A96 DUALLING EAST OF HUNTLY TO ABERDEEN
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (OCTOBER 2020)

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 (SBC) 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 SBC 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 upgrade to the A9 and the Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route (AWPR)/Balmedie-Tipperty and will provide those people and businesses located along the corridor

with the best possible access to Inverness and Aberdeen and onwards to the Central Belt. 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 East of Huntly to Aberdeen scheme will be identified once the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (DMRB) Stage 2 assessment has been completed. Due to the high level of feedback received to date, Transport Scotland expects to announce a preferred option in the coming months.

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

Following consultation on the preferred option for the A96 Dualling East of Huntly to Aberdeen scheme in the coming months, the design of the preferred option will be further developed, refined and assessed, during the DMRB Stage 3 process, which is expected to take approximately 2 years. Any necessary environmental mitigation will be designed and incorporated into the scheme and an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Report will be prepared and published. (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).

Draft Road Orders (which show the line of the proposed scheme) and a draft Compulsory Purchase Order (confirming the extent of land required to deliver, maintain and operate the scheme) will be prepared for publication at the same time as the EIA Report. The programme thereafter is dependent on the level of formal comment received 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 is now complete. This includes the doubling of track between Aberdeen and Inverurie; signalling enhancements;

platform extensions at Insch and Elgin; Forres station relocation and track improvements and infrastructure to support two new stations at Dalcross (for Inverness Airport) and Kintore. In addition to Phase One, the new Kintore Station opened in October 2020. These improvements are being taken forward in addition to the A96 Dualling Programme.

A6. Will the new A96 be a Special Road?

At this stage, there are no plans to promote the new A96 dual carriageway as a Special Road, which means that there will be no restrictions on the types of vehicles using it. The proposed road standard for the A96 Dualling East of Huntly to Aberdeen scheme is now referred to as D2APc (formerly Category 7A), under updated DMRB standard CD 109 Highway Link Design, meaning that access to and from the dual carriageway will be restricted to grade separated junctions (i.e. junctions with overbridges/underbridges and slip roads) in line with the A96 Dualling Programme junction strategy.

A7. Who will maintain the new dual carriageway and what will happen to the existing A96?

On completion of the new dual carriageway, the existing A96 will be de-trunked and form part of the local road network to be maintained by the local authority. The new A96 dual carriageway will become the new trunk road and will be maintained by Transport Scotland.

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, including the three stages of DMRB, 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, operate 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 including health and safety considerations, 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 scheme be delivered by widening the existing A96?

The re-use/widening of the existing A96 has been investigated thoroughly as part of the early assessment work. The outcome of this work concluded that the existing A96 single carriageway is constrained at numerous locations by the standard of the existing road geometry, roadside properties and by a high density of existing junctions and accesses. This limits the opportunity for an online upgrade of the existing route through a number of sections, including the section at Inverurie. The assessment has determined that it is more suitable to develop the new dual carriageway offline from the existing road, with the existing A96 retained for use as part of the local road network to maintain access to land and property. This approach also helps to meet one of the scheme objectives to reduce the potential conflicts between local and strategic traffic journeys.

Regarding the section at Inverurie, the online widening of the existing A96 between Inveramsay Bridge and Port Elphinstone Roundabout (approximately 6.6 kilometres) was assessed against the A96 Dualling East of Huntly to Aberdeen scheme objectives and was found to perform poorly against the environmental and engineering criteria, including the proposed dual carriageway unavoidably encroaching into and permanently impacting on residential and commercial properties, including the need for demolition. Based on this, an online dual carriageway upgrade of the A96 through Inverurie was not considered further as part of the DMRB Stage 2 assessment. Further information is provided in the “Online at Inverurie – Dualling Feasibility and Appraisal – East of Huntly to Aberdeen” Report available on the Transport Scotland website at:

https://www.transport.gov.scot/publication/online-at-inverurie-dualling-feasibility-and-appraisal-east-of-huntly-to-aberdeen-a96-dualling/

In addition, the reasons for deselection of an online option at Inverurie were detailed at the Route Options – Design Update in May 2019 and further information is available on the Transport Scotland website at:

https://www.transport.gov.scot/publication/exhibition-materials-may-2019-east-of-huntly-to-aberdeen-a96-dualling/

Further feedback relating to online dualling at Inverurie was received following the Route Options – Design Update in May 2019. Please refer to Section E of this FAQ document for details relating to the A96 Online Dualling at Inverurie Supplementary Study.

B3. Do predicted traffic levels support the dualling of the A96?

