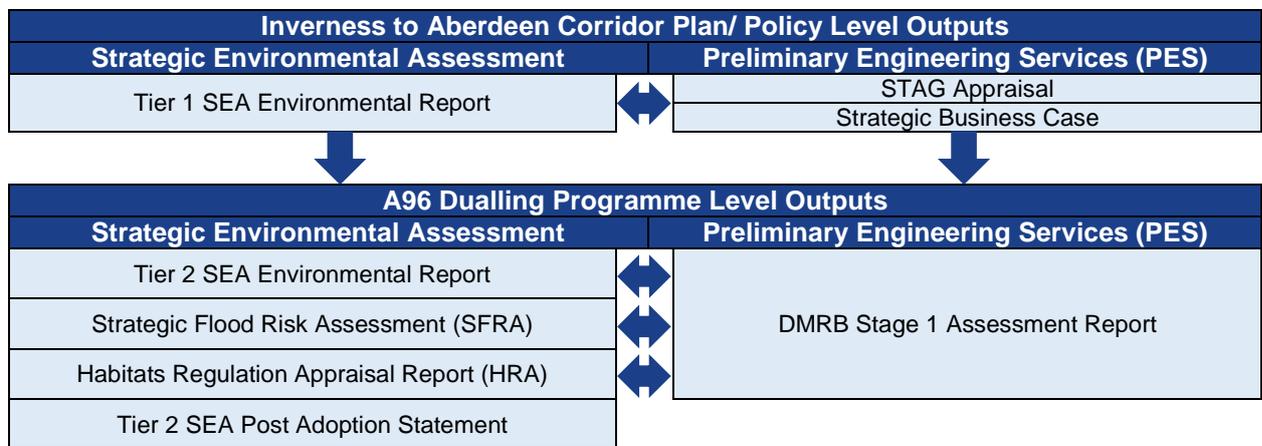


Figure 2-1 Overview of key A96 Dualling stages and deliverables

More specifically, this section provides a summary of how the findings of SEA outputs have been taken into account, and how environmental considerations have been, or will be, integrated into the A96 Dualling Programme.

Table 2-1 below provides a summary of the various stages and outputs of the SEA process, including the supporting strategic studies undertaken, identifying where particular environmental issues have been considered and where these have resulted in changes to the A96 Dualling Programme.

Table 2-1 How environmental considerations have been integrated into the SEA and the A96 Dualling Programme

A96 SEA Approach and Environmental Considerations	Which SEA stage/ output?	How SEA outputs have been/ will be integrated into the SEA and A96 Dualling Plan and Programme?
Inception		
Consultation meetings with Historic Environment Scotland ³ (HES), Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) and Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) to discuss and agree the principles of the Tier 1 and Tier 2 SEA approaches to A96 corridor/ strategic intervention/ dualling proposals.	During Inception stage	The two-tier approach was proposed for the A96 SEA to ensure that the strategic policy proposal, or plan, for dualling was assessed (at Tier 1 – high level narrative/ issues assessment) and that specific improvement strategy options and alternatives for dualling were assessed at programme level (Tier 2 – more detailed spatial constraints/ issues assessment).
Tier 1 SEA		
Scoping Stage		
Series of workshops with STAG, PES (DMRB Stage 1) teams and SEPA, SNH, HES and Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) on the approaches to, and integration of, SEA assessment.	Scoping stage	Ensured that the two-tier SEA informed parallel workstreams on the SBC (at Tier 1) and on the identification and assessment of Preliminary Engineering Services (PES) strategy options (at Tier 2). Secured early communication with the Consultation Authorities to inform the proposed methodologies for both tiers of SEA.
Review of wide range of policies, plans and strategies (PPS) to identify key environmental protection/ policy themes for A96 Dualling, against each SEA topic.	Scoping Report Section 2 Appendix A	Demonstrated the policy context for A96 dualling, including a review of the Strategic Transport Projects Review (2008) and its SEA, the Scottish Government's Infrastructure Investment Plan (2011) and other relevant national and regional PPS. The PPS review informed the key themes and aspects to be considered through the tiered SEA process.
Environmental Constraints Baseline which included: Geographic Information System (GIS) constraint mapping – baseline constraints data collation within 7.5km either side of the existing A96 trunk road. Baseline summary tables – grouping constraints against ten distinct sections along the route and each SEA topic.	Scoping Report Section 3 Appendix B Appendix C	Commenced the collation of an environmental constraints 'databank' for future use, provided a summary of the 15km-wide baseline study area and detailed how this would be divided into ten SEA baseline sections along the A96 route. Provided a visual representation of where relevant constraints were located within the Tier 1 SEA 15km-wide corridor. The GIS was used to prepare quantitative baseline summary tables for each SEA section alongside indicative constraints maps, to support the SEA.
Proposed Approach to Assessment which included details of proposed methodologies for Tier 1 and Tier 2 assessments and other linked assessments and also set out the programme for consultation.	Scoping Report Section 4	Ensured early explanation of proposed approaches to assessment to inform consultation on the proposed approach. Ensured integration of programmes of work so that the SEA informed the development of the business case and strategic alternatives/ options at plan/ programme level.
Environmental Report Stage		
Interim papers on alternative methodological approaches to the STAG options and PES options assessments were prepared and submitted to the Consultation Authorities during the Tier 1 assessment process.	Environmental Report Section 1	It was agreed to completely separate the SEA assessments and focus Tier 1 on the STAG options assessment and Tier 2 on the PES options assessment. It was considered that the two-tiered approach provided a transparent framework for stakeholder consultation, helping to identify the potential for significant environmental effects (risks and opportunities) at both the policy and programme levels respectively.
Responses to Consultation Authority feedback on Tier 1 SEA Scoping Report.	Environmental Report Appendix A	Provided a full record on how the Tier 1 Environmental Report addressed specific comments on Tier 1 Scoping, or provided a justification as to why particular issues were not addressed.
Updated and revised PPS review.	Environmental Report Section 3 Appendix B	Provided a summary of key constraints for the Tier 1 SEA process, and documented the additional range of PPS considered following Consultation Authority feedback on the Tier 1 SEA Scoping Report.

³ Historic Scotland (HS) were consulted during both tiers of the A96 Dualling Programme SEA, however in October 2015 they became the new public body, Historic Environment Scotland (HES)

A96 SEA Approach and Environmental Considerations	Which SEA stage/ output?	How SEA outputs have been/ will be integrated into the SEA and A96 Dualling Plan and Programme?
Environmental constraints including SEA baseline, the division of the corridor into SEA study areas and the key issues by environmental topic (using Key References). Updated and additional GIS constraints mapping. Updated and revised baseline summary tables.	Environmental Report Section 4 Appendix C Appendix D Appendix G	Documented the additional range of constraints considered following Consultation Authority feedback on the Tier 1 SEA Scoping Report. Use of GIS allowed the assessment team to consider alternative transport intervention options in relation to individual constraint types, or in relation to spatial clusters of constraints, and enabled flexibility in the spatial extent of the study areas being considered. The GIS was used to prepare quantitative baseline summary tables for each SEA section alongside indicative constraints maps.
Appraisal of the Do Minimum and the Future Baseline. Do Minimum Scheme Descriptions and Assessment Tables (using Key References).	Environmental Report Section 5.2 Appendix E Appendix G	The predicted effects of each Do Minimum scheme on the predicted future environmental conditions were identified. The Do Minimum scenario assessment was documented for each of the topics 'scoped in' to the assessment. This appraisal was used as the reference case for the Tier 1 SEA appraisal of each of the six STAG intervention options.
STAG Options Schematics + Assessment Tables and Findings.	Environmental Report Section 5.3 Appendix F	The Tier 1 SEA of the six strategic transport intervention options developed for the Inverness to Aberdeen Corridor STAG appraisal, informed the strategic business case for the interventions. The SEA process concentrated on providing robust inputs for the consideration of the 'Environment' criterion as an integrated part of the wider STAG appraisal of the six options. The assessment tables for each option presented the findings of the future baseline appraisal (incorporating the Do Minimum schemes), such that the predicted impacts of each STAG option related to the anticipated future conditions.
Deferring Monitoring and Post Adoption.	Environmental Report Section 6	It was agreed that a single Post Adoption Statement would better enable a synopsis of the full two-tier SEA process, demonstrating linkages between the two levels of assessment, the additional detail incorporated at each stage and the monitoring framework.
Signposting Tier 2 SEA.	Environmental Report Section 7	Updated the proposed approach to assessment at Tier 2 to ensure integration of SEA with the development and assessment of improvement strategy options.
Tier 2 SEA		
Scoping Stage		
Introduced programme objectives.	Scoping Report Section 1	Detailed the set of programme objectives which were developed for the A96 Dualling Programme, building on those developed for the SBC; these were used as the basis for testing and sifting of the improvement strategy options generated during the DMRB Stage 1 process.
Response to Consultation Comments.	Scoping Report Appendix A	Provided a full record of comments on the Tier 1 Environmental Report and how comments were taken into account in the proposed approach to the Tier 2 detailed assessment, or explaining why particular issues were not addressed.
SEA and PES Preliminary Assessment Sifting Parts 1 and 2.	Scoping Report Section 2.2 Section 2.3 Appendix B Appendix C Appendix D	Presented preliminary assessment sifting Parts 1 and 2 methodology and findings. Part 1 of the PES sifting process focused on the appraisal of a long list of improvement strategy options against the set of corridor objectives. The SEA adopted a constraints-led approach to assessment, in parallel with the objectives-led sifting, to ensure that a comprehensive analysis of environmental effects was undertaken and integrated with the PES option sifting process. Sifting Part 2 comprised an assessment of the six improvement strategy options remaining after Part 1 (B, C, D, E, N and P) to identify any which were significantly less advantageous than others. The PES team collated and considered baseline engineering, built environment, topographical and geotechnical constraints information, as well as preliminary cost/ deliverability data. SEA informed Sifting Part 2 through specific input on environmental constraints. The combination of the PES objectives-based sifting approach and the SEA constraints-based assessment provided a robust approach to the selection of options for the next stage of assessment.

A96 SEA Approach and Environmental Considerations	Which SEA stage/ output?	How SEA outputs have been/ will be integrated into the SEA and A96 Dualling Plan and Programme?
		<p>It should be noted that the SEA of the original Option N highlighted that it would potentially be more favourable with some refinement to avoid the Natura sites at its western extent. Following further consideration of this option, the recommendation to revise it to avoid the Natura sites at the western extent was accepted and implemented. Following this change, SEA recommended that the revised Option N could be carried forward for further consideration. It was recommended that Options E and P were not taken forward for further assessment due to the significant engineering, cost/ deliverability and environmental disadvantages associated with tunnelling. The improvement strategy options remaining after the sifting process were Option B, Option C, Option D and Option N.</p>
Proposed approach to detailed assessment which included consideration of environmental baseline constraints and PPS, and overviews of the assessment methods to be applied.	Scoping Report Section 3 Appendix E Appendix F Appendix G	<p>Provided a summary of key constraints for consideration through the Tier 2 SEA process, and documented the additional range of PPS and constraint data considered following Consultation Authority feedback on the Tier 1 SEA Environmental Report. Ensured early explanation of proposed approaches to assessment to allow consultation and consideration of feedback.</p>
Environmental Report Stage		
Summarised SEA Process providing overview of Tier 1 SEA and the links to Tier 2.	Environmental Report Section 2	<p>Provided an overview of the DMRB process and how environmental assessment is incorporated at each stage, and detailed the Tier 2 SEA scope, which brought environmental topics back into the assessment.</p>
Updated and revised PPS review, baseline constraints and study areas, and development of a set of SEA criteria.	Environmental Report Section 3 Appendix B	<p>Provided updated constraints for consideration through the Tier 2 SEA process, and documented the additional range of PPS considered following Consultation Authority feedback on the Tier 2 SEA Scoping Report. Defined the geographical extent of options for preliminary assessment and extents for those remaining after sifting, which were wider to enable detailed identification and consideration of constraints, with a view towards maintaining future flexibility for dualling alignment options development and assessment. Described the SEA criteria which were developed to underpin a framework for the assessment of the improvement strategy options at the Tier 2 detailed assessment stage.</p>
Preliminary Environmental Assessment which detailed the methodology for assessment of PES improvement strategy options as well as the findings of Sifting Parts 1 and 2.	Environmental Report Section 4 Appendix C Appendix D	<p>The approach to, and findings of, the Preliminary Environmental Assessment as detailed above in the Tier 2 Scoping Report, were also captured in the Tier 2 Environmental Report to allow for public consultation.</p>
Consideration of landscape issues – Landscape Review.	Environmental Report Section 5.5 Section 6 Appendix G Appendix H Appendix I Appendix J	<p>The Review included a general landscape character description encompassing a narrative of the alternative improvement strategy options and general area descriptions. In addition to identifying the sensitivity of the landscape within each improvement strategy option, a commentary on landscape character and the predicted effects of dualling, was provided. The findings of the review fed directly into the Tier 2 SEA detailed assessment.</p>
SEA input into five A96 Dualling design strategies, where a number of key environmental issues associated with each strategy were identified.	Environmental Report Section 5.6	<p>The SEA team input to the development of the PES Strategies to help define and capture important issues to be addressed in later stages of the design and assessment process. This ensured that the full range of potential environmental effects associated with strategy development were addressed, providing the basis for more detailed environmental assessment and mitigation of junctions and other road dualling infrastructure in later stages of design.</p>

