A96 DUALLING HARDMUIR TO FOCHABERS
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (DECEMBER 2017)

SECTION A: THE SCHEME

A1. What are the Benefits of Dualling the A96?

Benefits of dualling the A96 between Inverness and Aberdeen include:

- supporting sustainable economic growth by providing opportunities to grow the regional economies in the corridor through improved access to the wider strategic transport network and enhanced access to jobs and services;
- improving road safety for motorised and non-motorised users;
- reducing journey times and improving journey time reliability;
- reducing conflicts between local and strategic journeys;
- reducing the environmental effect on the communities along the corridor by improving environmental conditions in towns to be bypassed, where possible;
- supporting access to tourist and recreation sites; and
- facilitating active travel in the corridor.

A2. Why is the A96 Dualling necessary?

In December 2011, The Agenda for Cities, "Scotland's Cities: Delivering for Scotland", was published by the Scottish Government. The Agenda identifies connecting cities with strong, reliable and resilient transport infrastructure as a key characteristic to support growth. Published alongside this was the Scottish Government's Infrastructure Investment Plan, providing an overview of plans for infrastructure investment over the coming decades. To complement the Agenda for Cities, the Infrastructure Investment Plan contains a commitment to complete the dual carriageway network between all of Scotland's cities by 2030, including the dualling of the A96 between Inverness and Aberdeen.

Within this context, an Inverness to Aberdeen Corridor Study Strategic Business Case was published in 2014 by Transport Scotland and seeks opportunities to address the growing economic and transport demands along the corridor. The Strategic Business Case developed transport planning objectives for the Inverness to Aberdeen corridor taking cognisance of the national, regional & local policies and plans; and the problems and opportunities identified along the corridor.

The Strategic Business Case demonstrated that the proposal to dual the A96 is the best way to meet the future needs of those living, working and travelling along the corridor in the 21st century. Importantly the appraisal showed 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 upgrade to the A9 Perth to Inverness and the Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route/Balmedie-Tipperty projects and will provide those people and businesses located along the corridor with the best possible access to Inverness and Aberdeen and beyond. The appraisal concluded that the

full dualling of the A96 would deliver significant wider economic and accessibility benefits.

A copy of the Inverness to Aberdeen Corridor Study Strategic Business Case is available from the Transport Scotland website at https://www.transport.gov.scot/media/6931/a96-strategic-business-case-inverness-to-aberdeen-sbc-final-17-september.pdf

A3. When will a decision be taken on a preferred option for the scheme?

A preferred option for the A96 Dualling Hardmuir to Fochabers scheme will be identified once the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (DMRB) Stage 2 Assessment has been completed. Transport Scotland anticipates that a preferred option will be confirmed in second half of 2018.

A4. What is the programme for delivery of the scheme?

Following consultation on the preferred option for the A96 Dualling Hardmuir to Fochabers scheme in 2018, the design of the preferred option will be further developed, refined and assessed which is expected to take approximately 2 years. The land required for the delivery of the scheme will be identified during this time and an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Report will be prepared for the proposed scheme. (Note: the Roads (Scotland) Act 1984 (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 changed the statutory title of the document reporting an EIA from Environmental Statement to EIA Report). The draft Orders (which show the line of the proposed scheme and the extent of land required to deliver it) will be prepared for publication at the same time as the EIA Report. The programme thereafter is dependent on the public reaction to the published draft Orders and whether there is a need for a Public Local Inquiry. Construction of the scheme itself can only commence if the scheme is approved under the relevant statutory procedures and thereafter a timetable for its progress can be set. The Scottish Government has made a commitment to complete the dualling of the A96 between Inverness and Aberdeen by 2030.

A5. Can improvements to the rail network be made instead of the A96 dualling?

Improvements to the rail network in conjunction with improvements to the trunk road network are integral to achieving the Scottish Government's objectives for the Aberdeen to Inverness corridor as set out in its Infrastructure Investment Plan. Phase One of the rail improvements programme includes the redoubling of track between Aberdeen and Inverurie; signalling enhancements; platform extensions at Insch and Elgin; Forres station relocation (now complete) and track improvements and infrastructure to support two new stations at Dalcross (for Inverness Airport) and Kintore. These improvements are being taken forward in addition to the A96 Dualling Programme.

SECTION B: SCHEME DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT

B1. What process does Transport Scotland follow when developing a trunk road improvement?