To inform the traffic assessment of route options, Transport Scotland has developed a strategic traffic model of the full A96 corridor from Inverness to Aberdeen. The model is informed by a comprehensive database of traffic and planning data, including numerous traffic surveys undertaken specifically for this scheme. The model forecasts future traffic conditions based on planning data outlined in local and national planning documents, including anticipated changes in traffic demands associated with land use development and committed infrastructure improvements, such as the AWPR/Balmedie-Tipperty and the Aberdeen to Inverness railway improvements. As part of the assessment process, each of the options is evaluated under forecast future traffic conditions.

As a result of the work carried out to date through the ongoing DMRB Stage 2 assessment, each of the options shown at the Route Options - Design Update in May 2019 have demonstrated they achieve the Scheme Objectives and offer benefit to both trunk road and local road traffic. The forecasts of future traffic growth indicate that the dualling scheme will meet the recommended flow criteria for a dual carriageway outlined in design guidance document *TA46/97 'Traffic Flow Ranges for Use in the Assessment of New Rural Roads'* which, in combination with the wider aims and objectives of the scheme, supports the dualling of the A96 between East of Huntly and Aberdeen. The A96 Corridor Road Assignment Model will continue to be refined and updated to reflect future forecast scenarios based on relevant policies and plans as the scheme development progresses.

B4. Have you considered the impact of the AWPR/ Balmedie-Tipperty on traffic demand/flows in your assessment?

As noted above, the AWPR/Balmedie-Tipperty has been included in the traffic modelling. Following the completion of the AWPR in February 2019, a data collection exercise was undertaken in Spring and Autumn 2019 to establish the impacts of the AWPR on traffic patterns. The data shows that the traffic patterns observed on site are reflected in the A96 strategic traffic model.

B5. Will the route options assessment process take account of the traffic congestion through Inverurie?

From the traffic modelling that has been carried out to date, including on-site traffic surveys, Transport Scotland is aware of the existing traffic congestion through

Inverurie town centre. The route options assessment will consider the potential for each option to deliver benefits to both trunk road and local road traffic. The assessment considers the impact of each option in terms of change in traffic volume, traffic routing and journey time.

B6. How is the cost of the route options considered as part of the assessment?

Costs are considered and form part of the economic assessment within the DMRB Stage 2 assessment process, and these will be developed and published as part of the DMRB Stage 2 Scheme Assessment Report once complete.

B7. What provision is being made for Non-Motorised Users (NMUs)?

Facilitating active travel and improving safety for motorised and non-motorised users are two of the key objectives of this scheme. Suitable provision for all users, including pedestrians, cyclists, equestrians and vulnerable road users such as children, the elderly and mobility impaired is an important part of the A96 Dualling programme. The scheme will facilitate active travel in the area by providing NMU facilities.

Existing NMU facilities will be identified during the DMRB Stage 2 Assessment to assess the impact the route options have on these facilities. The assessment will also consider how each of the route options has the potential to deliver opportunities for NMUs. A reduction in traffic in urban areas is also assessed under the DMRB Stage 2 assessment.

At DMRB Stage 3, specific NMU proposals will be developed in consultation with key stakeholders. Existing designated local routes, including core paths, cycle and equestrian routes will be assessed and underpasses/overbridges or diversionary routes will be provided where appropriate in locations where the scheme would otherwise sever routes. Opportunities identified during Stage 2 will also be developed where appropriate.

Transport Scotland recognises the contribution that local user groups can make in terms of gaining valuable local knowledge. We have set up a Non-Motorised User Forum to provide updates on emerging proposals and seek vital feedback. There will also be further consultation with the local community and interested parties as the scheme development continues.

B8. What are the proposals for crossing the River Don at Kintore?

A significant structure will be required to cross the railway line, River Don and its associated floodplain for the Violet route option. Options for the structural form and cost of any such crossing are still being developed and will form part of the DMRB Stage 2 assessment process which includes an assessment of engineering, environment, traffic and economics. Should this option be identified as the preferred option, a more detailed design would be developed during the DMRB Stage 3 assessment.

In terms of flood risk, we are working with the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) to ensure that the route options do not increase flood risk to any sensitive receptors. To that end, modelling of the crossing of the River Don and its associated flood plain, at Kintore, will be carried out at DMRB Stage 2, with a view to proving this can be achieved. We continue to engage with SEPA and Aberdeenshire Council about flooding and drainage aspects of the design. A consideration of flooding impact is discussed in C4 below.

While there is a proposed crossing of the River Don at Kintore, there are also a number of other significant watercourse crossings for other route options. We are considering the impact of these route options on river crossings across the study area.

