

1 Introduction

1.1 Overview

- 1.1.1 The A96 Aberdeen – Inverness Trunk Road, as shown in Figure 1.1, is located in the north-east of Scotland and is of national strategic importance linking Inverness to Aberdeen. This corridor is vital in supporting the future growth of the two cities and the various communities within, and connected to it. It runs between Raigmore Interchange at Inverness and Haudagain Roundabout at Aberdeen, and is approximately 99 miles (160km) long passing through, or nearby the settlements of Nairn, Forres, Elgin, Fochabers, Keith, Huntly and Inverurie.
- 1.1.2 In 2011 the Scottish Government, through the Infrastructure Investment Plan (IIP) (Scottish Government 2011), announced the commitment to dual to A96 between Inverness and Aberdeen by 2030, providing a number of benefits including improved journey times and reliability, delivering economic growth, improved connectivity and reducing the rate and severity of accidents.
- 1.1.3 Prior to this commitment being announced, design and assessment work had commenced on the dualling of the A96 between Inverness and Nairn in response to the investment priorities outlined in the final report of the Strategic Transport Projects Review (STPR) (Jacobs, Faber Maunsell, Grant Thornton and Tribal Consulting 2009).
- 1.1.4 The design and assessment of the A96 Dualling Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass) scheme (hereafter referred to as the proposed Scheme) has progressed through Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (DMRB) Stage 2 (route option assessment), taking into account the commitments outlined in the IIP, and a preferred option was announced in October 2014. Since 2015 the preferred option has been developed and assessed through DMRB Stage 3.
- 1.1.5 This Environmental Statement (ES) has been prepared in relation to the proposed Scheme, which has been progressed to a 'Stage 3' level of design in accordance with the DMRB. This would form the basis for the detailed design to be constructed by the appointed contractor(s), subject to agreement with Transport Scotland and adherence to environmental mitigation identified within this ES.
- 1.1.6 This chapter is supported by Appendix A1.1 (Record of Determination) and the following figures which are cross referenced where relevant:
- Figure 1.1 (A96 Aberdeen - Inverness Trunk Road); and
 - Figure 1.2 (Key Environmental Constraints).

1.2 Background to the Proposed Scheme

- 1.2.1 The STPR was published in 2008 and sets out the Scottish Government's transport investment priorities over the coming decades. Specific trunk road interventions that emerged from the review included upgrading the A96 between Inverness and Nairn to dual carriageway (Intervention 18) and a bypass of Nairn (Intervention 22).
- 1.2.2 In 2010, Transport Scotland commissioned a DMRB Stage 2 route option assessment in relation to upgrading the A96 between Inverness and Nairn to dual carriageway standard (with at-grade junctions) and a single carriageway bypass of Nairn. The design work was undertaken in order to support The Highland Council's Local Development Plan proposals for the A96 corridor and improve the operation of the trunk road around Inverness.
- 1.2.3 On 6 December 2011, the then Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment launched the IIP (Scottish Government 2011) which provides an overview of the Scottish Government's plans for infrastructure investment up to 2030. Contained within the document is a commitment to complete the dualling of the A96 between Inverness and Aberdeen by 2030, thus completing the dual carriageway network between all Scottish cities.

- 1.2.4 On 9 May 2013 the then Minister for Transport and Veterans set out how the A96 Dualling Programme would be taken forward. The outline strategy identified packages of design and development work to be progressed over the following few years with the objective of completing full dualling between Inverness and Aberdeen by 2030. These packages of work included updating the route option assessment work for the section of the A96 between Inverness and Nairn, including the bypass of Nairn, to reflect the Scottish Government commitment to dual the entire route.
- 1.2.5 Taking into account the objectives of the IIP, route options were developed to provide a dual carriageway with grade separated junctions between Inverness and Nairn and a dual carriageway bypass of Nairn.
- 1.2.6 As part of the A96 Dualling Programme Transport Scotland is committed to undertaking a rolling programme of regular engagement to ensure that communities, businesses and individuals affected by the work are kept fully informed and their vital feedback taken into account. This rolling programme commenced in November 2013 when Transport Scotland undertook a series of public exhibitions to present the route options under consideration for the section of the A96 between Inverness and Nairn, including the bypass of Nairn, and to seek public feedback on these.
- 1.2.7 The DMRB Stage 2 route option assessment (Jacobs 2014b) was completed with the preferred option presented to the public at a series of public exhibitions in October 2014.
- 1.2.8 Jacobs was commissioned by Transport Scotland in May 2015 to progress the DMRB Stage 3 design of the preferred option, including completion of a DMRB Stage 3 Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), and to provide services to complete an ES and draft Orders for the proposed Scheme. Extensive engagement has continued throughout the DMRB Stage 3 assessment, including a Meet the Team event on 26 and 27 August 2015 and drop-in sessions on 3 to 5 February 2016.