A96 SEA Approach and Environmental Considerations	Which SEA stage/ output?	How SEA outputs have been/ will be integrated into the SEA and A96 Dualling Plan and Programme?
<p>Detailed Assessment Findings and Matrices: In common with the approach adopted for the preliminary environmental assessment of improvement strategy options, the Tier 2 detailed assessment of the remaining 4 improvement strategy options adopted a constraints-led approach.</p>	<p>Environmental Report Section 6 Appendix H Appendix I Appendix J</p>	<p>The analysis of constraints, risk of effect and assessment of improvement strategy options drew upon information from GIS constraint data extracts, by review of mapped information and by making use of other key inputs such as traffic data, and findings from the additional studies. It was not the purpose of the detailed assessment to identify an order of 'preference' for improvement strategy options in environmental terms or to sift out any of the four key improvement strategy options being assessed. The detailed assessment stage provided an increased understanding of relevant constraints and the potential for significant effects of each option to inform future DMRB Stage 2 assessments.</p>
<p>Cumulative assessment including predicted cumulative effects and in-combination effects with other proposals.</p>	<p>Environmental Report Section 7</p>	<p>The cumulative assessments took account of key mitigation measures assumed for the individual improvement strategy options as set out in the detailed options assessments; where additional mitigation was considered appropriate to reduce or avoid potential significant cumulative effects, this was presented in the findings.</p>
<p>Mitigation measures were derived from the options assessment process where they were identified to help reduce or offset the potential for significant effects of dualling. An example monitoring approach was also provided.</p>	<p>Environmental Report Section 8</p>	<p>The detailed assessment matrices capture key mitigation where this was identified as being necessary to avoid or reduce the potential for significant environmental effects from dualling. Consultation comments were sought on an example monitoring framework and were incorporated into the detailed monitoring framework within this Post Adoption Statement.</p>
<p>Habitats Regulations Appraisal (HRA) Screening and Appropriate Assessment (AA)</p>		
<p>The A96 Dualling Programme was assessed in relation to its potential to have 'Likely Significant Effects' (LSE) on the conservation objectives and qualifying interests of internationally designated Ramsar and Natura sites. The HRA Pre-Screening Report identified International sites that may be hydrologically, or ecologically, connected to the 2km-wide improvement strategy option extents. The HRA Screening and Appropriate Assessment (AA) Report documented the assessment of each qualifying interest feature for each site, identifying the potential for LSE and requirements for AA. Appropriate Assessment was carried out, identifying a range of mitigation measures including detailed ecological survey requirements, potential exclusion periods, engineering solution options and a commitment to further HRA at the project level. Identification of these measures satisfied SNH that, at the strategic programme level, A96 dualling could deliver effective mitigation to avoid Adverse Effects on Site Integrity (AESI).</p>	<p>Submitted to SNH during Tier 2 Environmental Report Stage Pre-Screening reported in Tier 2 Environmental Report Section 5.5 HRA Screening and Appropriate Assessment (AA) Report Results reported in Tier 2 Post Adoption Statement</p>	<p>Although HRA is a separate process from SEA, it is generally considered best practice to integrate the two processes as far as possible at strategic planning and assessment stages. Where appropriate, SEA Sections and/ or improvement strategy options, were scoped out of the process, with agreement from SNH. Justification for the removal from further consideration was provided within the Pre-Screening Report, based on geographical location or absence of designated sites within each section. The HRA Screening and Appropriate Assessment (AA) Report assessed designated sites and their qualifying interest features, documenting where appropriate, the conclusion of 'No LSE'. A total of six sites (with seven corresponding designations) were taken forward to the next stage in the HRA process, known as the 'Appropriate Assessment' (AA), as the potential for A96 dualling to present Likely Significant Effects (LSE) on a range of Natura/ Ramsar site qualifying interest features was identified. The Appendices to the report consider each qualifying interest feature within scoped-in Natura and Ramsar sites. Where potential LSE was identified, AA has been carried out and mitigation measures proposed. The outputs from the AA have informed the monitoring framework and key mitigation measures included in this Post Adoption Statement, and will form the basis for more focussed and site specific mitigation measures as detailed design progresses. The HRA and Programme-level Appropriate Assessment (AA) Report shall be used as a key reference source for future DMRB design stages and environmental assessment work, particularly related to project level requirements for more detailed Habitats Regulations Appraisal and related ecological survey requirements.</p>
<p>Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) Report</p>		
<p>The Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) Screening Report provided the baseline conditions, set out the proposed approach to assessment and detailed the programme of works.</p>	<p>Submitted to SEPA during Tier 2 Environmental Report Stage</p>	<p>Secured early communication with SEPA to facilitate a clear understanding of the proposed assessment approach, ensuring consultation comments were able to be incorporated into the process.</p>

A96 SEA Approach and Environmental Considerations	Which SEA stage/ output?	How SEA outputs have been/ will be integrated into the SEA and A96 Dualling Plan and Programme?
		<p>Ensured A96 Dualling Programme constraints were identified and assessed from two perspectives; considering the A96 as a sensitive receptor to flood risk, and therefore flood risk as a potential constraint to A96 Dualling and considering A96 Dualling as a potential source of change in flood risk. Ensured integration of programmes of work to ensure the SFRA informed the Tier 2 SEA.</p>
<p>The SFRA was carried out in parallel with Tier 2 SEA to inform the consideration of key areas of flood risk. The approach was informed by consultation with SEPA and the relevant Local Authorities on flooding issues across the SEA study area. The SFRA collates information on local flood history and supporting data on flooding and flood risk, summarising the key issues associated with impacts of, and impacts on, flooding from the shortlisted set of improvement strategy options within each of the defined SEA study sections.</p>	<p>Environmental Report Section 5.5 Section 6 Appendix F Appendix H Appendix I Appendix J</p>	<p>Where the SFRA identified that improvement strategy options were likely to be constrained in flood risk terms, it recommended further assessment within the context of other engineering and environmental constraints (including via the SEA), as well as traffic demand, before decisions are reached on the removal of options from further consideration at subsequent stages of the development process.</p> <p>The findings from the SFRA Report informed the SEA and were incorporated in the Tier 2 detailed improvement strategy option assessments.</p> <p>The SFRA shall also be used as a key reference source for future DMRB design stage and environmental assessment work, particularly related to project level requirements for more detailed flood risk assessment/ modelling and drainage considerations, including Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) and consideration of watercourse crossings and geomorphological issues.</p>

3 Consultation

This section describes the stakeholder and public consultation undertaken throughout the A96 Dualling SEA process, explaining SEA consultation requirements as well as detailing those specific to the A96 Dualling Programme. A summary of key feedback received throughout the SEA process is presented together with an explanation of how information received from consultation was taken into account in the development of the A96 Dualling Programme and its environmental assessment.

3.1 A96 Dualling consultation

The Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act, 2005 (the Act), requires the consideration of Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) for all public sector plans, programmes and strategies with the potential for significant effects on the environment.

The Act also includes requirements for consultation throughout the SEA process; these are summarised in Table 3-1 below.

Table 3-1 Summary of consultation requirements under the SEA legislation

Steps in the SEA	Consultation requirements
Determination if a plan or programme requires an SEA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consult Consultation Authorities if screening is required Information made available to the public
Decision on scope and level of detail of the assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consult Consultation Authorities
Environmental report and draft plan or programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information made available to the public Consult Consultation Authorities Consult the public
During preparation of plan or programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Take account of Environmental Report and opinions expressed (and produce statement)
Adopted plan or programme; statement and measures concerning monitoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information made available to Consultation Authorities Information made available to the public

Adapted from Figure 3 from 'A Practical Guide to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive'

A two-tiered approach to the A96 Dualling SEA was adopted to ensure that effective environmental assessment was integrated throughout programme development. This also helped to ensure that there was a comprehensive framework for stakeholder consultation, providing opportunity to comment on the potential for significant environmental effects at both the policy/ plan level and programme level for Tier 1 and 2 SEAs respectively.

A number of bodies were consulted on the Tier 1 and Tier 2 Scoping and Environmental Reports and they have helped to inform the environmental assessment and adoption of the programme. These included the SEA Consultation Authorities (Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), Historic Environment Scotland (HES) and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA)), as well as Forestry Commission Scotland and relevant local authorities.

Wider (public) consultation was also undertaken over a statutory six week period commencing on 25 September 2014 for the Tier 1 Environmental Report, and over a six week⁴ period commencing on 11 May 2015 for the Tier 2 Environmental Report. All Environmental Report documents were published on Transport Scotland's website, www.transportscotland.gov.uk/project/a96-dualling-inverness-aberdeen/environmental-challenges, and hard copies were made available for public inspection at Transport Scotland's office in Glasgow.

⁴ Due to the volume of comments received in the closing week of the consultation period for Tier 2, comments received up until 29 of May were accepted and have been reviewed for this Post Adoption Statement

In addition to SEA specific consultation, a series of A96 Dualling Programme public exhibitions were held in venues along the existing A96 route from 11 May until 21 May 2015. These events in Elgin, Forres, Huntly, Fochabers, Keith, Blackburn and Inverurie gave local communities and businesses the opportunity to see and comment on the outcome of the Tier 2 SEA and on the preliminary engineering services (PES) work that Transport Scotland has been taking forward for the route east of Nairn to Aberdeen.

The public exhibitions were well attended with a turnout of over 2000 people in total, and this was reflected in the written feedback received over the consultation period which ran in parallel with the statutory SEA consultation period. Many responses from the general public were appreciative of the exhibitions, communicating that the material available and the explanations received from the Transport Scotland representatives present, allowed them the opportunity to better understand the planning process and participate in the consultation.

3.2 A96 Dualling consultation comments

As listed in Table 3-1 above, the Act requires SEA consultation opinions and comments received to be reported in the Post Adoption Statement; details of how they were addressed throughout the A96 SEA process are included in Sections 3.2.1 and 3.2.4 below.

As the wider A96 Dualling Programme consultation coincided with the Tier 2 SEA consultation period, almost 600 comments were received from the general public and analysis of these responses identified that approximately 503 generally related to (or included comments on) the environment, with some making specific reference to the Tier 2 SEA.

In addition to the numerous comments received from individuals, comments were received from the following community councils and local interest groups:

- Bennachie Community Council
- Dyke Landward Community Council
- Keith & Strathisla Regeneration Partnership
- Forres Business Association
- Forres Community Council
- Pluscarden Abbey

Due to the volume of comments received, individual responses have not been detailed in full in this document. However, to ensure that key information was captured for future stages of the design process, comments have been categorised and the key points raised drawn out and presented in Sections 3.2.2 and 3.2.3 below; Section 3.2.4 explains how comments will be taken account of during future stages of the environmental assessment process.

3.2.1 A96 SEA consultation comments

Consultation comments on the Tier 1 and Tier 2 Environmental Reports received from the SEA Consultation Authorities, national organisations and local authorities, are detailed in full, along with the SEA response to them, in Appendices A and B respectively. A summary of these comments and how they have been taken into account throughout the A96 Dualling Programme development can be found in Section 3.2.4 below.

A number of Consultation Authority comments on the Tier 2 Environmental Report related to matters of procedural/ technical/ assessment detail, and in reviewing these comments some inconsistencies in the reporting within the detailed assessment matrices were we identified.

For completeness a list of errata and inconsistencies has been prepared, which can be found in Appendix C, and together these appendices provide a fully documented audit trail on how comments have been taken into account throughout the SEA.

3.2.2 Key themes from A96 Dualling Programme consultation by SEA topic

To manage the volume of comments received, and to capture relevant information for future stages of the design and assessment process, all comments were reviewed and categorised. Many comments were complex and raised a number of points, therefore they have been categorised and attributed to one or more of the six Tier 2 SEA assessment topics to draw out the key and common themes.