B9. 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/under bridges 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, some sections of the existing A96 will be de-trunked and form part of the local road network which, where appropriate, will be connected to the proposed grade separated junctions. Where the existing local road network and access to individual properties are impacted by the new route, alternative access provision will be included within the scheme design to ensure connectivity.

B10. How are you ensuring that the preferred option will reduce journey times and improve journey time reliability?

The route options presented at the public exhibitions were taken forward because they perform well against the scheme objectives. All of the route options comply with current design standards for a Dual 2 lane All-purpose road D2APc, including compliance with gradient and width standards. Even where the routes may be longer, they offer journey time savings and improvements in journey time reliability when compared to travelling on the existing A96. This is because the routes are of a higher standard, with a 70mph speed limit. They also offer reduced delays and road safety improvements through the rationalisation of junctions, provision of grade separated junctions and improved overtaking opportunities. The traffic model used in the assessment of journey times takes into account vehicle operating costs and fuel consumption when calculating the user benefits of each of the options.

B11. How have you considered the proposed route options in terms of winter/weather resilience?

Regarding weather related aspects for the route options, AmeyArup have sought information on road closures and winter resilience issues from various authorities, including the Met Office, Aberdeenshire Council and Transport Scotland's Trunk

Road Operating Company, BEAR Scotland. This information has informed the initial route options developed to date. As part of the design development and assessment work required, consideration will be given to the resilience of the route options and any mitigation measures that could minimise the impact to road users.

B12. How will the scheme consider public transport users, including school buses?

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. AmeyArup have engaged with Aberdeenshire Council's Passenger Transport Unit from an early stage in the DMRB Stage 2 process which has identified current and future public transport strategies, including scheduled rail and bus services, park and ride, dial-a-bus and school passenger transport. The route options will be assessed against their potential to align with these passenger transport strategies, and the impact of the dualling on scheduled bus routes. AmeyArup will continue to 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.

B13. 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.

B14. Why has Option Q been ruled out?

Improvement Strategy Option Q was discounted in 2015 as part of the DMRB Stage 1 assessment on the grounds that it did not perform well against the A96 Dualling Programme objectives.

Acknowledging the feedback received from stakeholders and members of the public following the 2015 exhibitions and the more recent 'Meet the Team' events in 2017, a further review of Improvement Strategy Option Q was completed as part of the initial development of the A96 Dualling East of Huntly to Aberdeen scheme.

This review split Improvement Strategy Option Q into two parts: namely, the A947 corridor and the A920 corridor. The A947 corridor that connects Oldmeldrum, Newmachar and Dyce was deselected as a result of the early engineering, environmental and traffic assessment and sifting work completed prior to October 2018. The A920 road corridor from Colpy to Oldmeldrum (Blue route option) was deselected prior to May 2019, following a multi-disciplinary comparative assessment, comparing two options at a time, where they perform similar functions. Refer to further information on the Transport Scotland website at the following location:

https://www.transport.gov.scot/publication/dmrb-stage-2-pairing-assessments-east-of-huntly-to-aberdeen-a96-dualling/

In each case, the better performing option was identified, and the poorer performing option was deselected. As a consequence of this, the Blue route option was deselected in favour of the Pink route option.

B15. Will there be upgrades to the existing A96 dual carriageway between Aberdeen and Inverurie?

Improvements to the existing A96 dual carriageway and its junctions between the AWPR and Inverurie, will be considered as part of the ongoing development and assessment of the scheme and will be subject to further public engagement as part of this process. The development and assessment of improvements to the existing dual carriageway will follow the DMRB Stage 2 options assessment process.

B16. Will there be service facilities for electric charging points along the route?

Electric charging points, along with other Intelligent Transport Systems (ITS) such as monitoring and a communication system, will be considered as part of the development of the preferred option during the DMRB Stage 3 process.

B17. How are junction locations and layouts determined?

As part of the DMRB Stage 2 assessment, detailed traffic modelling, in tandem with the economic, engineering and environmental assessments, will be used to determine the layout and location of the required junctions, so that they best serve local and strategic traffic movements.

At the Initial Route Options public exhibitions in October 2018, indicative junction locations were shown on the plans presented at the exhibitions. These junctions were subsequently developed and presented at the Route Options - Design Update in May 2019. In developing the initial junction layouts, various engineering constraints were considered such as the local topography, existing properties and existing strategic utilities. Maintaining the existing A96 as a local route and connectivity to local roads and settlements helps to achieve the scheme objective of reduced conflicts between local traffic and strategic journeys. Environmental constraints including designated sites to be avoided, where possible, helped to guide the junction design process.

