

## **A96 Inverness to Nairn (incl. Nairn Bypass)** **Frequently Asked Questions – March 2014**

### **Section A: The Scheme**

#### **A1. Why is the A96 Inverness to Nairn including Nairn Bypass project required?**

The Strategic Transport Projects Review, published in 2008, identified a programme of strategic transport interventions necessary to support the future effective operation of Scotland's transport network. This included, at Intervention 18, upgrading the A96 to dual carriageway between Inverness and Nairn, and at Intervention 22, enhancement of the A96, including a bypass of Nairn. In addition the Infrastructure Investment Plan, published in December 2011, provides an overview of the Scottish Government's plans for infrastructure investment over the coming decades. Contained within the document is a commitment to dual the A96 between Inverness and Aberdeen.

#### **A2. What is the justification for dualling the A96?**

*Scotland's Cities: Delivering for Scotland* [2011], set out the Scottish Government's intention to develop and exploit the strongest assets and most productive resources of Scotland's cities and their regions to optimise their contribution to sustainable economic growth for all of Scotland. One of the key characteristics that will support the growth of Scotland's Cities is the connectivity between cities through strong digital and transport infrastructure. In terms of transport infrastructure, this can be achieved through the improvement of journey times and journey time reliability. Through its Infrastructure Investment Plan the Scottish Government has made a commitment to dual the A96 between Inverness and Aberdeen.

It is anticipated that dualling the A96 will:

- Reduce journey times and improve journey time reliability between Inverness and Aberdeen and, in combination with the dualling of the A9, improve connectivity to the Central Belt.
- Promote economic growth.
- Improve road safety.
- Reduce driver stress.
- Improve the environmental conditions and reduce severance in bypassed communities.
- Offer the opportunity to improve pedestrian, cyclist and equestrian facilities.
- Improve access and connections to public transport.
- Improve accessibility to tourist and recreation sites.
- Complete the dual carriageway network between all of Scotland's cities.

#### **A3. When will a decision be taken on a preferred route for the A96 Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass)?**

The Scottish Government is seeking to reach a position of confirming a preferred route in 2014, to provide certainty for affected parties.

#### **A4. When will work start and when will the new road be open?**

The overall timetable for the dualling programme is set by the Scottish Government's commitment to complete dualling of the A96 between Inverness and Aberdeen by 2030.

Programmes for individual projects, within that overall commitment to dual the A96, will take shape during the on-going preliminary design and development work on the wider A96 dualling.

In terms of the A96 Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass) project, the Scottish Government is seeking to reach a position of confirming a preferred route in 2014, to provide certainty for affected parties.

## **Section B: Scheme Design and Development**

### **B1. What process do 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 assessment process covers engineering, environment, traffic and economics. Transport Scotland also consults with the public and interested bodies with views being taken into account during the assessment process. The overall process for the development of a trunk road scheme follows a general sequence of:

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

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

### **B2. Why does it appear that little regard has been given to previous work on a route for a Nairn Bypass?**

Possible routes options of a bypass around Nairn have been discussed for many years. The Nairnshire Local Plan Inquiry in 2000 removed a previous indicative route for a Nairn Bypass since the scheme was not at an advanced stage of preparation and was not at that time in a committed programme. As a result, the published Nairnshire Local Plan of December 2000 did not contain an indicative route for a bypass of Nairn.

The A96 Growth Corridor Framework published in September 2007 and the subsequent Highland wide Local Development Plan published in April 2012 contained an indicative route for a bypass of Nairn which had been developed through a planning and development process led by The Highland Council.

This Nairn Bypass route was developed as a desk-based indicative alignment in support of the wider planning framework. The route was considered for planning purposes and was not

subject to a full design development process. At that time the route was assumed to be a single carriageway bypass with a number of at-grade roundabouts connecting to the local road network around Nairn. None of the previous routes considered by The Highland Council were formally adopted by the Scottish Government as the preferred route for a Nairn Bypass.