The SEA topics used for categorisation of comments were:

- Biodiversity, flora and fauna
- Soils and geodiversity
- Water and flooding
- Population and human health (incorporating noise and air quality)
- Historic environment
- Landscape and visual

Many responses covered more than one SEA topic, and where responses raised several points, each point was allocated to the relevant topic; Figure 3-1 below shows the distribution of points on each of the SEA topics. The following section of this report provides more detail about the number of comments received and draws out the key points raised.

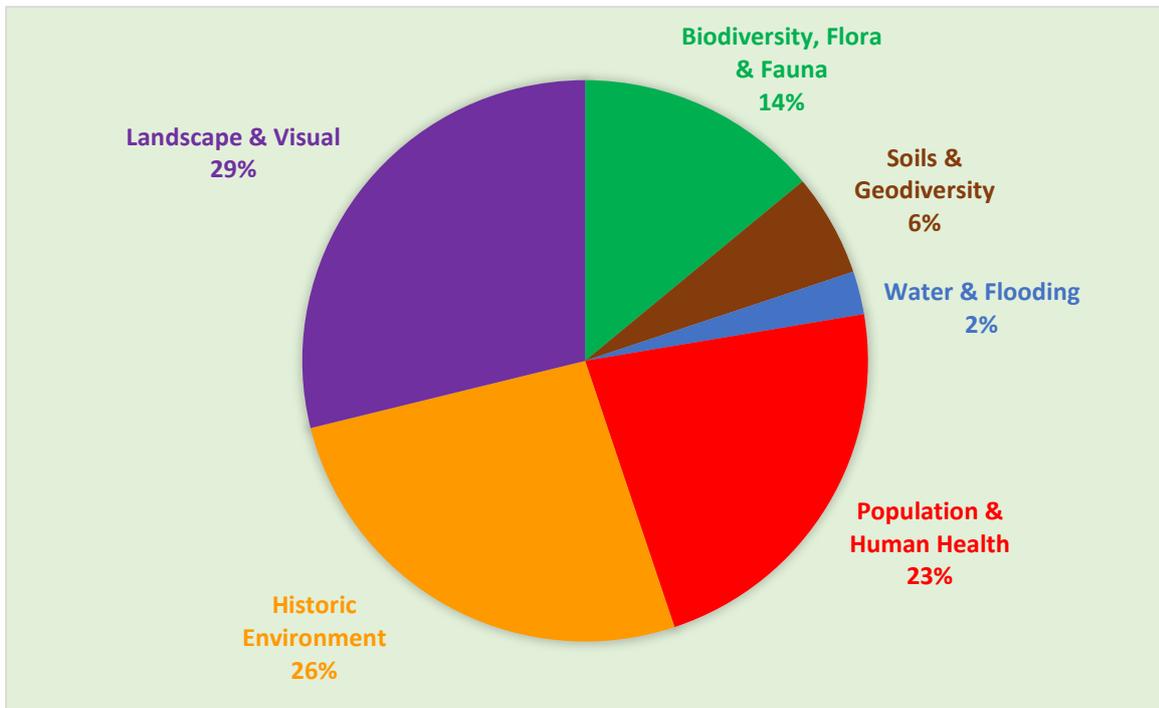


Figure 3-1 Percentage of points relating to each SEA topic theme

Biodiversity, Flora and Fauna

There were 135 comments where biodiversity, flora and fauna was highlighted as a concern with regards to the dualling of the A96. Of these, wildlife was mentioned 95 times with flora and fauna specifically mentioned 58 times. The key points raised were regarding:

- The large populations of wildlife within the Inverness to Aberdeen corridor, some of which are endangered, for example capercaillie, red and roe deer, polecats, pine martins, badgers, red squirrel, stoat, weasel and wildcat; with concerns over the protection of these species, during and after construction.
- The loss of woodland, some of which is being specifically managed to encourage habitat for key species.
- The suggestion that much greater cognizance should be attributed to the role and value of trees, woodland and forests not only in analysis of the dualling options, but in the detailed design stage of the finally adopted route, such that minimizing the removal of woodland and/ or loss of important connectivity between woodlands for biodiversity and wildlife habitat purposes, is given much higher priority.
- The protection of plant and tree species which are indigenous to specific areas within the A96 Dualling corridor.

Soils and Geodiversity

There were 57 comments relating to soils and geodiversity with the common theme of loss of prime agricultural land being mentioned 50 times. The key points raised were regarding:

- The loss of agricultural land and effects on many small, local businesses due to dualling.
- The separation of farm buildings from farm land through loss of prime agricultural land, having a detrimental impact and making some farms no longer viable.
- Options passing through extensive areas of farmland and forestry, disrupting the local economy and wildlife.
- Options which pass far from the centre of Elgin, where the complexity and number of feeder road connections/ junctions will increase, resulting in additional agricultural land being lost.

Water and Flooding

There were 24 responses which mentioned water and flooding and the comments received mainly related to local flood knowledge and historic flood events. The key points raised were regarding:

- The areas of flood risk around Forres and Elgin and the impact of dualling on newly constructed Flood Alleviation Schemes.
- Rising sea levels threatening the area around Findhorn Bay where the flat lands are prone to flooding, suggesting that options could be incorporated into flood defences by elevating the road/ ground level, possibly protecting areas including the industrial estate and homes in the Pilmuir area.
- The heavy rain in the summer of 1997, when there was extensive flooding along the Kinloss Burn on the south west side of Forres.
- The number of environmental constraints in the vicinity of the River Findhorn and the potential crossing of the River Findhorn.
- The avoidance of the flood plain to the north of Inverurie.

Population and Human Health

There were 218 comments where population and human health was highlighted as a concern. Of these, noise and/ or air pollution was mentioned 94 times and non-motorised users 39 times. The key points raised were regarding:

- The increase in noise and air pollution as the result of a dualled road.
- The lack of proper consideration of the relative impact of noise within the Tier 2 SEA.
- The effect of moving from "online" to "offline" creates new, and increased, noise footprints over areas previously valued for their rural tranquillity and landscape value that are iconic of Moray generally.
- The omission in the Tier 2 SEA of an evaluation of the acoustic impact of a re-location of the A96 from its current Forres bypass routing to an "offline" scheme, and the expected increase in traffic that would use it.
- The effects that options would have on communities where, if not completely destroyed, they could be dissected as well as isolated from other neighbouring communities.
- The destruction of natural recreational facilities and the effects on non-motorised users including equestrians, walkers and cyclists.
- The risk to the tourism industry posed by the effect A96 dualling would have on various tourist attractions of the north-east, for example Pluscarden Abbey and Valley, the Bennachie Hills and the Picardy Stone.
- The failure to address the impact on businesses, and the follow-on impacts on employment, health etc., created by the various proposed options.
- Concerns that the impacts on other non-designated, and therefore more subjectively defined or evaluated, aspects of the environmental fabric within and closely adjacent to dualling options, have not yet been given the due attention they deserve; accordingly there is a perceived danger that these will simply be ridden roughshod over at this early stage by purely engineering design and cost considerations.

Historic Environment

There were 254 comments where the historic environment was highlighted as a concern regarding the dualling of the A96; points raised related to listed buildings, scheduled monuments, battlefields and local archaeological sites. The key points raised were regarding:

- The potential impact of option N on the historic Pluscarden Abbey and its setting.
- The impact on Bennachie and the surrounding settlements and archaeology, including the Picardy Stone scheduled monument.
- The preference of dualling existing sections of the A96 where possible to minimise the impact on natural and built features.
- Concerns over potential impacts on historic environment features such as Manar House, Aquhorthies House, Chapel of Garioch/ Pittodrie House, Harlaw Battlefield monuments as well as castles and castle grounds (e.g. Darnaway, Blervie, Burgie, Gordon).
- The impact Option C would have upon scheduled monuments and sites of historic, archaeological and cultural importance; examples include the Iron Age Fort on Mither Tap (Bennachie), the Colony settlement in the Bennachie Forest, the Picardy Stone, Berry Hill enclosure and the Ratch-hill settlement.

Landscape and Visual

There were 279 responses which highlighted concerns over landscape and visual issues, with considerable emphasis being placed upon the natural beauty of the area; particularly Pluscarden Area of Great Landscape Value (AGLV) and Bennachie and the potential visual intrusion caused by new sections of road through unspoiled countryside. The key points raised were regarding:

- Option N affecting three AGLVs and in the case of the Pluscarden Valley AGLV, effects are considered major.
- The loss to future generations of irreplaceable landscapes through building a road of such significant size along, or close to, Option C.
- The flat landscape around Elgin which will highlight the new dual carriageway; the new road will also stand out when looking from the hills down to it.
- The potential for the dualled A96 being detrimental to areas of great beauty including the River Spey, Altyre and Darnaway Forests, and the Speyside and Dava Way walking routes.
- The lack of consideration that the existing nature and use of the land has been given through the sifting and assessment process.

Overview

Many comments were expressions of personal opinion with regards the potential effects of dualling, however in addition, local knowledge on various environmental topics was also provided. Much of this information will be gathered during the forthcoming DMRB Stages through a thorough review and update of baseline data, supplemented by site surveys and, where appropriate, detailed environmental modelling. Future stakeholder engagement will also capture valuable local and specialist information which will be used in future design and assessment processes.

3.2.3 Key themes from A96 Dualling Programme consultation by Improvement Strategy Option

The review of comments not only identified themes relating to SEA topics, but also recognised the fact that comments often also related specifically to improvement strategy options. Once again, those comments pertaining to the environment were categorised, this time by options mentioned.

The improvement strategy options assessed in the SEA and used for categorisation were:

- Option B
- Option C
- Option D
- Option N

Figure 3-2 overleaf shows the number of comments which contained reference to each of the improvement strategy options; the following section of this report provides more detail about the number of comments received and draws out the key points raised.

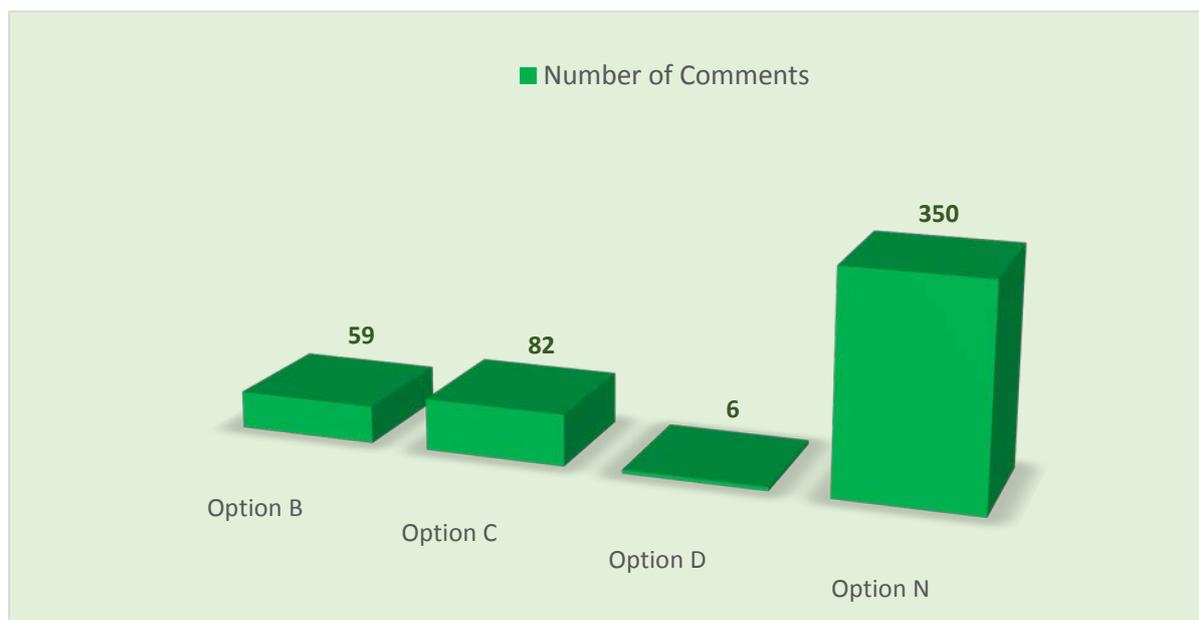


Figure 3-2 Number of comments received which made reference to improvement strategy options

Option B

Option B broadly follows the corridor of the existing A96, with the exception of offline bypasses of the settlements of Forres, Elgin, Keith and Inverurie. Of the four improvement strategy options assessed, Option B provides a strategy for full dualling between east of the A96 Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass) scheme and Aberdeen. The remaining three options only cover part of the dualling and therefore would need to be delivered in combination with Option B.