Please refer to Section G of the FAQ document which provides more information on recent updates to the junction locations and layouts along with the addition of a new junction on the Orange route option.

SECTION C: ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

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

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 the construction phases to minimise the 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 its consultants AmeyArup continue to engage with key statutory environmental authorities, including Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) and Historic Environment Scotland (HES) 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 assessment, taking account of the predicted impacts of each option. The findings of this work will 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 in the scheme design during the DMRB Stage 3 process.

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

An assessment of the predicted 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 eliminate or reduce impacts will be identified and included in the design development of the preferred option during the DMRB Stage 3 process. Details of potential impacts, mitigation and residual impacts will be presented in the EIA Report. The

assessment will cover climate, human health, people and communities, geology and soils, contaminated land and groundwater, road drainage and water environment, nature conservation, landscape, visual effects, cultural heritage, air quality, noise and vibration, policies and plans, agriculture, forestry and sporting interests, and cumulative impacts.

C3. What measures are being taken to assess 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, the design of the preferred option will be developed. Traffic noise modelling and the assessment process will be used to help design appropriate sustainable mitigation measures which will be reported in the EIA Report. The assessment will predict traffic noise levels and the likely health effects at sensitive receptors, including dwellings, considering relevant legislation, standards and guidance.

Acoustic mitigation measures 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 set out the expected noise changes as a result of the developed preferred option, including the effects of the mitigation measures which are incorporated into the design.

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 flood modelling will be carried out to assess the potential impact of the options and to assist in the design of mitigation, where required. 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.

Additionally, the drainage design will include the provision of drainage features which will control the rate of run-off from the new road. The flooding and drainage aspects of the scheme are being designed in consultation with SEPA and Aberdeenshire Council. The findings from the flood risk assessments and any specified mitigation will be incorporated into the EIA Report.

C5. How will visual and landscape impacts be assessed and mitigated?

Visual impacts are considered during the DMRB Stage 2 design and assessment process and will feed into the identification of a preferred option.

Once a preferred option has been identified 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 eliminate 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.

In addition, we will be taking into account in our landscape appraisal the sense of place as part of the DMRB Stage 2 Scheme Assessment Report. Landscape effects will be further considered at DMRB Stage 3 and reported in the EIA Report.

C6. How are wildcats, including the Wildcat Priority Areas, considered as part of the design development?

The Wildcat Priority Areas (WPA) in Scotland are set up to help manage and protect wildcat populations. WPAs are non-statutory designations and not protected by law. However, while WPAs are non-statutory designations, the wildcats themselves and their den sites have statutory legal protection. AmeyArup are conducting desk-based research, field surveys and liaising with relevant stakeholders, seeking to minimise the potential impact on wildcats throughout the study area.

C7. How are you considering the impact of the new dual carriageway on air quality?

Potential changes in air quality as a result of changes in traffic flows are considered with respect to relevant policy and legislation, and in the context of existing air quality in the study area.

For the DMRB Stage 2 assessment, an Atmospheric Dispersion Modelling System (ADMS) is being used to estimate pollutant concentrations for each route option. This approach is consistent with the level of assessment prescribed in DMRB and expands on this to ensure the potential impact in terms of air quality is assessed in detail. The assessment seeks to identify the potential magnitude of change in pollutant levels that would be experienced, both adversely and beneficially, across receptors within the defined study area, as a result of the scheme.

The outcome of the air quality assessment will be reported within the air quality chapter in the DMRB Stage 2 Scheme Assessment Report.

C8. How is Climate Change considered as part of the assessment process?

As part of the DMRB Stage 2 assessment, we are assessing the potential climate impacts and effects from construction and operation of the scheme, following the methodology set out in DMRB LA 114 Climate document. The assessment will consider carbon emissions and the scheme's resilience to climate change. We are liaising with the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) as to the climate change allowances to use in assessing flood risk based on the latest UK Climate Projections research.

Climate change will continue to be considered in further detail as part of the DMRB Stage 3 once a preferred option is selected. An Environmental Impact Assessment Report will be published and will give consideration to potential impacts associated with increased traffic, consumption of material resources, and the production and management of waste during construction and the operation of the proposed scheme. In terms of resilience to climate change, a risk assessment of the preferred option will be undertaken to determine route specific risks in more detail and develop appropriate mitigation.

C9. How are you considering the impact on community facilities as part of the assessment process?

One of the scheme objectives is to avoid significant environmental impacts and, where this is not possible, to minimise the environmental effect on the communities and people in the corridor and on natural and cultural heritage assets, including community facilities.