The Scottish Ministers are the relevant Roads Authority for the A96 Trunk Road and scheme development is undertaken in accordance with the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges and promoted through the Roads (Scotland) Act 1984. The Roads (Scotland) Act 1984 sets out the procedures the Scottish Ministers must follow in promoting new roads. This includes advertising and consulting on the proposed preferred route, invite comments and objections, negotiate objections, and if objections can't be resolved undergo a formal dispute procedure which in the case of a roads project is through a Public Local Inquiry. The Nairn Bypass is currently at the route option assessment stage and a preferred route has yet to be announced by the Scottish Government. As such we have not reached the stage where we could advertise and formally consult on a preferred route.

As the work previously undertaken on the Nairn Bypass had considered the bypass as a single carriageway with at-grade junctions, it was therefore important that the design route options previously developed were reviewed and updated to reflect the decision to upgrade the A96 between Inverness and Aberdeen to dual carriageway standard with grade separated junctions (i.e. junctions with slip roads and fly-overs or underpasses).

Transport Scotland is currently progressing the route option assessment work with a view to announcing a preferred option for the A96 Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass) later in 2014 to provide certainty for affected parties, although it must be recognised that further work will be required to inform that decision. The current route option assessment process has taken due consideration of previous studies, reports and consultations. It is however vital that we consider, consult on and assess all potential options at this stage of development so that we can identify the optimum preferred route which would then be able to be developed and promoted in accordance with the Roads (Scotland) Act 1984.

### **B3. Why have you included a route option through Delnies Wood since it was understood that this had been ruled out many years ago?**

The current route option assessment process has taken due consideration of previous studies, reports and consultations. It is however vital that we consider, consult on and assess all potential options at this stage of development so that we can identify the optimum preferred route which would then be able to be developed and promoted in accordance with the Roads (Scotland) Act 1984.

The specific concerns raised in respect of Delnies wood, along with comments in relation to other options, will be considered as part of the route options assessment process.

### **B4. Why have you not included a route option for the Nairn Bypass which remains south of the railway between Gollanfield and Meikle Kildrummie?**

A route option to the south of the railway was considered by the project team and a preliminary design was developed and assessed. The option was developed from previous alignment options considered for a Nairn Bypass, including the indicative alignment developed by The Highland Council through their A96 Growth Corridor Framework. The route option crosses the Blar Nam Fiadh peat bog south of the Aberdeen to Inverness

railway line. A ground investigation using a peat probe was undertaken in March 2013 and this established that peat is present over a length of 1.6km of the proposed route option with peat thicknesses highly variable up to a maximum recorded depth of 6.9m. The presence of peat of this depth, presents a greater degree of engineering difficulty in relation to constructability and related impacts, when compared to other options.

The project team considered a range of economic, engineering and environmental factors and compared these to the Blackcastle Quarry route (Options 2E, 2F, 2G, 2H and 2I as it passes the quarry). While the advantages of the Blar nam Fiadh route were recognised, the increased construction cost, increased environmental impacts, increased engineering risks due to proximity of the live Aberdeen to Inverness railway and the peat bog and anticipated lower journey time savings were sufficient for the project team to determine that this option should not be included for further consideration in the route option selection process.

#### **B5. Why is there not a junction at the south side of Nairn to serve the sawmill and the Nairn south development area?**

Junction locations have been determined by examining the secondary road network and considering the traffic volumes predicted to use each possible junction location. Junctions are proposed at locations where there is sufficient traffic demand or where they are considered to provide a suitable connection to the secondary road network.

It is appropriate to provide new grade separated junctions for Nairn to the east and west of the town and under some options an intermediate junction with the A939 is proposed. Additional junctions around Nairn are not proposed since the A96 dual carriageway has a strategic function and is not intended to act as a local distributor road around Nairn. In particular, the B9090 and B9091 are a less suitable radial routes into Nairn due to the constraint at the existing railway bridge in Nairn.

#### **B6. What happens to direct accesses onto the current A96?**

In general there will be no direct accesses onto the new dual carriageway. All access onto the dual carriageway should be via grade separated junctions (i.e. junctions with slip roads and fly-overs or underpasses). Where possible, lengths of the existing A96 will be retained for local access and these will provide connections to the dual carriageway junctions.