Of the consultation comments received, 59 specifically mention Option B and the key points raised were as follows:

- Option B would allow for the widening of the existing A96 road and would have a significantly reduced cumulative impact on numerous constraints.
- Option B south around Elgin is very close to Elgin, which could give rise to pollution (air quality and noise) and flooding risks in the town centre.
- Option B north around Forres has the potential to increase flood risk caused by tidal effects.
- Option B south around Forres and Option B south around Elgin are both situated close to SEPA determined flood areas, specifically the area between Forres Enterprise Park and the settlements of Lochaber/ Easter Lawrenceton, and the area between Palmerscross and Pittendreich on the B9010 to the south of Elgin.
- Option B south around Elgin poses a threat to the Pluscarden Valley area.
- Option B south around Elgin seems less constrained in terms of nationally/ internationally designated sites, however Option B north around Elgin would impact prime agricultural land which produces malting barley, thus affecting the local economy in terms of keeping maltings and distilleries supplied.
- Option B south around Forres would damage much woodland and associated wildlife, especially along the lower Findhorn Valley which hosts spectacular woodland and gorge scenery.

- Depending on which bypasses are favoured, Option B has the potential to affect numerous historic environment features including Blervie Castle scheduled monument, many standing stones, stone circles and Bronze Age settlements.

Option C

This improvement strategy option was developed to provide a more direct line from Huntly to Blackburn, bypass Inverurie and avoid a number of sections of poor road alignment on the existing A96.

Option C received 76 comments stating an opposition to the proposal, 68 of which specified effects on Bennachie as being a concern, with potential effects on tourism, landscape and non-motorised users regularly cited. The key points raised were regarding:

- The popular recreational area of Bennachie and the effect Option C would have on non-motorised users including walkers, cyclists and horse riders.
- The visual and noise pollution caused by a dualled route to the popular walking areas around Bennachie.
- The visual and environmental deterioration to the appearance and environmental quality of the area as a result of the proposed Option C.
- The existing A96 being considered by many as an accepted part of the local landscape, and by widening the existing road (opting for Option B) there would be negligible visual impact on the surrounding landscape, compared with Option C.
- The damage to extensive ancient woodland which is situated within the study area associated with Option C.
- The potential loss of prime agricultural land and detachment of farm units from land holdings, which would be significantly increased as a result of pursuing routes that cut through the open countryside, (i.e. Option C), given that these options contain significant areas dedicated to farming, agriculture and other associated primary industries.
- The impacts on the cultural environment within the boundaries of Option C; including impacts on scheduled monuments such as the Picardy Stone, the Berry Hill enclosure, Rach-hill settlement field system, Deer's Den roundhouses, Maiden Castle, Mither Tap hill fort, Harthill Castle A-listed building and Pittodrie house B-listed building.

Option D

Option D was developed to provide a more direct line between a section of the A96 from the Glens of Foudland to the north-west of Inverurie; Option D received 6 responses, the key points raised were as follows:

- Option D runs close to the Harlaw battlefield and other historic sites including Bowman Stone, Rayne Parish Church, Kirkton of Rayne war memorial, Rayne Parish burial grounds, three sacred fountains in Culsalmond (including St. Mary's and St. Michael's) and the Old Rayne stone circle.
- Option D would affect large areas of prime agricultural land.
- The study area of Option D includes two Geological Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs); Pitcaple and Legatsden quarries.
- Option D would be in direct conflict with several policies of the Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan, including, but not limited to: Policy 11 – Natural heritage; Policy 12 – Landscape conservation;

Policy 13 – Protecting, improving and conserving the historic environment; and, Policy 14 – Safeguarding of resources and areas of search.

Option N

Option N was developed to provide a more direct line from the west of Forres to the south east of Fochabers and removes the need to travel the longer length of the existing A96 via Forres and Elgin.

Option N received 341 responses against the proposed route with 294 of the comments relating specifically to the potential impacts on Pluscarden Abbey and Valley, with potential disturbance to the historic environment, the landscape and biodiversity and flora and fauna being regularly highlighted as important issues. The key points raised were regarding:

- The potential impact that Option N could have on the important historical building of Pluscarden Abbey, a restored 13th Century building still operating as a working monastery, as well as its special character, setting and exceptional environment.
- The Pluscarden Valley, some of which lies within Option N's boundary, which is home to some of Scotland's rarest fauna and flora and endangered species, for example capercaillie, melanistic wildcats, pine martins, adders, blackcaps and orchids.
- The potential for Option N to spoil an area of natural beauty, with the Pluscarden area having AGLV status, regarded by many as one of Moray's unsung treasures in terms of its tranquil and beautiful mixed pastoral and woodland landscape; two other AGLVs, the River Spey and the River Findhorn, lie within the option boundaries and would also be affected.
- Concerns over the Pluscarden Valley, which is well regarded for its tranquillity and recreational walking routes and the local roads within it, which are also used by visiting motorists as a quiet, alternative route to A96, between distilleries, local towns and tourist attractions
- The increase in noise and dust pollution, during and after construction of Option N, causing disturbance to the inhabitants of Rafford and Forres.
- The effects on the tourist trade in the local bypassed community of Forres, particularly to tourist attractions including Sueno's stone and Nelson's Tower, should Option N be approved.
- The potential destruction of Altyre Woods, and more generally the upper Moray countryside, if Option N were to be adopted.
- Effects on local wildlife in the area (postcode IV36 2RH), which include wildcat, red squirrels, foxes, badgers, deer, bats, ospreys, kites, feeding geese and many other animals and birds.

Overview

Many comments were expressions of personal opinion with regards the improvement strategy options being taken forward to DMRB Stage 2, however local knowledge covering various environmental topics was also provided. Issues applicable to the distinct geographic locations of improvement strategy options will be considered during the next stages of design and assessment when route options are developed and assessed.

3.2.4 Summary of all consultation comments and how they have been taken into account

An overview on how the A96 Dualling SEA engaged the range of statutory and non-statutory consultees who have been involved to date, is provided in Table 3-2 below, along with a summary of consultation comments and how these were taken into account in the development of the A96 Dualling Programme.

Table 3-2 Summary on how consultation opinions were taken into account

Consultee/ respondent	General summary of engagement and comments	How comments were taken into account in the SEA and PPS development
<p>Historic Environment Scotland (HES)</p>	<p>Engaged via workshops and meetings throughout each stage of the SEA process. Provided written responses to the Tier 1 and Tier 2 SEA Scoping Reports and Environmental Reports.</p> <p><u>Tier 1</u> Historic Environment Scotland confirmed acceptance of a two-tiered approach to the SEA, as well as the specific approach and assessment undertaken at Tier 1. Detailed feedback was provided on the specific areas within their remit as a statutory SEA consultee, including advice on national datasets, risks to heritage assets from the strategic interventions, and the signposting of the assessment to be undertaken at the Tier 2 Environmental Report.</p> <p><u>Tier 2</u> Historic Environment Scotland confirmed acceptance of the approach and assessment undertaken at Tier 2, providing detailed feedback on the specific areas within their remit as a statutory SEA consultee, including detailed assessment findings, risks to heritage assets within the improvement strategy options, mitigation/ monitoring. Historic Environment Scotland also requested clarification on the next stage of environmental assessment to be undertaken at DMRB Stage 2.</p>	<p>Comments received from Historic Environment Scotland (HES) have been documented in Appendices A and B and have helped to inform both tiers of SEA, as well as the Monitoring Framework detailed in Section 5 and Appendix E.</p> <p>HES supported the adopted two-tiered approach to the SEA which ensured that Tier 1 informed the Strategic Business Case (SBC) and STAG assessment.</p> <p>More specifically, HES recommended the inclusion of pertinent PPS and constraints to Tier 1 and Tier 2, such as Local Development Plans, Historic Scotland’s Managing Change Guidance note and their Garden and Designed Landscapes dataset, and the inclusion of additional constraints such as non-designated archaeology.</p> <p>HES agreed with the approach to assessment in Tier 2 and welcomed the detailed development of the assessment matrices which allowed for a clearer understanding of the constraints and potential effects for each option, underpinning the comparative appraisals presented in the options assessment tables.</p> <p>HES also supported the approach to analysis of constraints, which drew on both quantitative data and an informed qualitative commentary on their implications for the sensitivity of each option area, and the potential risk of impacts on key assets.</p> <p>In accordance with Historic Environment Scotland’s suggestions, where possible the Tier 2 assessment incorporated a commentary on the risk of direct effects on assets and on indirect effects such as setting on important sites (including those which may be out with, but close to, the study areas).</p> <p>Similarly, the potential for mitigation was considered wherever possible and captured in the detailed assessment matrices as consideration of impacts and mitigation, albeit at a strategic level, was important in understanding the potentially significant effects of each option. This was used to inform the narrative in each assessment matrix for the options comparisons, and also informed the mitigation set out in Section 8 of the Tier 2 Environmental Report (ER).</p> <p>Historic Environment Scotland’s suggestions have also contributed to Section 6 of this Post Adoption Statement, which sets out in more detail, the consideration of environmental issues in future stages of the design and assessment process. Similarly the Monitoring Framework (see Section 5) has been developed to encompass Historic Environment Scotland’s comments and seeks to proactively manage significant effects that may emerge in more detailed assessment.</p>

Consultee/ respondent	General summary of engagement and comments	How comments were taken into account in the SEA and PPS development
<p>Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA)</p>	<p>Engaged through workshops and meetings held at each stage of the SEA process. Provided written responses to the Tier 1 and Tier 2 SEA Scoping Reports, Environmental Reports and the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) produced to inform the Tier 2 Assessment.</p> <p><u>Tier 1</u> SEPA confirmed acceptance of the approach and assessment undertaken at Tier 1, providing detailed feedback on the specific areas within their remit as a statutory SEA consultee, including advice on national datasets, water quality, drainage and the levels of SuDS treatment required, sustainable flood risk management, application of Controlled Activity Regulations (CAR) and Water Framework Directive (WFD) requirements on watercourse crossings and culverts, river geomorphology and ecological improvement, groundwater dependent terrestrial ecosystems, peat soil management and waste management and the signposting of the assessment to be undertaken at the Tier 2 Environmental Report.</p> <p><u>SFRA</u> SEPA confirmed acceptance of the approach and assessment undertaken in the SFRA and while feedback noted and accepted that all options would have an impact on flood risk, specific mention was given to Options B North in both sections 3 and 4. SEPA advised that these options should be avoided as they <i>“involve crossing extensive areas of flood plain at such a scale that impacts would be extremely difficult to adequately mitigate the effects of”</i> and <i>“contain existing properties which are extremely vulnerable to flooding and in the case of Forres have been severely flooded as recently as August 2014.”</i> This feedback helped to inform the Tier 2 SEA.</p> <p><u>Tier 2</u> SEPA confirmed acceptance of the approach and assessment undertaken at Tier 2 providing detailed feedback on the specific areas within their remit as a statutory SEA consultee, including SEA criteria, detailed assessment findings, mitigation and monitoring requirements. SEPA also requested clarification on the next stage of environmental assessment to be undertaken at DMRB Stage 2.</p>	<p>Comments received from SEPA have been documented in Appendices A and B of this Post Adoption Statement and have helped to inform both tiers of SEA, as well as the Monitoring Framework detailed in Appendix E.</p> <p>SEPA agreed with the two-tiered approach to the SEA and welcomed the proposal to carry out a Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) at Tier 2. More specifically, the new SEPA 2014 Flood Maps data was provided for inclusion in Tier 1 and Tier 2 SEA as well in the SFRA.</p> <p>SEPA recommended the inclusion of relevant PPS and constraints to Tier 2 SEA and as such, Local Development Plans (LDPs), the SPP Consultation Draft (2013), the Waste Management Licensing (Scotland) Regulations (2011), the River Basin Management Plan for the Scotland River Basin District and plans from the North East and North Highland Area Advisory Groups were added to the PPS review. Furthermore, the SEA topics air quality and climatic factors, were scoped in to Tier 2 SEA following consultation comments.</p> <p>SEPA provided flood risk information for the SFRA and also reviewed the final document, providing their comments and recommendations; these in turn helped to inform the Tier 2 SEA of improvement strategy options on the water and flooding environment.</p> <p>SEPA’s comments at the Tier 2 Scoping stage regarding linking both levels of environmental assessment ensured that an explanation of the Tier 1 SEA and the outcome of the SBC were summarised in the Tier 2 SEA Environmental Report, and that the Tier 2 approach and findings were clearly set out, along with future design and mitigation expectations.</p> <p>Comments from SEPA informed the development of the Monitoring Framework (see Section 5), which has been tailored to the issues identified for the improvement strategy options which are being taking forward to future DMRB stages. It provides an overview of monitoring proposals for corridor development, and alignment design and assessment, through these DMRB stages and into construction.</p> <p>Comments have also led to an updated list of mitigation measures in Section 6 of this Post Adoption Statement, which provide the basis for good practice methods to be adopted and developed where relevant, through the DMRB stages and into construction.</p>
<p>Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH)</p>	<p>Engaged via workshops and meetings throughout each stage of the SEA process. Provided written responses to the Tier 1 and Tier 2 SEA Scoping Reports, Environmental Reports and the Habitats Regulations</p>	<p>Comments received from SNH have been documented in Appendices A and B and have helped to inform both tiers of SEA, as well as the Monitoring Framework detailed in Appendix E.</p>