The AmeyArup team have undertaken surveys to identify facilities that are used by the community. We are also using the feedback received from the public consultation to understand more about how the community use the study area. We will use all this information to inform the People and Communities chapter of the DMRB Stage 2 Scheme Assessment Report.

C10. How are impacts on wildlife and biodiversity considered in the assessment process?

It is acknowledged that the proposed route options pass through or close to a number of areas of wildlife, scenic and historic significance, with a wide range of local, regional and national 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 the risk of adverse effects.

The assessment to date has incorporated data from several sources, including consultation with various statutory and non-statutory organisations (including Scottish Natural Heritage, Aberdeenshire Council, Scottish Forestry, Forestry and Land Scotland, Scottish Wildlife Trust, and North East Scotland Biological Records Centre) as well as ground field surveys.

The appraisal takes into account a wide range of ecological baseline data. This data, together with observations from site visits, allows an appraisal to be made of the greatest areas of ecological sensitivity to inform the option appraisal process. In addition, AmeyArup are scoping the detailed surveys required to inform the EIA process and this will include undertaking more detailed surveys in DMRB Stage 3.

C11. Are legally protected species considered as part of the assessment?

Legally protected species are considered as part of the assessment. The assessment includes species protected under national (e.g. badger and red squirrel), and international (e.g. otter and bats) legislation. To help inform the DMRB Stage 2 assessment we have obtained records of protected species from data providers (e.g. North East Scotland Biological Records Centre, Scottish Badgers), from consultation with the statutory and non-statutory environmental bodies, and also from members of the public through the public consultation process. AmeyArup have also undertaken initial ecological surveys to assess the habitat suitability for these protected species.

As part of DMRB Stage 3, further detailed species-specific surveys will be undertaken, and we will seek to avoid, minimise and mitigate significant impacts on the species and habitats as part of the Ecological Impact Assessment for the scheme.

C12. How does the scheme align with planning policy and proposed local developments?

The National Planning Framework (NPF) and Scottish Planning Policy (SPP) provide the policy and spatial framework for the planning system and how it is to facilitate delivering Scottish Government's sustainable development. The SPP is a statement of Scottish Government policy on how nationally important land use planning matters should be addressed across the country. Scotland's Third NPF (NPF3) sets out a commitment to better connect Scotland's cities and specifically includes the A96 dualling project. NPF is a statutory tool, and the Scottish planning system requires that all local authorities prepare Local Development Plans (LDP) which respond to the Government's national plans and policies and specifically to NPF3.

The route options presented at the public consultation events are currently being assessed in accordance with the DMRB Stage 2 assessment process. This process includes consideration of how each option performs against the requirements and aims of local, regional and national planning policy. All material planning considerations, such as whether a proposed route option aligns to certain policies, will be considered and route options assessed explicitly against the policies and aims of the LDP, including proposed local developments. This assessment process will inform the selection of a preferred option to be taken forward for further assessment and consideration.

At DMRB Stage 3, a more detailed assessment of how the preferred option performs against the requirements and aims of local, regional and national planning policy will be undertaken. Further design development will enable the predicted land take

impacts on LDP designated sites and planning application sites to be assessed in more detail.

SECTION D: LAND AND PROPERTY

D1. Will those who suffer loss of property and/or land as a result of the preferred option receive compensation for those losses?

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, Transport Scotland will identify the land required to construct, operate and maintain the scheme and thereafter will publish a draft Compulsory Purchase Order. Once the land has been acquired by the Scottish Ministers they will appoint the Valuation Office Agency to assess the level of compensation due for property or land compulsorily purchased. The District Valuer and 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. 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. It is acknowledged that some properties are in proximity to the route options being considered and this will be taken into account in the DMRB Stage 2 assessment.

The preferred option will be subject to further design and assessment work as part of the DMRB Stage 3 process. This will determine the exact location of new road infrastructure in relation to nearby properties and any associated access arrangements, in addition to developing the design to minimise the impact on the environment and individuals.

D3. Will the impact on agricultural land be considered?

The Environmental Assessment process includes consideration of the potential impacts of route options on agricultural land and land used for other purposes such as for development or by the community. 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. The assessment of the amount of land affected by each route option will be undertaken as part of the agriculture, forestry and sporting interests chapter included in the DMRB Stage 2 Environmental Assessment.

Following the identification of a preferred option, the DMRB Stage 3 assessment will consider the matter of farm severance in detail to inform further design development and discussions with affected landowners regarding accommodation works.

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 their 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 are minimised.