A rigorous assessment process is undertaken to establish the line for a trunk road improvement scheme. The three stage DMRB assessment process covers engineering, environment, traffic and economics. Transport Scotland also consults with the public and interested bodies with views being taken into account during the assessment process. The overall process for the development of a trunk road scheme follows a general sequence of:

- strategic assessment and identification of potential improvement strategies (DMRB Stage 1);
- development and assessment of route options and identification of a preferred option (DMRB Stage 2). This includes an engineering, environmental, traffic and economic assessment of each route option identified to inform the preferred option choice;
- development of preferred option proposals and preparation of an EIA Report (DMRB Stage 3);
- publication of statutory road Orders (defining the line of the proposed scheme), Compulsory Purchase Order (defining the extent of land required to deliver and maintain the scheme) and EIA Report for formal consultation; and
- procurement and construction of the scheme (subject to completion of the relevant statutory procedures).

The individual and combined durations of these phases of work are variable depending on factors such as technical complexity, environmental constraints and the scale and content of the works.

Further details on the stages of the process for promoting new trunk roads can be found on the Transport Scotland website at:
https://www.transport.gov.scot/transport-network/roads/promoting-new-trunk-roads/

B2. Can the existing A96 be widened?

A thorough review of the existing A96 corridor has been undertaken to identify the present engineering, environmental, traffic and economic features and to provide an understanding of how the dualling programme may positively or negatively impact these features. The combination of the existing single carriageway alignment, roadside properties and density of junctions and accesses constrains an online widening upgrade of the existing A96. This means that in most cases it is more suitable to develop the proposed dual carriageway alignment offline between Hardmuir and Fochabers and retain the existing A96 as part of the local road network as opposed to online widening of the existing road. Bypasses of the largest communities require to be built offline to the existing A96 in order to provide traffic relief.

B3. Will the existing Forres Bypass be upgraded to dual carriageway?

Specific design and assessment of online widening options through Forres has been undertaken following feedback from members of the public at the "Meet the Team" events held in October 2016. This has concluded that all of the online options considered have significant issues in terms of their feasibility and acceptability, including the requirement for demolition of properties. In this area a number of ancillary roads and bridges would be required to maintain access to areas to the north of the existing A96, which means the overall scheme would need significantly more width than that required for simply adding a second carriageway. Other key issues highlighted by the assessment were the considerable health and safety risk and significant disruption associated with construction of any of the options within such a constrained corridor. Therefore, online dualling options in Forres have been ruled out and will not be considered further.

B4. Will the existing Fochabers Bypass be incorporated into the new A96 dualling scheme?

Upgrading the recently constructed A96 Fochabers and Mosstodloch Bypass to form part of the proposed new dual carriageway will require extremely careful consideration of the engineering and environmental challenges. As such, route options including both online (purple) and offline (red) have been developed at Fochabers to address these challenges, and these will be fully assessed as part of the DMRB Stage 2 Assessment.

B5. How will the new dual carriageway cross the existing railway line?

A number of the route options will require to cross the Aberdeen to Inverness railway line. The details of how this can be achieved will be developed in collaboration with Network Rail.

B6. What provision is being made for Non-Motorised Users (NMUs)?

Suitable provision for all users, including cyclists and equestrians, is an important part of the A96 Dualling programme. The scheme will facilitate active travel in the area and specific facilities will be identified and developed during future stages of the design. Existing designated local routes, including core paths, cycle and equestrian routes will be maintained and underpasses/overbridges or diversionary routes will be provided where appropriate in locations where the scheme would otherwise sever routes.

Transport Scotland recognises the contribution local and user groups can play and, as such, we have set up a Non-Motorised User Forum to provide updates on emerging proposals and also to seek vital feedback. There will also be further consultation with the local community and interested parties as the scheme development continues.

B7. How will the scheme consider public transport users?

The scheme objectives include reducing journey times and improving journey time reliability for all road users, as well as facilitating integration with public transport facilities to benefit public transport users. Transport Scotland will consult with public transport providers as part of the development of the scheme in order to address the needs of public transport services that serve local communities in the vicinity of the A96. Discussions will be held with The Highland Council and The Moray Council in relation to school transport.

B8. What will happen to the existing local road access?

Access to all properties will be maintained. Access to the new dual carriageway will be from a number of grade separated junctions (i.e. junctions with overbridges/underbridges and slip roads) which provide safe access to and from the dual carriageway. Minor roads and private means of access will not have junctions onto the dual carriageway. On completion of the new dual carriageway, the existing A96 will be detrunked and form part of the local road network and will be connected to the proposed grade separated junctions. Where the existing local road network and access to individual properties is impacted by the new route, alternative access provision will be included within the scheme design to ensure connectivity.

B9. What lighting will be provided on the dual carriageway?