Consultee/ respondent	General summary of engagement and comments	How comments were taken into account in the SEA and PPS development
	<p>Appraisal Screening Report and the Programme-level Appropriate Assessment (AA) Report.</p> <p><u>Tier 1</u> SNH confirmed acceptance of the approach and assessment undertaken at Tier 1, providing detailed feedback on the specific areas within their remit as a statutory SEA consultee, including advice on national datasets, landscape, wildness and wild land, national and internationally designated biodiversity conservation sites, key species issues, Habitats Regulations Appraisal (HRA) and Appropriate Assessment requirements, Ancient Woodland, soils, geodiversity and geomorphology, aquatic, wetland and peat ecological issues, as well as issues related to access and recreation, and the signposting of the assessment to be undertaken at the Tier 2 Environmental Report.</p> <p><u>Tier 2</u> SNH raised some issues regarding the assessment methodology proposed to be undertaken at Tier 2 SEA providing detailed feedback on the specific areas within their remit as a statutory SEA consultee, including SEA criteria, detailed assessment findings, mitigation and monitoring requirements. A meeting was held with SNH following feedback on the Tier 2 Scoping Report and the methodology followed for the SEA was adjusted to take account of these discussions. In feedback on the Tier 2 ER, SNH also requested clarification on the next stage of environmental assessment to be undertaken at DMRB Stage 2.</p>	<p>In the early development of the SEA process, SNH agreed with the two-tiered approach to SEA and suggested that a clear explanation of the SBC and PES objectives and their differences be reported in the Environmental Reports.</p> <p>Similarly, the different methodological approaches to assessment of the STAG Strategic Intervention Options and PES improvement strategy options were clearly documented and example assessment tables provided for consultation at the start of the SEA process. This supported transparency in the overall process, where one set of options assessment (STAG options) was kept completely distinct from another set of options (PES options).</p> <p>More specifically, SNH recommended that a full record of STAG options assessment, using the seven point scale and a bullet point narrative, was provided in the Tier 1 Environmental Report, the STAG appraisal tables identifying and discussing the environmental assessment findings for each SEA topic separately.</p> <p>In accordance with SNH's suggestions, the descriptions of the ten Tier 1 baseline study areas included Landscape Character Assessment types and the assessment of STAG options included a narrative on the potential for effects on landscape character. The Forestry Commission Scotland's Native Woodland Survey of Scotland (NWSS) dataset was also added to the Tier 1 baseline and additional PPS considered; this included Landscape Character Assessments for the study area, SNH's Commissioned Report number 293, "The view from the Road" and SNH's Natural Heritage Zones: A National Assessment of Scotland's Landscapes.</p> <p>Recommendations from SNH were incorporated throughout the Tier 2 SEA process and as such, the Tier 2 Environmental Report was prepared as a stand-alone report with all relevant background material and assessment findings being incorporated within the document, including an overview of the Tier 1 process and findings and how it linked with Tier 2; the full suite of assessments undertaken for the PES options, including the HRA Screening and SFRA, were also reported.</p> <p>The Tier 1 Environmental Report set out an indicative approach to landscape sensitivity for Tier 2, and landscape character was considered in more detail as part of the development of the landscape review for the A96 corridor. The review was used to support the detailed assessment of PES options which remained after initial sifting assessments, and suggestions from SNH helped to develop the constraints used to define sensitivity, for example woodland character and relative wildness were incorporated into the review.</p> <p>Discussions were held with SNH on the format of the HRA and an HRA Screening Report was submitted to SNH for review and agreement, which enabled reporting of the Screening stage within the Tier 2 ER. Continued consultation with SNH throughout the Appropriate Assessment (AA) stage has allowed the outcome of the Screening and AA stages to be reported in Section 2 of this Post Adoption Statement, with required strategic avoidance/</p>

Consultee/ respondent	General summary of engagement and comments	How comments were taken into account in the SEA and PPS development
		<p>mitigation measures and/ or monitoring recommendations being incorporated into the Monitoring Framework.</p> <p>In line with SNH's recommendations, the Tier 2 SEA methodology was updated to allow for a high level assessment of cumulative/ in-combination effects for the PES options which remained after initial sifting assessments; the potential for synergistic and cumulative effects was also addressed in the Tier 2 ER.</p> <p>In accordance with SNH's recommendation that mitigation should clearly link to the specific environmental effects identified through the assessment, the potential for mitigation was set out in the assessment matrices as specifically as the level of assessment detail allowed. The high level nature of the Tier 2 SEA necessarily meant that only outline mitigation could be established at that stage, however comments from SNH have led to a refreshing of this mitigation as detailed in Section 6 of this Post Adoption Statement.</p> <p>Specific mitigation measures are considered to be more appropriate to later stages of corridor option assessment (i.e. DMRB Stage 2) when narrower corridors will allow for more specific impact prediction and evaluation, and SNH's suggestions following publication of the Tier 2 ER have contributed to Section 6 of this Post Adoption Statement, which also sets out in more detail the consideration of environmental issues in future stages of the design and assessment process.</p> <p>SNH comments regarding the methods applied within the A9 SEA led to the adoption and development of the formats used in the A96 Tier 2 assessment matrices. More specifically, SNH's request for data capture tables to be included in the Tier 2 ER resulted in the inclusion of the first set of detailed assessment matrices in ER Appendix H, with subsequent matrices progressing the assessment, culminating in the detailed findings for each key option included in ER Appendix J.</p> <p>Comments also ensured that the assessment matrices were developed to capture the potential effects of each option and to comment on significance as far as possible given the options areas being considered. The focus was on typically permanent and medium/ long term predicted effects, enabling a comparative assessment and secondary, indirect and synergistic effects were recorded wherever the sensitivity of the level of assessment allowed.</p> <p>More specifically, soils data incorporating carbon richness and national/ regional NMU access routes and trails were included as criteria for the Tier 2 assessments.</p> <p>SNH commented on discrepancies in the ER and after a thorough review, a list of inconsistencies and errata was drawn up and can be found in Appendix C of this PAS; correction of these would not change the key findings of the SEA and no material changes would need to be made to the assessment findings set out in the published Tier 2 ER.</p>

Consultee/ respondent	General summary of engagement and comments	How comments were taken into account in the SEA and PPS development
		<p>Following SNH's comments regarding the Monitoring Framework, it has been further developed in order to allow for identification of a monitoring strategy for each constraint identified through the SEA for both DMRB Stage 2 and Stage 3.</p> <p>SNH raised a concern regarding how broad scale and high level the Tier 2 assessment was, however, Transport Scotland identified at an early stage that sufficiently broad assessment study areas would be required to ensure all potential future road alignments within each strategy option could be considered. These comments, however, have contributed to Section 6 of this Post Adoption Statement which clarifies the link between the SEA and subsequent environmental assessment at DMRB Stage 2, where narrower corridors will be developed and assessed.</p>
<p>Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS)</p>	<p>Participated in Tier 1 Scoping Workshop and engaged and commented through the statutory consultation process for the Tier 2 Environmental Report and at A96 Dualling public exhibitions which took place during the Tier 2 Environmental Report consultation period.</p> <p>FCS provided written feedback on a range of woodland related considerations relevant to the improvement strategy options. This included the availability of datasets, national policy on the control of woodland removal, the FSC Scottish Forestry Strategy as well as landscape aspects, ancient woodland, native woodland, woodland functionality, fragmentation mitigation, compensation, regeneration and management.</p>	<p>At the Tier 1 Scoping Workshop, Forestry Commission Scotland provided information on when the Native Woodland Survey of Scotland (NWSS) dataset would be complete and available for use; this was consequently used in Tier 1 and Tier 2 SEA.</p> <p>Comments received from Forestry Commission Scotland on Tier 2 SEA have been documented in Appendix B of this Post Adoption Statement and have helped to inform the Monitoring Framework detailed in Appendix E.</p> <p>At future stages of design and assessment, all constraints data and policies, including those relating to woodland, will be reviewed and refreshed and the detailed comments received from FCS will be used in ensuring all relevant National Forest Estates are considered.</p> <p>Forestry Commission Scotland, along with other relevant stakeholders, will be consulted throughout the DMRB Stage 2 process to provide detailed, local information to further inform the assessments and design considerations.</p>
<p>British Horse Society (BHS)</p>	<p>Engaged and commented through the statutory consultation process for the Tier 2 Environmental Report, and at A96 Dualling public exhibitions which took place during the Tier 2 Environmental Report consultation period.</p> <p>Provided response to Tier 2 Environmental Report which set out objections to Option C, specifically relating to its potential impact on the NMU routes used for off road hacking.</p>	<p>Comments received from the British Horse Society have been documented in Appendix B of this Post Adoption Statement and have helped to inform the Monitoring Framework detailed in Appendix E.</p> <p>The BHS, along with other relevant stakeholders, will be consulted at future stages of DMRB Stage 2 process to provide detailed, local information on how their members use NMU routes and to inform the assessments and design relating to NMUs, including specifically for off road hacking routes within improvement strategy option C.</p>
<p>Local Authorities: Moray Council Aberdeenshire Council Aberdeen City Council</p>	<p>Engaged and commented through the statutory consultation process for the Tier 2 Environmental Report, and at A96 Dualling public exhibitions which took place during the Tier 2 Environmental Report consultation period.</p> <p>Also attended and participated in a number of meetings and workshops throughout the Preliminary Engineering Services (PES) work.</p>	<p>Comments received from the Local Authorities have been documented in Appendix B of this Post Adoption Statement and have helped to inform the Monitoring Framework detailed in Appendix E.</p> <p>Core path data was requested from Aberdeenshire Council Infrastructure Services GIS team and the data received in April 2014 was labelled 'core paths'. As such, this was used in the assessment, however these comments have informed the Monitoring Framework detailed in Appendix E.</p>

Consultee/ respondent	General summary of engagement and comments	How comments were taken into account in the SEA and PPS development
	<p>No written responses provided to the Tier 2 Environmental Report from Moray Council and Aberdeen City Council, however responses were provided on the wider Dualling Programme. Aberdeenshire Council commented that the SEA had misinterpreted the data received as “core paths” when it was in fact the “wider path network”.</p>	<p>At future stages of design and assessment, all constraints data, including data relating to core paths, will be reviewed and refreshed and Local Authorities, along with other relevant stakeholders, will be consulted throughout the DMRB Stage 2 process to provide detailed, local information to further inform the assessments and design considerations.</p>
General public	<p>Engaged and commented through the statutory consultation process for the Tier 1 and Tier 2 Environmental Reports Primarily as a result of A96 Dualling public exhibitions which took place during the Tier 2 Environmental Report consultation period almost 600 comments were received from the general public as a response to the broader engagement which came about principally from the exhibitions, with only a small number of comments making specific reference to the Tier 2 SEA Environmental Report.</p> <p>To capture valuable information for future stages of the design process and to manage the volume of comments received, all comments were reviewed and categorised by the SEA team. After a review, it was identified that over 500 comments related to environmental issues and these have been categorised and the key points documented in Sections 3.2.2 and 3.2.3 of this Post Adoption Statement.</p>	<p>Many comments were expressions of personal opinion with regards the improvement strategy options being taken forward to DMRB Stage 2, however in addition, local knowledge on various environmental topics was also provided.</p> <p>Local information and other key points raised in comments will be summarised in a Consultation Report and all comments will be made available to future design teams to inform the development of route options and alignments.</p> <p>Future stages of design will include further consultation, for example at public exhibitions, which will capture valuable local and specialist information to be used in design and assessment processes.</p>

3.3 Concluding remarks on A96 Dualling consultation

This Section of the Post Adoption Statement has captured and summarised the key comments received throughout the A96 Dualling SEA process, with Appendices A and B specifically providing detail on the responses to comments made by a number of bodies, including the SEA Consultation Authorities.