D5. Will existing private infrastructure, such as land drainage and water supplies, be affected by the proposed options?

Data on existing infrastructure that may be affected, including drainage, water supplies and wind turbines, is being gathered as part of the assessment process and in consultation with utility asset owners and suppliers. The impact on and mitigation for any privately-owned infrastructure will be considered in more detail at DMRB Stage 3 in consultation with individual property and landowners.

D6. Have you considered the economic impact on local businesses?

The DMRB Stage 2 Assessment considers the potential impacts and benefits of the scheme on the local, regional and national economy.

There will be an assessment of potential direct impacts upon businesses, e.g. if land is lost from a recognised business or community facility, or where there is a loss of agricultural land.

SECTION E: ONLINE DUALLING AT INVERURIE

E1. Why has supplementary investigation work into online dualling through Inverurie been undertaken?

Deselected options, including online dualling through Inverurie, were first shown at the Initial Route Options public exhibitions in October 2018. Following the exhibitions, public feedback was received suggesting online dualling through Inverurie should be re-considered. To address this feedback additional information on the challenges associated with online dualling through Inverurie to Dual 2 lane All-purpose road D2APc standard was presented at the Route Options - Design Update in May 2019: https://www.transport.gov.scot/publication/exhibition-materials-may-2019-east-of-huntly-to-aberdeen-a96-dualling/
Following these drop-in sessions, further public feedback was received in support of online dualling through Inverurie.

As part of the consideration of the latest feedback, supplementary design development and assessment has been undertaken of online dualling through Inverurie. Further details of the A96 Online Dualling at Inverurie Supplementary Study can be found at the following link:
https://www.transport.gov.scot/publication/a96-online-dualling-at-inverurie-supplementary-study-october-2020/

E2. What are the issues associated with online dualling through Inverurie?

The provision of online dualling through Inverurie requires the acquisition and potential demolition of residential properties as there is insufficient space between properties particularly around the Blackhall Road area to widen the A96 to dual carriageway standard and to provide sufficient construction and maintenance space.

Online dualling would result in savings on earthworks operations through utilisation of the existing A96, although this can only be achieved for approximately half of the distance between Drimmies and Thainstone because of tie-ins and to accommodate junctions. Utilising the existing River Don bridge would also reduce works associated with crossing the river as it is anticipated the existing bridge could be re-used for one of the carriageways. These savings would be offset by the need for significant numbers of retaining walls at pinch points and any remedial works to bring the existing A96 up to current standards and the required design life.

Construction works for online dualling would require narrow traffic lanes on the existing A96 and the implementation of a 40mph speed limit during construction. Where construction space is limited by live traffic, construction programmes are generally extended, increasing the risks associated with working in a congested site adjacent to a live road for longer periods. There are also major utility impacts within the corridor including 4.3km diversions of large water mains which add to the increased construction and programme risk associated with construction within a constrained corridor adjacent to live traffic.

In relation to environmental impacts, there are five simultaneous major adverse impacts for human health, people and communities, air quality, landscape and visual and policies and plans within the built-up area of Inverurie which would affect a large number of receptors despite the presence of the existing road.

Online dualling though Inverurie concentrates strategic and local traffic within the same corridor and limits opportunities relating to economic development and non-motorised users.

E3. Can a lower standard of dual carriageway be provided online through Inverurie to lessen the impacts of online dualling?

A Dual 2 lane All-purpose D2APb road (previously Category 6) with an at-grade junction at Blackhall has been investigated. It would require a signalised roundabout at Blackhall Road and a 60mph speed limit on approaches. The provision of an at-grade signalised roundabout and introduction of a speed limit would not be in line with the overall strategy of providing a consistent, high-quality dual carriageway as an outcome of the A96 dualling programme. In relation to scheme objectives, it is considered to perform poorly against:

- Scheme Objective 1.5 to separate local and strategic traffic with the at-grade junction layout having a poorer performance than a grade separated junction (GSJ) as a result of the need for all traffic to interact at Blackhall Roundabout;
- Scheme Objective 1.6 to improve network resilience as it removes the opportunity to use the existing A96 as a diversion route;
- Scheme Objectives 2.3 and 4 relating to NMU/active travel as it offers little opportunity for NMU provision and has potential issues with increased NMU conflicts and changes to NMU routes;
- Scheme Objective 3 to provide opportunities to grow the regional economy with the at-grade junction layout having a poorer performance than the GSJ as a result of offering less capacity for future development;
- Scheme Objective 6 to minimise the environmental effect of the scheme as a result of major adverse impacts on a large number of receptors. Compared to the D2APc (GSJ) layout, there would be a reduction in the number of properties to be acquired and reduced Landscape and Visual impacts. Overall however, major adverse impacts remain including performing particularly poorly against Scheme Objective 6.1 relating to People and Communities as property acquisition and demolition remains a requirement.