Due to its predominantly rural location, it is expected that the new dual carriageway will not be lit. However, local lighting may be required at junctions or underbridges dependant on their location and design. Details of lighting will be developed during the DMRB Stage 3 design process once a preferred option has been selected (i.e. during the development and assessment of the preferred option).

B10. What mapping has been used when developing the proposed route options?

Ordnance Survey mapping from April 2014 along with aerial photographic survey information from March 2017 has been used to develop the route options.

B11. Do the route options consider the proposed developments in the Moray Local Development Plan, e.g. Findrassie/Myreside and Elgin South

The A96 Dualling Hardmuir to Fochabers scheme is being developed taking into consideration the Moray Local Development Plan proposals. As part of the environmental assessment, the route options will be assessed in relation to the Local Development Plan and other wider Plans and Policies.

SECTION C: ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

C1. How will the environmental impact of the scheme be assessed and mitigated?

In addition to its proximity to a significant number of properties, the A96 passes through or close to a number of areas of wildlife, scenic and historic significance, with a wide range of nationally and internationally designated sites in the region. A96 dualling-related effects in and around such areas will be carefully considered through the design process, and later sensitively managed through construction phases to minimise risk of adverse effects.

Transport Scotland has undertaken a route-wide Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) to determine and understand the environmental constraints, consider the potential impacts that alternative route corridor options may present on the surrounding environment, and to develop the strategic mitigation or guidance required to minimise risks. Two reports in connection with the SEA were published on 25 September 2014 and 6 November 2014 respectively and these can be viewed at https://www.transport.gov.scot/projects/a96-dualling-inverness-to-aberdeen/a96-dualling-inverness-to-aberdeen/#42719.

SEA outputs have informed the identification of route options for the scheme and work undertaken during the DMRB Stage 2 assessment will build on this work.

Transport Scotland and their consultants Mott MacDonald Sweco (MMS) continue to engage with key statutory environmental authorities, including Scottish Natural Heritage, Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) and Historic Environment Scotland with regard to the environmental sensitivities and potential environmental impacts of the proposals and to reduce these as far as possible through design and mitigation.

An Environmental Assessment of the route options will be undertaken as part of the DMRB Stage 2 route options assessment taking account of the predicted impacts of each option. The findings of this work will help to inform the selection of a preferred option.

Once a preferred option has been identified, an assessment of the predicted environmental impacts during its construction and operation will be undertaken at DMRB Stage 3 through an EIA. Where practicable, mitigation to avoid or reduce impacts will be developed and incorporated to the scheme design.

C2. How will environmental impacts of the preferred option be mitigated?

An assessment of the environmental impacts of the preferred option, during construction and operation will be undertaken at the next stage of scheme development (the DMRB Stage 3 process). Where practicable, mitigation to avoid or reduce impacts will be identified and implemented as part of the development of the preferred option during the DMRB Stage 3 process. Details of potential impacts, mitigation and residual impacts will be presented in an EIA Report The assessment will cover land use, geology, contaminated land and groundwater, the water

environment, ecology, landscape, visual, cultural heritage, air quality, noise and vibration, pedestrians and non-motorised users, vehicle travellers, disruption due to construction, policies and plans and cumulative impacts.

C3. What measures are being taken to address road traffic noise from the scheme?

Road traffic noise will be assessed as part of the DMRB Stage 2 Environmental Assessment, where the potential noise impact of each option will be considered and the findings will help to inform the selection of a preferred option. At DMRB Stage 3, following announcement of the preferred option, the design detail will develop and the traffic noise modelling and assessment process will be used to help design appropriate mitigation which will be reported in the EIA Report. Examples of acoustic mitigation may include earth bunds, false cuttings and acoustic barriers which will seek to be in keeping with the local environment and take account of other constraints such as visual impact. Typically low noise road surfacing material will be used on the dual carriageway to deliver benefits through reduced noise for nearby receptors. The EIA Report will report the expected noise changes as a result of the preferred option including the effects of the mitigation which has been developed.

C4. How will the flooding impact of the scheme be taken into account?

It is recognised that the scheme traverses areas which are known to experience flooding and are identified by SEPA as being subject to flood risk. A key element of the design and assessment of each option is to ensure that existing flooding patterns are not made worse by the scheme. During development of the route options detailed flood modelling will take place to assess the potential impact of the options and to assist in the design of mitigation. Such mitigation could include constructing the road on structures across parts of the flood plain, provision of flood relief culverts and the identification and construction of compensatory flood storage areas where required. Additionally, the drainage design will include the provision of drainage ponds which will control the rate of run-off from the new road. The flooding and drainage aspects are being designed in consultation with SEPA and Moray Council.