Additionally, the wider A96 Dualling Programme comments from the general public and individual bodies alike, have been reviewed and summarised in this PAS. Although there was no requirement for individual responses to be provided through the A96 SEA process, in early September 2015 Transport Scotland replied to all those who commented either by email or by post.

Comments have informed this Post Adoption Statement and in particular the Monitoring Framework, which has been developed to ensure that the issues and concerns raised through the SEA consultation are taken in to consideration at the next stages of assessment i.e. DMRB Stage 2 and Stage 3.

Throughout the SEA process ongoing consultation has helped shape and develop the content and methodology of the assessment, through overarching discussion on the two-tiered process and the appropriate methodology that each level of assessment should follow, down to detailed guidance on pertinent PPS, constraints and data sets to be considered at both Tier 1 and Tier 2.

Consultation has helped to signpost the next stage of each assessment and this approach will continue during the subsequent stages of assessment, through the formal DMRB process, public exhibitions and through ongoing stakeholder engagement.

More detail on the Monitoring Framework is provided in Section 5 of this document and the detailed framework is contained in Appendix E; Section 6 provides further detail on the Environmental Assessment process at DMRB Stage 2.

4 Reasons for choosing the PPS, as adopted, in light of other reasonable alternatives

The two tiered approach to the SEA of the A96 Dualling Programme aimed to objectively assess a number of alternatives at both the plan (Tier 1) and programme (Tier 2) stages. This ensured that the environmental assessment process was integrated with plan/ programme development throughout. Each stage of assessment has been documented through the Tier 1 and Tier 2 Environmental Reports and supporting strategic study reports.

Tier 1 of the SEA provided the evidence base and audit trail for the assessment of ‘Environment’ during the Inverness to Aberdeen strategic corridor study, integrating with the STAG appraisal process which informed Transport Scotland’s *Inverness to Aberdeen Corridor Study – A96 Dualling Inverness to Aberdeen Strategic Business Case*.

The Strategic Business Case (SBC) summarised the wider economic assessment undertaken of a number of strategic transport alternatives within the context of the SEA/ STAG appraisals and concluded that;

The outcome of this appraisal clearly demonstrates that the proposal to dual the A96 is the best way to meet the future needs of those living, working and travelling along the A96 Corridor in the 21st Century.

Importantly, the appraisal has shown that, the dualling is best able to meet the Transport Planning Objectives, by providing drivers with a consistent road standard that provides the best connectivity for those using the route, either end to end or to the many destinations along the corridor.

Dualling the A96 will also complement the planned upgrades to the A9 and A90 Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route (AWPR), and will provide those people and businesses located along the corridor with the best possible access to Inverness and Aberdeen and onwards to Central Belt.

In summary,

- *the appraisal evidence demonstrates that the options for further improving the transport links between Inverness and Aberdeen over and above existing commitments should be road based infrastructure interventions;*
- *full dualling of the A96 between Inverness and Aberdeen is the best performing option in terms of the transport planning objectives and the STAG criteria; and*
- *more detailed work on the Outline Business Case will help to refine the phasing and programme.*

Given the outcome that full dualling represented the best performing option overall, the SEA moved to a second tier of assessment, focusing on ‘Improvement Strategy Options’ for alternative dualling solutions.

The Tier 2 SEA aligned with Stage 1 of a multi-stage Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (DMRB) design and assessment process and assessed a range of improvement strategy options. These were developed under a separate but integrated Preliminary Engineering Services (PES) workstream, to consider alternative ways of providing dual carriageway connectivity between Inverness and Aberdeen.

A two-part sifting process was adopted, integrating SEA and PES findings to reach a shortlist of alternative options for further, detailed assessment.

The PES sifting process focused on the appraisal of improvement strategy options through determining their performance against a set of dualling programme objectives. Through the SEA constraints-based assessment, the key issues, risks and impacts (adverse and beneficial) of each option were summarised

and a recommendation on whether each alternative improvement strategy option should be taken forward for, or removed from, further consideration was made.

The initial development of improvement strategy options generated a list of 16 broad options within which notional dualling alignments could be developed. The combination of the PES objectives-based sifting approach and the SEA constraints-based assessment provided a robust, integrated approach to the selection of options for the next stage of assessment with four remaining after the sifting process; Option B, Option C, Option D and Option N.

These four improvement strategies progressed to the DMRB Stage 1 Assessment, which comprised desk-based engineering, environmental and traffic and economic assessments; the Tier 2 SEA findings also informed the environmental section of the DMRB Stage 1 assessment.

The integrated SEA and PES assessment concluded that all four improvement strategies, Option B, Option C, Option D and Option N, met the overarching programme objectives. These improvement strategy options were adopted and will be taken forward to the next stage of design and assessment (i.e. DMRB Stage 2 assessment) where more detailed work will be undertaken to lead to the identification of a preferred route.

It is important to note that although it was not the objective of the SEA to identify a clear option 'preference' in overall environmental terms, the predicted effects of the alternatives on the environmental designations and constraints within the study areas of these four improvement strategy options were appraised in some detail, and the potential for significant environmental effects of development of a dualled trunk road within each area was assessed against each of the SEA topics.

5 SEA Monitoring Framework

Part 3, Section 18(3)(f), and Section 19, of the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005 requires the Responsible Authority to identify the measures to be taken to monitor the significant environmental effects of the implementation of the Plan or Programme. SEA monitoring should enable the identification of unforeseen adverse effects at an early stage, as well as enable appropriate remedial action.

At DMRB Stage 2 and Stage 3, there will be further detailed design and environmental assessment which will provide tailored mitigation and monitoring schedules for the final project alignments.

The A96 Dualling SEA Monitoring Framework presents an approach which provides future design and environmental assessment teams a mechanism to specifically consider how the key constraints, analysis and mitigation identified through the SEA process, should be considered during the forthcoming DMRB design stages.

The Monitoring Framework is presented on a section by section basis to align with the study area sections used in Tier 2 SEA detailed assessments, and provides a series of eight tables detailing the improvement strategy options within each section; the location of the sections are detailed in Figure 5-1 below.

It should be noted that Figure 5-1 shows ten A96 SEA sections from north to south, however the detailed PES and SEA assessments concentrated on A96 SEA sections 3 to 10 due to the fact that a preferred option for the A96 Dualling Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass), (sections 1 and 2), was announced by Transport Scotland in October 2014.

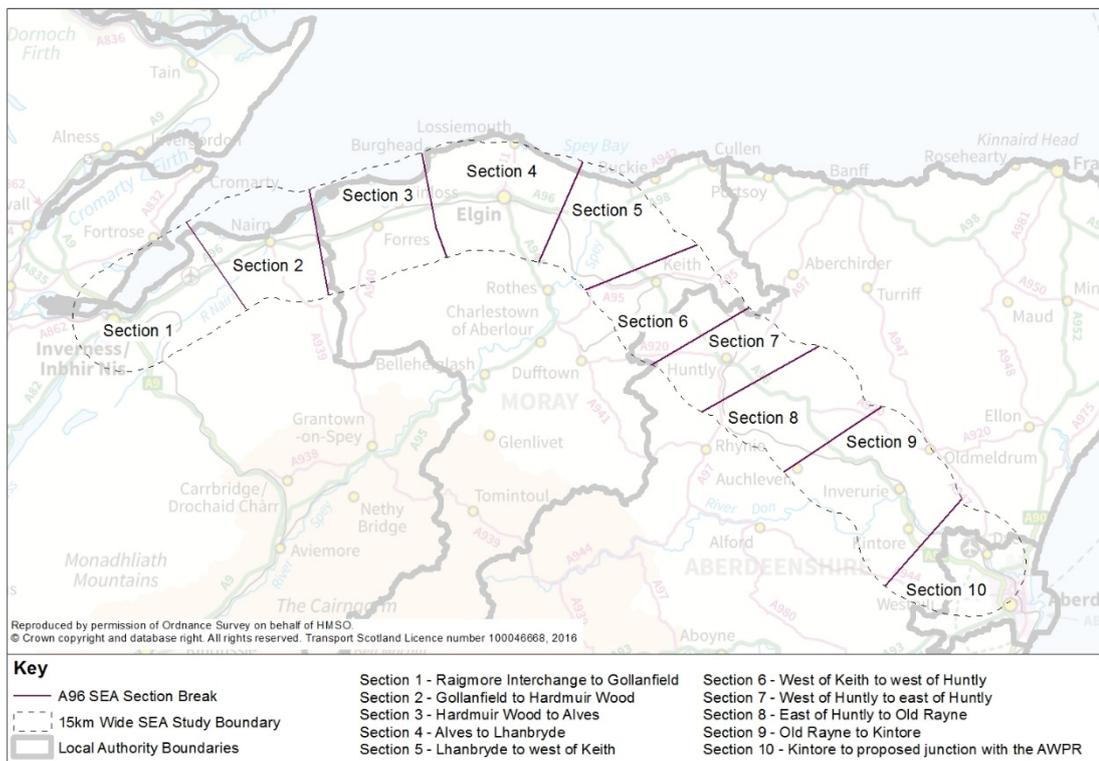


Figure 5-1 Location of A96 SEA study area sections 1-10

Using the SEA study area sections within the Monitoring Framework provides a broad assessment study area and captures the constraints associated with all potential future road alignments within each improvement strategy option. This approach also ensures a link between future environmental requirements for DMRB Stage 2 and Stage 3 and the SEA detailed assessment findings, where level of constraint and sensitivity, and subsequently potential risk of effect, were identified.

In response to comments provided at the Tier 2 SEA Environmental Report consultation stage, the framework has also been further developed to identify a monitoring strategy for each key constraint at DMRB Stage 2 and Stage 3.

Table 5-1 below provides a simple overview explanation of the SEA Monitoring Framework layout, where annotated text presented in *red italics* explains the content/ intention of each cell or column. The full set of tables making up the Monitoring Framework are presented in Appendix E.

It must be noted that, whilst the SEA Monitoring Framework provides a mechanism to ensure that the issues considered at the SEA level cascade through future stages of design and assessment, it does not include the full range of additional local issues and constraints that must be identified and considered at the DMRB Stage 2 and EIA level. Any previous SEA findings or assessment results should be reconsidered at the local level, within the context of additional information and road design detail developed through DMRB Stage 2 and Stage 3, and more detailed local understanding and consultation.

Table 5-1 Example of the A96 Dualling SEA Monitoring Framework layout presented in Appendix E

A96 Dualling SEA Monitoring Framework							
Section 3 – Hardmuir Woods to Alves							
SEA References: SEA Tier 2 Environmental Report Appendix H and I (Presenting the environmental assessment of options)							
SEA Identified Constraints	Description of Constraints (% coverage of 2km-wide segment area)				SEA Summary	Recommendations for later DMRB Stages	
	West Option B	Forres Option B North	Forres Option B South	Forres Option N		DMRB Stage 2	DMRB Stage 3
	Approximately 5km long and 940Ha in area	Approximately 13km long and 2550Ha in area	Approximately 13km long and 2630Ha in area	Approximately 13km long and 2670Ha in area			
Biodiversity							
Internationally Designated Sites <i>Ramsar</i> <i>Special Protection Area (SPA)</i> <i>Special Area of Conservation (SAC)</i>	None	Moray and Nairn Coast Ramsar (0.6%) and SPA (0.6%)	Darnaway and Lethen Forest SPA (0.1%) Lower Findhorn Woods SAC (<0.1%)	Darnaway and Lethen Forest SPA (1.1%) Lower Findhorn Woods SAC (0.4%)	Refer to Strategic Habitats Regulations Appraisal (HRA). The SEA determined that these designations were generally located at the outer edge of the segments and do not represent a significant constraint to dualling. However, significant impacts were identified for Forres Option N as significant effects are possible if a dualling alignment followed the southern part of the segment at the western end. Any impact will require consideration via potential Habitats Regulations Appraisal (HRA) at later DMRB Stages.	Principle of avoidance to be adopted as the primary approach. Refer to Strategic HRA. Review and refresh baseline data. Include specific consideration of SEPA's wetland inventory data set. HRA to be revisited in discussion with SNH as further information on route/ alignment options becomes available. SNH consultation to advise requirements for surveys and mitigation for qualifying interest features, to inform the approach to more detailed HRA Appropriate Assessment as required, supporting DMRB options design and environmental assessment.	Principle of avoidance to be adopted as the primary approach. DMRB Stage 3 HRA must be completed and agreed with SNH in advance of DMRB Stage 3 Environmental Statement finalisation to inform preferred option alignment design. Include mitigation, management plans and exclusion zones/ timescales for qualifying species as agreed with SNH. DMRB Stage 3 Report and Environmental Statement to include appropriate record of consultation, all further studies undertaken and any mitigation works required.

