

2 Need for the Proposed Scheme

2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 This chapter sets out the national and local context for the dualling of the A96 between Inverness and Nairn, including a bypass of Nairn (hereafter referred to as the proposed Scheme). The proposed Scheme forms part of the wider Scottish Government commitment to upgrade the A96 between Inverness and Aberdeen to dual carriageway by 2030.

2.1.2 A summary of the existing and future traffic conditions is also provided to highlight the proposed Scheme's impact on existing traffic flow and accident rates.

2.1.3 The chapter is supported by the following figures, which are cross referenced where relevant:

- Figure 2.1 (Traffic Flows Location Plan Base Year/Do-Minimum); and
- Figure 2.2 (Traffic Flows Location Plan Do-Something).

2.2 The A96 Aberdeen - Inverness Trunk Road

2.2.1 The A96 Aberdeen – Inverness Trunk Road is a strategic route linking Inverness to Aberdeen. Currently the A96 consists mostly of single carriageway with some overtaking lanes and sections of dual carriageway at the western and eastern limits of the trunk road. 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.

2.2.2 The proposed Scheme, starts east of the roundabout for Inverness Retail and Business Park, approximately 850m east of Raigmore Interchange, and continues approximately 31km east and ends at Hardmuir, 3.5km to the east of Auldearn. Here, it would tie into the existing A96 in accordance with design standards.

2.2.3 It is considered that the upgrade of the A96 to dual carriageway would help assist economic growth through improved access to the wider strategic transport network and enhance access to jobs and services. Dualling of the A96 would also improve journey times, reduce accident rates and reduce the conflict between local traffic and other traffic in urban areas.

2.3 National Context for A96 Dualling

2.3.1 The proposed Scheme has been identified within a number of national strategies and policy frameworks as an important national infrastructure scheme.

2.3.2 The Government's vision and objectives for transport in Scotland are set out in Scotland's Transport Future (Scottish Executive 2004), which provides the policy framework for transport in Scotland with an overall aim to '*...promote economic growth, social inclusion, health and protection of our environment through a safe, integrated, effective and efficient transport system.*' (page 17).

2.3.3 The National Transport Strategy (NTS) which followed in 2006 (Scottish Executive 2006) outlined the long-term strategy to meet the aims identified in Scotland's Transport Future. This Strategy was recently updated in 2016 (Scottish Government 2016) and sets out as one of its strategic outcomes the need to '*Improve journey times and connections, to tackle congestion and the lack of integration and connections in transport which impact on high level objectives for economic growth, social inclusion, integration and safety.*' (Section 3.7: Transport, page 67). The Strategy confirms the Scottish Ministers commitment to investing in the A96 dualling between Inverness and Aberdeen by 2030.

2.3.4 To support the aims of Scotland's Transport Future and the NTS, the Strategic Transport Projects Review (STPR) (Jacobs, Faber Maunsell, Grant Thornton and Tribal Consulting 2008) sets out a series of transport interventions that included upgrading the A96 between Inverness and Nairn to

dual carriageway (Intervention 18) and targeted road congestion/environmental relief schemes such as a bypass of Nairn (Intervention 22). In the final report (Jacobs, Faber Maunsell, Grant Thornton and Tribal Consulting 2009), the STPR states the following:

'Upgrading the A96 to dual carriageway between Inverness and Nairn is expected to reduce accident rates (by around 40 per cent) by providing a higher standard of road. It would also reduce journey times along this section of the corridor, improving connectivity between Inverness and communities to the east (including the planned developments in this corridor at Tornagrain), and helping to increase the labour catchment area for Inverness. Improvements would also be felt on longer distance road journeys between Aberdeen and Inverness.' (Annex A: Summary of Draft Investments, paragraph A.177).

'Enhancements to the A96 such as a bypass around Nairn would reduce the conflict between local and strategic traffic and improve journey times and journey time reliability along the route.' (Annex A: Summary of Draft Investments, paragraph A.226).