C5. What measures will be taken to address landscape and visual effects of the preferred option?

At this stage of scheme development a preferred option has yet to be identified. Visual effects are considered during DMRB Stage 2 and once a preferred option has been selected for the scheme, a detailed assessment will be undertaken of how it will potentially change people's views, including the views experienced by those living in the vicinity of the scheme. Where potentially significant adverse visual changes to views from residential properties are identified, mitigation measures will be developed to avoid or reduce the impact. Mitigation measures to help screen the road may include: minor revisions to the design of the route; earthworks, such as screening bunds; and tree and hedgerow planting.

SECTION D: LAND AND PROPERTY

D1. Will property and landowners and businesses affected by the preferred option receive compensation for any losses incurred?

At this stage of scheme development a preferred option has yet to be identified. Once the preferred option has been identified and has been further developed through the DMRB Stage 3 process, the Scottish Ministers will appoint the Valuation Office Agency to assess the level of compensation due for property or land compulsorily purchased. The District Valuer and his staff from the Valuation Office Agency will discuss the level of compensation with each affected landowner and/or their professional advisor.

The assessment of compensation will depend on individual circumstances. The underlying principle is to put the landowner, in financial terms, so far as money can do so, in the same position as if property had not been taken. Basically the assessment of compensation will take into account the value of property and the value of related effects (known as Severance, Injurious Affection and Disturbance). Further guidance on the Compulsory Purchase Process and Compensation is available from the Transport Scotland website at https://www.transport.gov.scot/strategy-and-research/publications-and-consultations/j8908-00.htm.

In addition, 12 months after the opening of a new road, those who have not otherwise been compensated and who consider that their property has reduced in value by virtue of the operation of the new or altered road may be entitled to claim for compensation in that regard within the terms of Part I of the Land Compensation (Scotland) Act 1973. Again, the valuation of any such compensation will be assessed by the Valuation Office Agency.

D2. Will any properties be demolished as a result of the scheme?

Route options are being designed to avoid property demolition wherever possible. There are no residential properties directly affected by the options currently being developed but there are a number which are close to some of the route options. The route options will be subject to further design and assessment works to determine the exact location of new road infrastructure in relation to nearby properties and any associated access arrangements.

D3. Will the impact on prime agricultural land be considered?

The Environmental Assessment process includes consideration of the potential effects of route options on agricultural land, including areas of prime agricultural land and other land uses. As the route option designs are further developed and assessed, the potential for route options to affect farm units will be considered and mitigation measures will be developed to minimise the effects of the scheme from land take and farm severance where possible.

D4. Will adjacent communities be isolated by the scheme?

Where the new road passes between communities, consultation will be carried out during scheme development to identify how best to avoid or minimise any severance which may occur. It should also be noted that as proposals are developed, there will be further opportunities for the potentially affected parties to provide vital feedback. Transport Scotland will work closely with communities, landowners and local authorities during future stages of design to ensure any adverse impacts on existing access is minimised.

SECTION E: EXHIBITIONS AND PUBLIC CONSULTATION

E1. How were people notified of the route options public exhibitions held in June 2017?

The public information exhibitions held in June 2017 were promoted in the following ways:

- information was uploaded to the scheme website www.transport.gov.scot/project/a96-hardmuir-fochabers;
- letters were sent to all of the active Community Councils in the area and local MPs, MSPs and Councillors;
- letters were sent to over 1,200 individuals and organisations that previously asked to be kept informed of the progress of the A96 Dualling programme;
- advertising posters were distributed to 173 locations across the scheme extents; and
- press adverts were placed in the Inverness Courier, Press & Journal, Northern Scot, Nairnshire Telegraph, Aberdeen Citizen, Aberdeen Evening Express, Forres Gazette, Highland News Group and Strathspey & Badenoch Herald.

E2. What further consultation will take place? Will members of the public have further opportunities to comment on the scheme development?

Transport Scotland is committed to undertaking a rolling programme of engagement to ensure that communities, businesses and individuals affected by the work are kept fully informed and their vital feedback taken into account.

The feedback we received following the exhibitions held in June 2017 will be taken into account as we look to announce a preferred option for the scheme in 2018. Further public exhibitions will be held at that time to give members of the public the opportunity to comment on the preferred option. It is also likely that drop-in sessions will be held prior to that time to give the public an update on progress of the DMRB Stage 2 assessment process. Those people who have submitted a response following the June 2017 public exhibitions and those who are already on our mailing list will be sent a letter notifying them of any future public consultation events or drop-in events in addition to the advertising methods outlined in question E1 above.