1.3 Strategic Environmental Assessment

- 1.3.1 There are two Strategic Environmental Assessments (SEAs) that are relevant to the proposed Scheme; the SEA for the STPR (Jacobs, Faber Maunsell, Grant Thompson and Tribal Consulting 2008 and 2009) and the SEA for the A96 Dualling Programme (Halcrow 2014, CH2M 2015 and CH2M 2016).
- 1.3.2 The SEA for the STPR was undertaken 2008 to consider the likely environmental effects of the interventions emerging from the STPR. This assessment concluded that the STPR would cumulatively bring a number of benefits to the local and regional areas of Scotland, as well as nationwide benefits. Although the combination of interventions would also give rise to cumulative adverse effects largely as a result of the required new infrastructure, there would be opportunities to mitigate potential adverse effects by minimising individual adverse project effects in accordance with specific project assessments.
- 1.3.3 In response to the objectives of the IIP, Transport Scotland appointed Halcrow (now known as CH2M) to undertake a SEA to assess the environmental constraints and the issues and opportunities associated with A96 corridor transport intervention and improvement options. A two-tier approach was taken for the SEA as described below.
- 1.3.4 Tier 1 informed the appraisal of a number of strategic road and rail intervention options, as defined in the A96 Dualling Inverness to Aberdeen: Strategic Business Case (Jacobs 2014a), ensuring that potential environmental effects were appraised alongside the topics of economy, accessibility and social inclusion, safety, and integration. The assessment was published for consultation on 25 September 2014 (Halcrow 2014).
- 1.3.5 Tier 2 informed the appraisal of the broadly defined improvement strategy options as defined in the A96 Dualling Inverness to Aberdeen: DMRB Stage 1 Assessment Report (Jacobs 2015). As work on the section of the A96 between Inverness and Nairn, including the bypass of Nairn, had commenced prior to the announcement to fully dual the A96, the SEA notes that the '*SEA assessments of shortlisted options have therefore focused on alternatives for A96 dualling from*

east of Auldearn to Aberdeen (CH2M 2015, page 22). The objective of the Tier 2 SEA was to provide 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 subsequent stages of design and environmental assessment. The assessment was published for consultation on 11 May 2015 (CH2M 2015).

- 1.3.6 In February 2016, the Post Adoption Statement (CH2M 2016) was published to provide a comprehensive summary of the two-tier SEA process. It sets out:
- how environmental considerations have been integrated into the SEA and therefore the A96 Dualling Programme;
 - a summary of stakeholder and consultation feedback and explains how this was taken into account in the development of the A96 Dualling Programme;
 - the rationale for the Programme in light of alternatives;
 - the Monitoring Framework; and
 - further details on the approach to the environmental assessments, including the proposed mitigation strategy, which would be undertaken at DMRB Stage 2 and DMRB Stage 3.
- 1.3.7 As noted in paragraph 1.3.5, the SEA was commissioned during the DMRB Stage 2 assessment for the section of the A96 between Inverness and Nairn, including the bypass of Nairn, and as such it focused mainly on the section to the east of Auldearn to Aberdeen. However, the outputs of the SEA, particularly in relation to the mitigation strategies, are relevant and have been taken into account during the EIA process for the proposed Scheme.

1.4 The Proposed Scheme

- 1.4.1 The DMRB Stage 3 engineering design assessed in the EIA and reported in this ES is shown on Figure 1.2, along with the key environmental constraints.
- 1.4.2 The proposed Scheme comprises the provision of approximately 31km of new dual carriageway, which would mainly be constructed off the line of the existing A96. The existing A96 would be de-trunked and reclassified as a local road to maintain local access. The proposed Scheme would also incorporate:
- the provision of shared use paths suitable for Non-Motorised Users (NMU), approximately 30km in length;
 - six grade separated junctions;
 - 25 principal structures including a crossing of the River Nairn and three structures over the Aberdeen to Inverness Railway Line;
 - local road diversions and the provision of new private means of access; and
 - utility diversions including major diversions for SGN (previously Scotia Gas Networks) and CLH Pipeline Systems (CLH-PS).
- 1.4.3 Further details of the proposed Scheme are provided in Chapter 4 (The Proposed Scheme).

1.5 Statutory Context for EIA

- 1.5.1 The Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2011 (hereafter referred to as the EIA Regulations) implement the requirements of the European Union's EIA Directive, which was codified in 2011 by Directive 2011/92/EU on the assessment of the effects of certain public and private projects on the environment (European Union 2011). The EIA Directive has recently been updated, and a new Directive 2014/52/EU (European Union 2014) was adopted on 15 May 2014, however this will not be transposed into UK legislation until 2017.