- 2.3.5 The STPR also identifies that effective transport is key to supporting the delivery of Scotland's Economic Strategy. In relation to this, the STPR outlines the following objectives in relation to the road corridor between Aberdeen and Inverness:
- *'improve connectivity, particularly by public transport between Inverness city centre and the growth area to the east including Inverness Airport;*
 - *improve journey time and increase opportunities to travel, particularly by public transport, between Aberdeen and Inverness; and*
 - *reduce the accident rate and severity rate to current national average.'* (Annex B: Summary of STPR Work Packages, page 142).
- 2.3.6 Following on from the STPR, the Infrastructure Investment Plan (IIP) was launched in 2011 (Scottish Government 2011a) to provide an overview of the Scottish Government's plans for infrastructure investment up to 2030. This included a commitment to completing the dualling of the A96 between Inverness and Aberdeen by 2030. This Plan was updated in 2015 (Scottish Government 2015a) with a focus on improving connections across, within and to/from Scotland. The IIP continues to commit to completing the dualling of the road network between Scotland's cities by 2030, including between Inverness and Aberdeen. The IIP states that the Scottish Government's strategy is to *'...underline the commitment to connecting Scotland's cities with a high quality transport system that will generate economic growth and will ensure the road network between all Scottish cities is of dual carriageway standard.'* (page 69).
- 2.3.7 The Scottish Government's Economic Strategy was originally developed in 2007 and was updated in both November 2011 and March 2015 (Scottish Government 2011c and 2015b). Its purpose is to create a more successful country, with opportunities for all of Scotland to flourish, through increasing sustainable economic growth. The Strategy is based on the principle that an efficient transport system is one of the key enablers for enhancing productivity and delivering faster, more sustainable growth and to support this aspiration, the Strategy seeks to enhance connections between Scotland's urban areas.
- 2.3.8 Scotland's Cities: Delivering for Scotland (Scottish Government 2011b) complements the Government's Economic Strategy. It highlighted that the successful cities are linked by key growth supporting characteristics including being *'connected cities, with strong digital and transport infrastructure'* (page 21). Scotland's Cities also recognised that there is a *'need to work collaboratively [between cities] to optimise growth for the benefit of the whole of Scotland'* (page 10) and that the *'investment in infrastructure...is a key driver of both short-term and long-term economic growth and performance'* (page 10).
- 2.3.9 The Scottish Government published the National Planning Framework 3 (NPF3) in June 2014 (Scottish Government 2014). The Framework guides Scotland's spatial development over the next 20 to 30 years setting out strategic development priorities to support the Scottish Government's central purpose to *'create a more successful country, with opportunities for all of Scotland to flourish, through increasing sustainable economic growth.'* (paragraph 1.1).

- 2.3.10 NPF3 states that *'the road network has an essential role to play in connecting cities by car, public transport and active travel... We will complete dualling of the trunk roads between cities, with... dualling of the A96 from Inverness to Aberdeen by 2030.'* (paragraph 5.20). It also highlights that *'...dualling of the A96 between Inverness and Aberdeen, including bypasses of towns along the route, will provide opportunities to link the energy sectors in the two city regions as well as improving the quality of place within the towns.'* (paragraph 5.32).
- 2.3.11 The A96 Strategic Business Case (Jacobs 2014) undertook an appraisal of the Inverness to Aberdeen strategic transport corridor focusing on the performance of the trunk road and rail network between the cities of Inverness and Aberdeen. A number of options were assessed against transport planning objectives, implementability (feasibility, affordability and public acceptability) and the Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance (STAG) criteria relating to the environment, economy, safety, integration and accessibility and social inclusion. The assessment concluded *'...that the proposal to dual to A96 is the best way to meet the future needs of those living, working and travelling along the A96 Corridor in the 21st Century.'* It further states that *'...dualling is best able to meet the transport planning objectives....'* and that *'...full dualling of the A96 would deliver significant wider economic and accessibility benefits.'* (page 41).
- 2.3.12 The proposed Scheme, along with the dualling of the A96 between Inverness and Aberdeen, is specifically supported within the STPR, the IIP, the NTS and NPF3, as well as being confirmed as the preferred option to improve the performance of the Inverness to Aberdeen strategic transport corridor within the A96 Strategic Business Case. Furthermore, it supports the overall objectives of the Scottish Government in contributing towards the provision of an efficient, safe and integrated transport system which would act as a key enabler for sustainable economic growth. The proposed Scheme would reduce accident rates, along with improving journey time and reliability, tackling congestion and improving connectivity between Inverness and Aberdeen. The bypass of Nairn would also reduce conflict between local and strategic traffic and provide congestion and environmental relief to the town.

2.4 Local Context for A96 Dualling

- 2.4.1 The Highland-wide Local Development Plan (HwLDP) (The Highland Council 2012) and the Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan (IMFLDP) (The Highland Council 2015) emphasise the importance of the dualling of the A96 in relation to the future development aspiration of the A96 Corridor. The Highland Council's vision within the IMFLP (Highland Council 2015, Section 1: Introduction, paragraph 1.4) is that by 2030, the Inner Moray Firth will:
- *'have increased the number of jobs, people and facilities;*
 - *have a growing City;*
 - *have safeguarded and enhanced its special places;*
 - *have made it easy for people and wildlife to move about through a green network;*
 - *have more efficient forms of travel;*
 - *have resolved its infrastructure constraints;*
 - *have diversified its economy; and*
 - *be regenerated and renewed.'*
- 2.4.2 The Highland Council's strategy is that the majority of Inverness City's growth in the medium and long term (2016 to 2031) should be directed to the corridor between Inverness and Nairn. The transport study of Inverness and the A96 Corridor (The Highland Council 2010) highlights that this growth is dependent on key transport improvements, including the dualling of the A96 and a bypass of Nairn, and the Council will resist developments beyond the first phases until long-term transport solutions have been designed.
- 2.4.3 The dualling of the A96 is specifically mentioned in relation to the following:

- Stratton - phase 1 development requires dualling of the A96 between the Smithton and Inverness Retail and Business Park roundabouts.
- Nairn South - this allocation is subject to further assessment of the transport and infrastructure requirements that are necessary to enable development to progress. Construction of the A96 by-pass is a long term solution to divert through traffic away from the centre of Nairn and the scale of any development which can proceed ahead of the bypass will depend on the adequacy of alternative links provided through the development.
- Nairn - the bypass of Nairn will address many of the current concerns regarding the capacity of the road network to accommodate all the development opportunities identified in the Plan.

2.4.4 Overall, the proposed Scheme is considered to be essential to supporting the Council's development aspirations to support economic growth within the A96 Corridor.

2.5 Objectives of the Proposed Scheme

2.5.1 The objectives for the proposed Scheme have been developed in relation to the national and local objectives discussed above. These include the following:

- To improve the operation of the A96 and inter-urban connectivity through:
 - reduced journey times;
 - improved journey time reliability;
 - increased overtaking opportunities;
 - improved efficiency of freight movements along the transport corridor; and
 - reduced conflicts between local traffic and other traffic in urban areas.
- To improve safety for motorised and non-motorised users through:
 - reduced accident rates and severity;
 - reduced driver stress; and
 - reduced non-motorised user conflicts with strategic traffic in urban areas.
- To provide opportunities to grow the regional economies on the corridor through:
 - improved access to the wider strategic transport network; and
 - enhanced access to jobs and services.
- To facilitate active travel in the corridor.
- To facilitate integration with public transport facilities.
- To minimise the environmental effect on the communities in the corridor.

2.6 Traffic Conditions

2.6.1 The existing A96 between Inverness and Hardmuir (to the east of Auldearn) is mainly a rural single carriageway road with an Annual Average Traffic Level (AADT) between 9,000 and 26,000 vehicles per day based on 2014 observed data.

2.6.2 The modelled AADT traffic levels for the base year (2014) and the assessed Opening year (2021) and the assessed Design year (2036) for the 'Do Minimum' (without the proposed Scheme) are shown on Figure 2.1.

2.6.3 The assessed AADT traffic levels for the Opening year of the proposed Scheme (2021) and the assessed Design year (2036) for the 'Do Something' (with proposed Scheme) are shown on Figure 2.2.

- 2.6.4 Overall, the proposed Scheme is expected to remove traffic from the existing A96, and in particular traffic volumes on the existing A96 through the centre of Nairn are expected to be reduced by approximately 50% by 2036. This would help to address the environmental, social and economic concerns in relation to traffic congestion in the centre of Nairn.
- 2.6.5 The baseline scenario for accidents along the extents of the existing A96 between Inverness and Hardmuir, states that there were 63 accidents between 2010 and 2014, including one fatal and 15 serious. The accident rate varies along the length of the route as it is calculated based on the observed accidents between 2010 and 2014, and the traffic flows within the relevant section and year. The majority of accidents on this section of the A96 appear to have occurred at junctions, which are currently at-grade with the existing A96.
- 2.6.6 From the accident appraisal that has been undertaken, the anticipated number of accidents for the existing A96 in the Do-Minimum scenario would be 17 in the future year of 2021 (the Year of Opening for the proposed Scheme), and 14 in the future year of 2036 (the Design Year for the proposed Scheme). In the Do-Something scenario the anticipated number of accidents for the proposed Scheme in the Year of Opening (2021) would be nine, and in the Design Year (2036) would be eight. There would also be a small number of accidents anticipated to occur on the remaining existing sections of the A96 with the proposed Scheme in place, of approximately four accidents in 2021 and four in 2036.

2.7 References

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.

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Scottish Executive (2004). Scotland's Transport Future - The transport white paper - June 2004.

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Scottish Government (2007). Scotland's Economic Strategy.

Scottish Government (2011a). Infrastructure Investment Plan.

Scottish Government (2011b). Scotland's Cities: Delivering for Scotland.

Scottish Government (2011c). Scotland's Economic Strategy.

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Scottish Government (2016). National Transport Strategy.

The Highland Council (2010). Inverness, Nairn and A96 Corridor Transport Study.

The Highland Council (2012). Highland-wide Local Development Plan (HwLDP).

The Highland Council (2015). Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan (IMFLDP).