A Dual 2 lane Urban All-purpose road D2UAP dual carriageway has also been investigated with both grade separation and an at-grade signalised roundabout at Blackhall Road. This is the lowest standard of dual carriageway permissible which allows a reduction in central reserve width and the removal of hard strips therefore minimising the overall cross section width. The poor performance in relation to scheme objectives above would remain a feature of this layout, including residential property acquisition and potential demolition. It is considered that the lower standard

of road provision affects its performance against the scheme benefits and objectives and does not significantly lessen the impacts of online dualling through Inverurie.

E4. Can online dualling be delivered without residential property demolition?

There is limited space between existing properties particularly around the Blackhall Road area which is not sufficient to accommodate the increased width of a dual carriageway and to provide the necessary space required for construction and maintenance operations. Residential property acquisition and potential demolition would therefore be a requirement of online dualling through Inverurie. This applies to options that include a grade separated junction or a signalised roundabout at Blackhall Road. It also applies when considering the lowest standard dual carriageway with a reduced cross-section. The requirement for property acquisition and potential demolition is considered a notable impact, unique to online dualling.

E5. Could online dualling through Inverurie be delivered cheaper and faster than an offline route?

Online dualling through Inverurie may offer some cost savings compared to full new offline construction, although it is anticipated these would represent a small proportion of the overall scheme costs in the context of the East of Huntly to Aberdeen project. The alignment through Inverurie is not considerably shorter when compared to all route options being assessed, therefore the length of online dualling through Inverurie does not offer any significant saving. The main cost saving would result from the re-use of the existing A96, however this would not be possible over the full extent given the need to tie into other route options, accommodate junctions and to minimise impacts. It is also anticipated that renewal of the existing A96 road surface and associated infrastructure may be required. Any savings would also be reduced by the need for extensive retaining walls and substantial utility diversions.

In relation to the programme for delivery, the same steps must be followed using the DMRB assessment process and the statutory process in line with the Roads (Scotland) Act 1984 regardless of which route option is selected as the preferred option. DMRB Stage 3 will require site investigations (such as topographical, geotechnical and environmental surveys) plus further community engagement including with those directly affected by the preferred option. In addition, online construction would typically take longer in comparison to comparable offline construction.

In relation to programme therefore, no significant savings on the overall programme are anticipated given the relatively modest construction savings which could only be realised towards the end of a design, assessment, statutory consultation and procurement process that cannot readily be shortened.

SECTION F: EXHIBITIONS AND PUBLIC CONSULTATION

F1. How were people notified of the Initial Route Options public exhibitions held in October 2018 and the Route Options - Design Update in May 2019?

Both public information events were promoted in the following ways:

- information was uploaded to the scheme website - https://www.transport.gov.scot/projects/a96-dualling-inverness-to-aberdeen/a96-east-of-huntly-to-aberdeen/
- letters were sent to all the active Community Councils in the area and local MPs, MSPs and Councillors;
- letters were sent to those who previously asked to be kept informed of the progress of the A96 Dualling programme;
- advertising posters were distributed to over 200 locations across the scheme extents;
- press adverts were placed in the Press & Journal, Evening Express, Banffshire Journal, Buchan Observer, Deeside Piper, Fraserburgh Herald, Inverurie Herald, Ellon Times, Ellon Advertiser, Inverurie Advertiser, Turriff Advertiser, Huntly Express and Northern Scott; and
- Transport Scotland also published a news release with this information and advertised the events on its social media channels.

F2. 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 considered. Transport Scotland's approach to stakeholder engagement for the A96 Dualling Programme is set out in its document, "A96 Dualling Inverness to Aberdeen Engaging with Communities" which is available on the Transport Scotland website at: https://www.transport.gov.scot/media/2230/a96-dualling-engaging-with-communities-2015-online.pdf.

The feedback we received following the events held in October 2018 and May 2019 will be considered as we look to announce a preferred option for the scheme in the coming months.

F3. What work have you been doing since May 2019?

Following the Route Options – Design Update public engagement events held in Inverurie, Blackburn and Huntly in May 2019, a significant volume of feedback and comment has been received by Transport Scotland from members of the public, stakeholders and interest groups with respect to the route options being considered.

We have continued the design work for the scheme during the COVID-19 pandemic but only with work that could be undertaken in full alignment with the government's physical distancing measures as we work towards identifying a preferred option in the coming months.