Relevant section

Provides signpost to previous SEA output

Groups the range of constraints noted by the SEA in each design section

Description of constraint for each option in the section, including name/ type/ location/ extent

Short note on predicted significant impacts, avoidance potential, comments from SEA consultees, reference documents i.e. HRA/ SFRA

Headline requirements for further studies/ consideration/ consultation/ assessment and documentation through DMRB Stage 2/ Stage 3

6 Future Environmental Assessment

The Tier 2 Environmental Report showed how the SEA aligned with the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (DMRB) Stage 1 assessment and provided an overview of the DMRB process as a whole. In response to consultation comments, it was considered that it would be helpful to provide further detail, specifically on the next stages of environmental assessment to be undertaken in the DMRB process.

6.1 What to expect at DMRB Stage 2

The Tier 2 SEA may be viewed as broadly equivalent to the environmental input to the DMRB Stage 1 assessment, which comprised a broad, strategic approach to the identification and consideration of environmental, engineering, economic and traffic advantages, disadvantages and constraints of improvement strategy options. The Stage 1 assessment is the first in a multi-stage design and assessment process which will progress options refinement and analysis for the A96 Dualling Programme.

During DMRB Stage 2, the broad improvement strategy options will become more focussed so that route options can be developed, and an engineering, environmental, traffic and economic assessment of the potential impacts of each option will inform a preferred option choice.

The SEA identified the key environmental constraints and potential for effects for each improvement strategy option and, as shown in Figure 6-1 below, will directly inform the level of environmental assessment and potential mitigation measures applicable at DMRB Stage 2.

As the DMRB Stage 1 report suggested that the next stage of design of the A96 Dualling Programme progresses as three geographic sections, the proposed sections, in addition to the Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass) section which is being taken forward separately, are as follows:

- The Western Section extends from the tie-in of the Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass) scheme to the east of Nairn to Fochabers (approximately 46km).
- The Central Section extends from east of Fochabers to east of Huntly (approximately 31km).
- The Eastern Section extends from east of Huntly to the proposed junction with the Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route (approximately 42km).

The Stage 2 assessment work will be split into these three sections and may be packaged into even more manageable subdivisions or 'schemes' so that Transport Scotland can plan, design and promote schemes according to relevant future policy and funding priorities.

A Stage 2 assessment report will be prepared for each section/ scheme of A96 dualling, and although formal consultation is not a statutory requirement at this stage, Transport Scotland is committed to on-going consultation with key stakeholders. An example structure of a typical DMRB Stage 2 report is provided in Figure 6-2 below. This figure also sets out the typical structure which would likely be included in the environmental chapter; as engineering design progresses, the scope and level of assessment required will be determined.

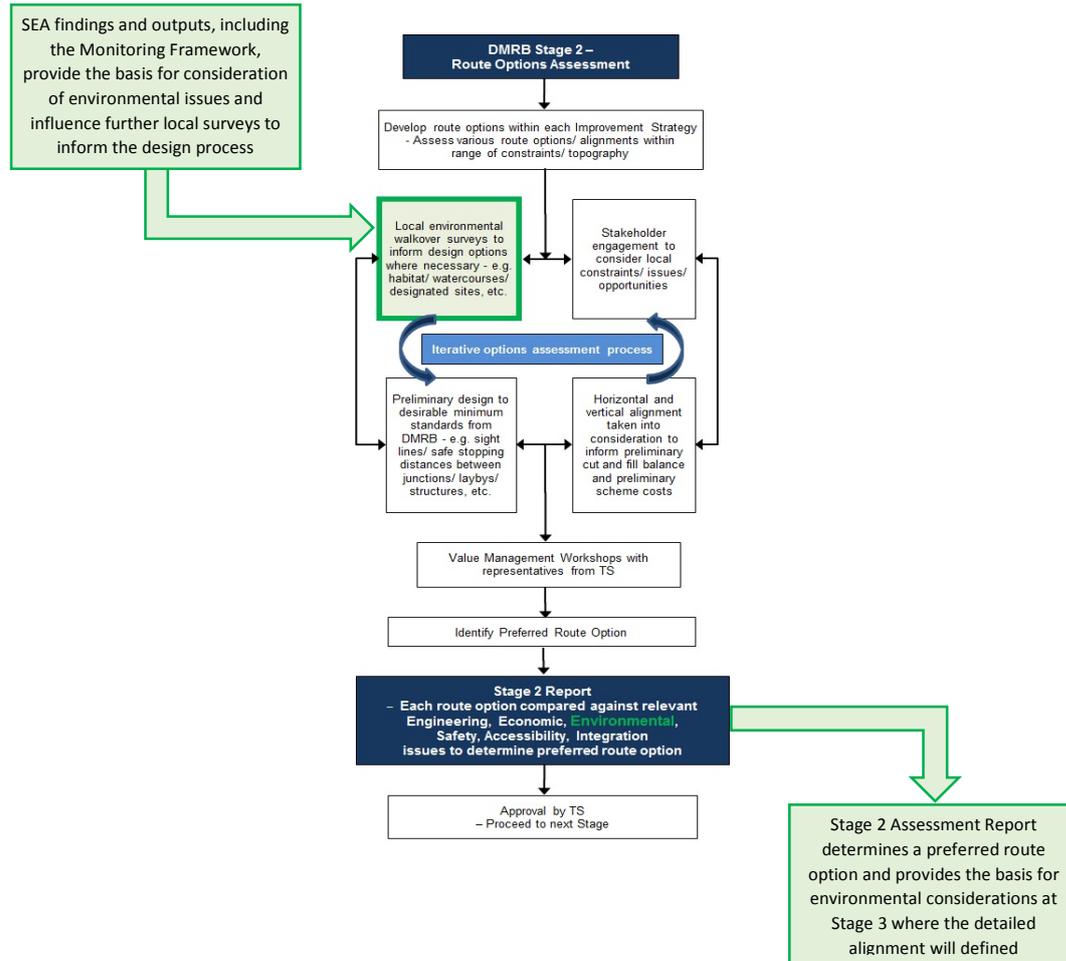


Figure 6-1 How environmental assessment is linked through the DMRB process

<p>Project X DMRB Stage 2 Report Overview of Contents</p> <p>Volume 1 – Main Report and Appendices</p> <p>Part 1: The Scheme</p> <p>Part 2: Engineering Assessment</p> <p>Part 3: Environmental Assessment</p> <p>Part 4: Traffic and Economic Assessment</p> <p>Part 5: Assessment Summary and Recommendation</p> <p>Part 6: Appendices</p> <p>Volume 2 – Engineering Drawings</p> <p>Volume 3 – Environmental Drawings</p>	<p>Part 3: Environmental Assessment</p> <p>6 Summary of Previous Environmental Assessment</p> <p>6.1 A96 Dualling Programme – DMRB Stage 1 Studies</p> <p>6.2 DMRB Stage 1 Assessment Review</p> <p>6.3 A96 Dualling Programme SEA Monitoring Framework</p> <p>6.4 References</p> <p>7 Overview of DMRB Stage 2 Environmental Assessment</p> <p>7.1 Introduction</p> <p>7.2 National, Regional and Local Strategies, Policies and Plans</p> <p>7.3 Environmental Assessment</p> <p>7.4 Environmental Assessment Topics</p> <p>7.5 Environmental Assessment – Chapter Structures</p> <p>7.6 Consultation</p> <p>7.7 References</p> <p>8 Air Quality</p> <p>8.1 Introduction</p> <p>8.2 Approach and Methods</p> <p>8.3 Policies and Plans</p> <p>8.4 Baseline Conditions</p> <p>8.5 Impact Assessment</p> <p>8.6 Potential Mitigation</p> <p>8.7 Summary of Route Options</p> <p>8.8 Compliance with Policies and Plans</p> <p>8.9 Scope of DMRB Stage 3 Assessment</p> <p>8.10 References</p> <p>▷ 9 Noise and Vibration</p> <p>▷ 10 Landscape and Visual</p> <p>▷ 11 Habitats and Biodiversity</p> <p>▷ 12 Geology, Soils and Groundwater</p> <p>▷ 13 Road Drainage and the Water Environment</p> <p>▷ 14 Cultural Heritage</p> <p>▷ 15 Effects on All Travellers</p> <p>▷ 16 Community and Private Assets</p> <p>▷ 17 Materials</p> <p>▷ 18 Policies and Plans</p>
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Figure 6-2 Example of DMRB Stage 2 report and the environment chapter within it

The principal objective of the DMRB Stage 2 assessment is to impartially assess alternative alignments and junction options under consideration, in order to identify any potential significant environmental impacts or risks.

The assessment will consider each option in isolation, and in the absence of any mitigation, before identifying whether mitigation could be implemented via further option development should it be taken forward to the DMRB Stage 3.

The assessment will also consider the likely scope of further assessments/ surveys/ information required at DMRB Stage 3 to be reported in the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA).

The final part of the DMRB Stage 2 assessment is to undertake a comparative assessment of the options, to determine which perform better or worse, taking environment, engineering and economics into account. The comparative assessment is undertaken via workshops enabling all of the information to be presented and evaluated collectively, to enable the selection of a preferred option to take forward to DMRB Stage 3.

At DMRB Stage 3, the preferred route will be refined, and subject to EIA and the findings of the EIA will be reported in the Environmental Statement (ES). The published ES is subject to statutory consultation with the consultation authorities, interested stakeholders and the general public. The ES will provide the decision makers with the evidence they require to establish the potential likely environmental effects of the proposal.

The outcomes and findings of the A96 Dualling SEA will be taken into account throughout the subsequent stages of the design process, helping to inform the consideration of key environmental issues and ensuring that the EIA process is effective.

6.2 Mitigation strategy going forward

The approach to mitigation taken throughout the SEA was to ensure that the first principle adopted was avoidance of effects on key environmental constraints. Where the SEA identified that avoidance was not possible (within the study areas defined for each option), the risk of effect of dualling on key sensitivities was identified and potential mitigation proposed to reduce or offset significant environmental effects; Figure 6-3 sets out this approach to mitigation.

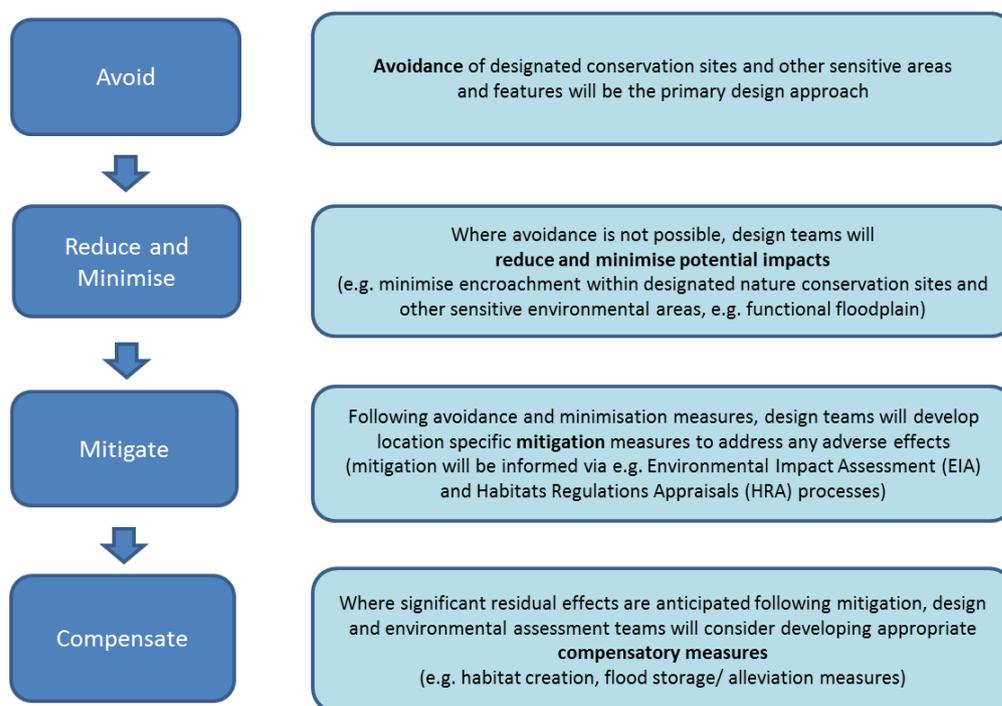


Figure 6-3 Mitigation strategy

This approach is also reflected in the Monitoring Framework presented in Section 5 and Appendix E of this report, and will be adopted at DMRB Stage 2 and Stage 3.