- 1.5.2 The requirement for an EIA of certain road construction or improvement projects is also required under the terms of the Roads (Scotland) Act 1984 (as amended by Part III of both the Environmental Impact Assessment (Scotland) Regulations 1999 and 2006).
- 1.5.3 Annex E of Circular 8/2007 (Scottish Government 2007) provides guidance on EIA of trunk road projects. Although the EIA Regulations consolidated, updated and replaced Part II of the Environmental Impact Assessment (Scotland) Regulations 1999, with effect from 01 June 2011, Parts III and IV of the 1999 Regulations, concerning Roads and Bridges, and Land Drainage remain extant. Consequently the guidance contained in Annex E of Circular 8/2007 continues to apply and is relevant to considering the need for an EIA of the proposed Scheme.
- 1.5.4 The EIA Regulations categorise developments according to their requirement for an EIA. Schedule 1 lists large-scale or potentially high impact developments for which an EIA is always required. Schedule 2 lists developments that may or may not require an EIA depending on the characteristics and location of the development, and the significance of potential effects.
- 1.5.5 A screening exercise was undertaken in November 2015. This determined that the proposed Scheme falls within the definition of Schedule 1 as follows:
- 'Construction of a new road of four or more lanes, or realignment and/or widening of an existing road of two lanes or less so as to provide four or more lanes, where such new road, or realigned and/or widened section of road would be 10 km or more in a continuous length'. (EIA Regulations 2011, Schedule 1, paragraph 7.3)*
- 1.5.6 As such it is necessary to carry out an EIA and to publish an ES. The Record of Determination (RoD) to formally record the screening process is provided in Appendix A1.1.
- 1.5.7 The EIA of the proposed Scheme has formed an integral part of the engineering design and appraisal process and has provided a valuable opportunity to reduce potential environmental effects through design refinement. The purpose of EIA is to investigate the likely effect of the proposed Scheme on the biological, physical and historical environment, as well as on members of the public and on current or planned future use of the environment.

1.6 Environmental Statement (ES)

- 1.6.1 This ES reports the findings of the EIA process undertaken for the proposed Scheme, and as defined in Schedule 4 of the EIA Regulations it includes:
- a description of the proposed Scheme, including details of its physical characteristics, land use requirements, and an estimate by type and quantity of any residues and emissions arising;
 - an outline of the main alternatives and the main reasons for the choice of the proposed Scheme, taking into account the environmental effects;
 - a description of the aspects of the environment likely to be significantly affected by the proposed Scheme;
 - a description of the likely significant impacts of the proposed Scheme on the environment, including direct impacts and any indirect, secondary, cumulative, short, medium and long-term, permanent and temporary, beneficial and adverse effects;
 - a description of the measures envisaged to prevent, reduce and where possible offset any significant adverse effects on the environment;
 - an indication of any difficulties encountered in compiling the required information; and
 - a non-technical summary of the above information.
- 1.6.2 Table 1.1 sets out the structure of the ES along with a summary of what is included in each chapter. As far as is practicable, the chapters are written in a non-technical style to make it accessible to a wide, non-specialist audience. Where technical terminology is used, an explanation is provided in the text, and/or in the glossary which is provided at the front of Volume 1 of the ES.

Table 1.1: Structure of the ES

ES Component	Description
Non-Technical Summary (NTS)	
At front of the ES	Summary of the ES in non-technical language. This is also available as a separate document.
Volume 1: Main Report	
Chapters 1 to 4	Provide project background and details of the proposed Scheme assessed in the EIA, including the need for the proposed Scheme and the alternatives considered.
Chapter 5	Provides an overview of the EIA assessment process, setting out the environmental parameters considered, and explaining how the assessment of environmental effects was undertaken.
Chapter 6	Summarises the EIA consultation and scoping process, and provides a summary of the key issues raised and how these have been taken into account.
Chapters 7 to 17	Reporting of the EIA for each specialist environmental parameter, including an introduction to the subject area, approach and methods, baseline (i.e. existing) conditions, assessment of impacts, mitigation and residual effects.
Chapter 18	Summarises the assessment of relevant plans and policies and considers compliance with national, regional and local planning policy.
Chapter 19	Considers the overall (cumulative) impact of the proposed Scheme and the potential cumulative effect with other developments in the area, where not covered within the preceding chapters.
Chapter 20 to 21	Provides tabulated summaries of the mitigation proposed and the key residual effects remaining after implementation of mitigation.
Volume 2: Appendices – Specialist Technical Reports	
Appendices	Technical reference information supporting the ES chapters, such as calculations and detailed background data. Appendix number corresponds to the relevant ES chapter (e.g. Appendix A7.1 relates to Chapter 7).
Volume 3: Figures	
Figures	Graphics supporting the ES chapters, illustrating the proposed Scheme and environmental information. Figure reference corresponds to the relevant ES chapter (e.g. Figure 7.1 relates to Chapter 7).