SECTION G: DESIGN UPDATE

Why have design updates been made?

Following a review of all the junction locations and layouts in combination with the traffic assessment, there has been some design development to the previously presented junction proposals. These changes have been made taking consideration of feedback as well as engineering, environment, traffic and economic assessment and are being taken forward as part of the DMRB Stage 2 Assessment, as we look to identify a preferred option in the coming months. Changes include the introduction of a new junction and alterations to the layout and location of some of the other junctions. The reasons for these changes are explained below and in layout plans shown here: https://www.transport.gov.scot/media/48509/a96-dualling-east-of-huntly-to-aberdeen-design-updates-october-2020.pdf

Please note that junction slip roads are referred to as 'east facing' which means entry or exit to the A96 dual carriageway to/from the Aberdeen direction or 'west facing', referring to entry or exit to the A96 carriageway to/from the Inverness direction.

Colpy Junction

In May 2019 the Cyan and Red route options layout for Colpy Junction was grade separated to meet traffic movements in all directions, including from the A920. Feedback from local residents indicated that Colpy Junction was located close to Colpy village raising concerns over associated environmental impacts, with the A96 and the A920 traffic passing the village to the west and the east.

Following consideration of this feedback and further traffic assessment work which resulted in reducing the number of slip roads, it allowed the relocation of the Colpy junction with west facing slip roads only to accommodate future traffic demands. This layout would function in combination with the revised Kellockbank junction on the Brown or Pink route options.

The Colpy Junction (Cyan) updated layout:

- is relocated north of Colpy with west facing slip roads only;
- provides a shorter, more direct link to/from the A920 and to/from the new A96 west; and
- reduces the environmental impact on the Colpy community when compared to the previous layout by:
  - significantly reducing traffic on the existing A96 to the east of the village; and

- reducing visual and noise impacts as the new A96 dual carriageway will be in cutting to the west of the village.

The Colpy Junction (Red) updated layout:
- is relocated north of Colpy with west facing slip roads only;
- provides a shorter, more direct link to/from A920 and to/from the new A96 west;
- reduces the environmental impact on Colpy community by significantly reducing traffic on the existing A96 to the east of the village; and
- reduces C68S realignment, maintaining direct connectivity to properties to the west of the new dual carriageway.

Kellockbank Junction (Pink Route)
In May 2019 the Pink route option layout for Lawrence Road Junction had east facing slip roads (to/from Aberdeen direction) only and connection to a lightly trafficked minor side road at Lawrence Road.

Public feedback received for Lawrence Road Junction raised concerns regarding the local road standard and capacity for increased traffic flows that may occur if the junction was located at Lawrence Road.

Following further traffic assessment and design development work, it was identified that the Lawrence Road Junction should be relocated closer to the existing A96 and renamed Kellockbank Junction (Pink). This layout would function in combination with the Colpy junction on the Cyan or Red route options.

The new Kellockbank Junction (Pink) layout:
- has a smaller footprint that reduces the landtake and associated environmental impact;
- reduces the traffic flows on minor roads (Lawrence Road); and
- is relocated closer to the existing A96 with improved connectivity to/from the community of Insch.

Kellockbank Junction (Brown Route)
In May 2019 the Brown route option layout for Kellockbank Junction was grade separated with traffic movements in all directions. Public feedback was received regarding the proximity of Colpy Junction to Kellockbank Junction.

Following further traffic assessment work, it was identified that Kellockbank Junction only requires east facing slip roads (to/from Aberdeen direction) to provide the link required for traffic to/from the community of Insch, the B992 and the existing A96. This layout would function in combination with the Colpy junction on the Cyan or Red route options.

The Kellockbank Junction (Brown) updated layout:
- has a smaller footprint, “half diamond” layout reducing the landtake and environmental impact;

- requires only one structure over ‘The Kellock’ watercourse, minimising the potential impact on its floodplain; and
- maintains connectivity to/from the community of Insch.

New Pitscurry Junction (Orange Route)
In the May 2019 Orange route option design there was no junction connecting the new A96 dual carriageway with the B9001 which is one of the main existing routes linking communities to the north of Inverurie. Following further traffic assessment work, it was identified that the Orange route option would be more accessible to traffic from communities such as Rothienorman and Daviot if an additional junction was added at Pitscurry.

The new Pitscurry Junction (Orange):
- links directly to the B9001 local road linking to the communities of Rothienorman and Daviot and removing their need to travel through Inverurie town centre; and
- enables traffic movements in all directions.