Section 8.2 of the Tier 2 SEA Environmental Report provided a series of strategic mitigation measures which were grouped by topic. The mitigation measures were derived from the options assessment process to help reduce or offset the potential for significant effects of dualling and to demonstrate a commitment to the principles behind the mitigation which would be carried through to later stages of the road design and assessment process. These measures were identified at a strategic level consistent with the SEA, which deals with broad improvement strategy options since during DMRB Stage 1 it is not possible to have more specific details on road dualling alignments.

It is proposed that as the detailed design progresses through DMRB Stage 2 and Stage 3, these mitigation measures will be tailored/ refined to become appropriate location and project specific mitigation measures. During these stages mitigation will become increasingly detailed and site specific as understanding of environmental sensitivity and impact magnitude develops in response to field surveys, further stakeholder consultation and the developing route option designs. During DMRB Stage 2 the focus of the design and assessment process will remain on avoidance of constraints, where through integrated and multi-disciplinary iteration of road designs, environmental impacts are avoided or reduced as far as possible through the design process. At DMRB Stage 3, following avoidance and minimisation measures, location specific measures will be developed to address any remaining adverse effects.

It should be noted that the assessment of improvement strategy options was based on a core assumption that standard industry good practice would be followed in construction, and that the new road infrastructure would be designed in accordance with prevailing standards and good practice relating to safety, aesthetics, drainage and other factors such as appropriate provision for mammal fencing and crossings.

In response to SEA consultation comments this list of strategic mitigation has been updated and presented in Table 6-1 below.

Table 6-1 Key SEA mitigation measures for development in DMRB Stage 2

Key Mitigation Measures
<p>Biodiversity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local ecology surveys at later design stages will inform locally appropriate mitigation and species management plans • Seek to avoid designated sites and other important areas for nature conservation wherever possible in design and option development • Maintain species and habitat connectivity where possible • Watercourse crossing designs to avoid or minimise land-take or works affecting the riparian zone in particular for crossing of the River Spey (a designated SAC) • Crossing locations to avoid areas that could adversely impact important salmon spawning or juvenile habitats (including the River Spey) • In-channel structures and works will be avoided within all watercourses where possible • Avoidance will be adopted for introduction of new/ permanent in-channel barriers to salmon passage and percussive construction works in proximity to the key rivers during sensitive salmon migration periods (particularly for the River Spey) • Road alignment to minimise habitat fragmentation where habitat loss is unavoidable • Road design to incorporate appropriate species crossing infrastructure to minimise habitat fragmentation and severance • Key mitigation measures would include underpasses and wildlife bridges, habitat restoration and creation of new areas of native woodland • Where AWI/ Native woodland is unavoidable, aim to minimise fragmentation and maintain woodland integrity and connectivity • Where avoidance of forestry is not possible, consideration must be given to management of forestry waste and appropriate guidance followed • Further screening of the potential for options to affect SACs and SPAs (Natura sites) would be required at subsequent stages of design and agreed with Scottish Natural Heritage
<p>Population and Human Health</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Road design to accommodate crossings with local and national paths and cycleways with minimal disruption to their alignments • Wherever possible paths and cycleways to be kept open using temporary diversions during construction stages of the projects • Future road alignments to minimise need for property demolition and land take • Route choice to take account of proximity of operational road traffic effects on receptors in populated areas to reduce potential noise and other adverse amenity effects (including community severance) • Use of noise barriers and other acoustic screening as appropriate to be considered in locations where road traffic could increase noise impacts at nearby properties, and agreed with the local authority • Micro-siting of key infrastructure (including signs, fences, lighting) can help to reduce local impacts including from sensitive visual receptors

Key Mitigation Measures

Soils and Geodiversity

- Seek to avoid nationally and locally designated geological and geodiversity sites
- Where avoidance is not possible for the nationally and locally designated sites mitigation to be proposed at project EIA level in consultation with SNH
- Seek to avoid areas of prime agricultural land and high carbon content soils in route alignment development as far as possible and to minimise fragmentation of fields and farm units
- Where avoidance is not possible local level peat ecology, hydrogeology and geotechnical surveys will be required to determine locally appropriate solutions which minimise the potential effects of drainage and desiccation, and inform suitable restoration and management plans, including consideration of appropriate re-use or disposal options
- Adherence to construction best practice to avoid adverse effects on soils such as from contamination, and retention of topsoil seedbanks where appropriate for use in site landscaping; wherever possible, seek appropriate reuse of waste soil
- Farm accommodation works to be reviewed in more detail when specific alignments can be considered to minimise severance and fragmentation of farm units
- Provision of agricultural accommodation works such as vehicle underpasses

Water and Flooding

- Avoid new infrastructure in the functional floodplain (recognising that this may not be achievable in all locations), safeguarding flood storage and conveying capacity
- Where unavoidable, new infrastructure should be restricted to the shortest practical crossing, avoiding extensive construction within the functional floodplain and ensuring no net change in flood risk
- Avoid developing SuDS in the functional floodplain
- Water discharged from SuDS should not result in the deterioration of water quality or hydrogeomorphological effects in the receiving watercourse
- All design should be undertaken in line with the full list of SFRA recommendations and in consultation with SNH and SEPA

Air

- Mitigation at the route alignment options development and assessment stage will focus on avoiding sensitive residential and ecological receptors as far as possible

Historic Environment

- In the first instance, avoidance of designated and non-designated cultural heritage assets with future road alignments to preserve their structure and setting in situ
- Where preservation of remains in situ is not possible (in the case of non-designated assets) a range of measures may be undertaken to mitigate and offset the adverse impacts on the archaeological resource
- The effects of road development on the setting of historic environment assets will be taken into account in the design and mitigation of the road including attention to horizontal and vertical alignment and opportunities to screen the road
- For any unavoidable cultural heritage receptor, a suitable strategy for investigation and recording will be finalised on a site by site basis in conjunction with Historic Environment Scotland and the local authority Archaeologist

Key Mitigation Measures

Landscape

- Avoidance of important areas for landscape wherever possible, taking account of other constraints including visual receptors in properties and settlements
- Minimise impacts on key features and structure of the landscape which contribute to its character and sensitivity including native woodlands, copses and shelterbelts
- Respecting topography when developing future alignments so that road designs flow with the contours of the land and the road sits out of sight of visual receptors wherever possible
- Follow the principles in Transport Scotland's *Fitting Landscapes* guide
- Mitigate landscape and visual aspects of new road infrastructure (e.g. junctions and embanked sections of the road) through well designed screen planting using native species typical of the area
- Attention to horizontal and vertical alignment of the road will be required in managing the extent and slope of earthworks
- Take account of nearby visual receptors in design and location of other road elements including positioning of signs and lighting gantries

In addition to the topic specific mitigation presented above, the SEA identified mitigation to address cumulative effects with other plans and programmes.

This mitigation should be considered for each of the DMRB 2 design sections.

- A96 dualling proposals to consider Local Authority Development Plan proposals to minimise potential cumulative effects of habitat loss and develop complementary mitigation responses to address habitat loss
- A96 dualling proposals to consider development plans of local authorities to minimise potential cumulative effects from loss of important landscape features and develop complementary mitigation responses to minimise landscape effects
- Co-ordination and management of construction phasing and access arrangements for major developments and the A96 dualling to minimise construction disruption including dust nuisance
- A96 dualling proposals to consider Local Authority Development Plan proposal to avoid cumulative effects on the setting of Scheduled Monuments, Listed Buildings, Inventory Battlefields, Conservation Areas and Gardens and Designed Landscapes

7 Concluding Statements

Scottish Government guidance highlights that the SEA Post Adoption Statement should consider how the process has benefitted the development of the plan/ programme. Therefore, by way of providing some concluding commentary on the successes of the A96 Dualling Programme SEA, this section is presented using a question and answer type approach.

7.1 How did the SEA make a difference to the A96 Dualling Programme?

The SEA made a difference to the A96 Dualling Programme via a number of key elements:

- Early and on-going engagement with the statutory SEA consultees and other key stakeholders.
- Route wide Habitats Regulations Appraisal and Appropriate Assessment at the Programme Level, supported early identification of Natura (SAC, SPA and Ramsar) site issues, and options available to ensure avoidance of adverse effects on site integrity.
- The Strategic Landscape Review undertaken to inform the landscape assessment in the SEA ensured that landscape issues were considered early in the design process, identifying constraints that will inform more detailed design in later stages.
- The Strategic Flood Risk Assessment considered the types of flood risk likely to affect the options, delivering guidance on the key issues that later design teams must consider and clearly document.
- Innovative delivery of spatial analyses of environmental issues using a GIS constraints based approach.
- The SEA and supporting strategic studies delivered comprehensive, section-by-section and improvement strategy option specific assessments of key environmental constraints, providing increased understanding of environmental and land use constraints for each remaining option, identifying any potential for significant effects.
- The SEA worked to de-risk the A96 Dualling Programme by ensuring early and effective identification of the key environmental issues along the route. The SEA signposts in the Monitoring Framework where further studies and consultations are required to inform the later stages of the DMRB Stage 2 route options design, assessment and preferred route option selection, and Stage 3 development of preferred option design and Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) processes.
- The full suite of SEA documents, including this Post Adoption Statement, will be passed to future A96 Dualling design teams as the Dualling Programme moves forward.

7.2 How did the SEA secure effective stakeholder consultation?

A comprehensive framework for stakeholder consultation was established, providing opportunity to comment on the potential for significant environmental effects at both the policy/ plan level and programme level for Tier 1 and 2 SEAs respectively.

A number of bodies were consulted on Tier 1 and Tier 2 Scoping and Environmental Reports and have helped to inform the environmental assessment and adoption of the programme. These included the SEA Consultation Authorities (Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), Historic Environment Scotland (HES) and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA)), as well as Forestry Commission Scotland and relevant local authorities.

Wider (public) consultation was also sought over a statutory six week period commencing on the 25th September 2014 for the Tier 1 Environmental Report, and over a six week⁵ period commencing on the 11th May 2015 for the Tier 2 Environmental Report. All Environmental Report documents were published on Transport Scotland's website, www.transportscotland.gov.uk/project/a96-dualling-inverness-aberdeen/environmental-challenges, and hard copies were made available for public inspection at Transport Scotland's offices in Glasgow.

In November 2013, the programme of public engagement for the A96 Dualling Programme started with early stage public exhibitions. This allowed for communication of information on the assessment, design and development process needed to be undertaken before providing a dual carriageway.

Additionally, a series of A96 Dualling public exhibitions were held in venues along the existing A96 route from the 11 May until the 21 May 2015. These events in Elgin, Forres, Huntly, Fochabers, Keith, Blackburn and Inverurie gave local communities and businesses the opportunity to see and comment on the outcome of the SEA and preliminary engineering services (PES) work that Transport Scotland has been taking forward for the route east of Nairn to Aberdeen.

7.3 How were environmental issues highlighted early and avoided?

The very early stages of the SEA identified a range of national and international constraints to inform the assessment process; these were complemented by local constraints at the more detailed assessment stage of Tier 2. As the constraints data included a spatial reference, it could be collated via a Geographic Information System (GIS) and each constraint added as a separate layer over a base map. The improvement strategy options were also added as a layer and statistical and analytical tools within the GIS were used to identify the constraints within each improvement strategy option. Using visual representations of constraints data, the SEA team also used experience to inform a judgement on the potential for significant effects, or possible benefits of each option. This allowed for the accurate comparison and sifting of the improvement strategy options which resulted in the identification of the four remaining options to be taken forward for further assessment at DMRB Stage 2.

It must be recognised that there are still constraints with these four improvement strategy options which may prove to be unavoidable in later stages of design development. However, the SEA Monitoring Framework (and Section 6 of this report) provides details on further local level consultation and assessments which will be undertaken through the later DMRB design and assessment stages.

⁵ Due to the volume of comments received in the closing week of the consultation period for Tier 2, comments received up until the 29th of May were accepted and have been reviewed for this Post Adoption Statement



A96 Dualling Programme

Strategic Environmental Assessment

Post Adoption Statement

Transport Scotland

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