- 1.6.3 A glossary of terms and a list of abbreviations are also provided at the front of Volume 1.
- 1.6.4 This ES presents the assessment of the proposed Scheme as described in Chapter 4 (The Proposed Scheme). The design of the proposed Scheme may be refined, but would still be deemed to comply with this ES provided that such refinements are subject to environmental review to ensure that the residual effects would be no worse than those reported in this ES.
- 1.6.5 Some detailed aspects of the proposed Scheme design, such as construction methods and traffic management, would depend on the approved construction proposals of the appointed contractor(s), details of which would not be available until the detailed design and build stage. Assumptions have been made where necessary to inform the assessment, as described in Chapter 4 (The Proposed Scheme) and in individual chapters of the ES where relevant.
- 1.6.6 An independent audit of the assessments has been undertaken to produce a robust EIA that complies with the requirements of the EIA Regulations. Furthermore, consultation has taken place with regard to the scope, approach and results of the assessment, as described in further detail in Chapter 6 (Consultation and Scoping).

1.7 The Assessment Team

- 1.7.1 The EIA was undertaken, managed and compiled by Jacobs, an Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (IEMA) Registered EIA Quality Mark Company. Additional specialist environmental input was also provided to some technical components where appropriate, as identified within the relevant ES chapters.

1.8 Review and Comments

1.8.1 Copies of this ES are available for inspection at:

Transport Scotland

9th Floor
Buchanan House
58 Port Dundas Street
Glasgow
G4 0HF

Tel: 0141 272 7100

Nairn Library

68 High Street
Nairn
IV12 4BS

Tel: 0166 745 8506

Ardersier Library and Service Point

Old School
Station Road
Ardersier
IV2 7SU

Tel: 0166 746 2658

The Highland Council

ePlanning Centre
Glenurquhart Road
Inverness
IV3 5NX

Tel: 0134 988 6606

Culloden Library

Keppoch Road
Culloden
Inverness
IV2 7LL

Tel: 0146 379 2531

The Highland Council

Nairn Service Point
The Court House
High Street
Nairn
IV12 4AU

Tel: 0166 745 8570

Inshes Library

Inshes Road
Inverness
IV2 3RF

Tel: 0146 372 5928

The Highland Council

Planning and Building Standards
2nd Floor
Kintail House
Beechwood Business Park
Inverness
IV2 3BW

Tel: 0134 988 6608

Inverness Library

Farraline Park
Inverness
IV1 1NH

Tel: 0146 323 6463

1.8.2 The ES can be viewed on the Transport Scotland website available at:
www.transport.gov.scot/project/a96-invernessnairn-including-nairn-bypass.

1.8.3 A bound paper copy of the ES may be purchased at a cost of £250, and the ES is also available in DVD format at a cost of £10 by writing to Transport Scotland at the address shown above, or by email to info@transportscotland.gsi.gov.uk.

1.8.4 Any person wishing to make representation on the ES should write to Transport Scotland at the above address. Formal representations are invited until 31 January 2017.

1.9 References

Reports and Documents

CH2M (*on behalf of Transport Scotland*) (2015). A96 Dualling Programme: Strategic Environmental Assessment - Tier 2 Environmental Report.

CH2M (*on behalf of Transport Scotland*) (2016). A96 Dualling Programme: Strategic Environmental Assessment - Post Adoption Statement.

Halcrow (*on behalf of Transport Scotland*) (2014). A96 Dualling Programme: Strategic Environmental Assessment - Tier 1 Environmental Report.

Jacobs, Faber Maunsell, Grant Thornton and Tribal Consulting (*on behalf of Transport Scotland*) (2008). Strategic Transport Projects Review.

Jacobs, Faber Maunsell, Grant Thornton and Tribal Consulting (*on behalf of Transport Scotland*) (2009). Strategic Transport Projects Review: Final Report.

Jacobs (*on behalf of Transport Scotland*) (2014a). A96 Dualling Inverness to Aberdeen: Strategic Business Case.

Jacobs (*on behalf of Transport Scotland*) (2014b). A96 Dualling Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass): DMRB Stage 2 Scheme Assessment Report.

Jacobs (*on behalf of Transport Scotland*) (2015). A96 Dualling Inverness to Aberdeen: DMRB Stage 1 Assessment Report.

Scottish Government (2007). Planning Circular 8/2007: The Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations 1999 (Annex E - Environmental Impact Assessment of Trunk Road Projects).

Scottish Government (2011). Infrastructure Investment Plan.

EU Directives and National Legislation

European Union (2011). Directive 2011/92/EU on the assessment of the effects of certain public and private projects on the environment [2011].

European Union (2014). Directive 2014/52/EU on the assessment of the effects of certain public and private projects on the environment [2014].

Roads (Scotland) Act 1984.

Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 1999, SI199/01.

Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2006, SI2006/3295.

Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2011, SI2011/139.