#### **B7. What provision is being made for non-motorised road users?**

Suitable provision for non-motorised users is an important part of the scheme development, particularly where the route crosses existing local roads and other routes used by non-motorised users.

The non-motorised users (NMU) strategy for the scheme is being developed and the key principles are:

- Maintain local community connectivity
- Provide suitable facilities for non-motorised users to cross the A96 dual carriageway
- Enhance provision for non-motorised users in the A96 corridor with facilities to supplement the local Core Path Network, National Cycle Network and Green Networks.

**B8. What will happen to the A96 bus stops provision for the existing public transport services in the A96 corridor?**

The project objectives include improving journey times for all road users, including public transport. Between Inverness and Nairn, it is anticipated that public transport will continue to use the existing A96 single carriageway and serve existing bus stops. We are consulting with public transport providers as part of the scheme development in order to address the needs of public transport, including those services that currently deviate from the A96 in the scheme development. As the project moves forward we will continue to engage with them so that bus services and bus stops on the proposed route are properly planned.

**B9. Do the route options consider the proposed developments in the Local Development Plan, e.g. Tornagrain, Whitnass, Nairn South?**

The A96 Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass) project is being developed taking into consideration the Highland wide Local Development Plan and the emerging Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan proposals.

As part of the environmental assessment the route options will be assessed in relation to the Highland wide Local Development Plan and other wider Plans and Policies.

**B10. Why has the Morayston Variant been incorporated into some of the designs?**

The existing A96 corridor between Newton of Petty and Tornagrain passes Morayston House, Morayston cottages and the access for Norbord. Since access to the proposed A96 dual carriageway will be from a number of grade separated junctions, it is necessary at this location to retain the existing A96 single carriageway road to provide local access to properties, businesses, agricultural and forestry land. During option development, it was recognised that there were constraints on the space for a dual carriageway between Morayston House, Morayston cottages and the access for Norbord without impact on each. The Morayston Variant was proposed as an alternative route that would potentially reduce these impacts.

## **Section C: Environmental Issues**

**C1. How are environmental impacts considered as part of the route selection process?**

An assessment of the environmental impacts of each route option is being carried out as part of the Stage 2 route option assessment process. The November 2013 exhibition panels only provided a brief overview of environmental impacts because environmental investigations were still in progress.

The environmental assessment of route options follows the process set out in the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges and covers the following topics: air quality; noise and vibration; cultural heritage; landscape and visual; ecology; geology and soils; materials; all travellers; community and private assets; drainage and the water environment, and; planning and policies. Specialist staff, with experience in each of these fields, examine the baseline conditions and then assess the impact of each of the route options.

As part of the assessment a number of site surveys have been carried out. A habitat survey has been undertaken by ecologists to record vegetation and wildlife to inform the baseline ecology assessment. A watercourse survey has also been undertaken in order to assess the features of the watercourses in the study area. Landscape specialists have visited the site in order to assess the visual aspects of the route options and a site meeting has been held with Historic Scotland in order to consider the Auldearn battlefield site.

The findings of the environmental assessment will be used by the project team in the overall route options assessment process.

## **C2. How will environmental impacts of the preferred scheme be mitigated?**

An assessment of the environmental impacts of the selected preferred route, during construction and operation will be undertaken at the next stage of scheme development (i.e. Stage 3 development of preferred route). Where practicable, mitigation to avoid or reduce impacts will be identified and implemented as part of the preferred route, for example noise mitigation in the form of earthworks bunds or noise barriers. Details of potential impacts, mitigation and residual impacts will be presented in an Environmental Statement. The assessment will cover land use, geology, contaminated land and groundwater, the water environment, ecology, landscape, visual, cultural heritage, air quality, noise and vibration, pedestrians and non-motorised users, vehicle travellers, disruption due to construction, policies and plans and cumulative impacts.

## **Section D: Land and Property**

### **D1. Will property and land owners and businesses affected by the chosen preferred route receive compensation for any losses incurred?**

At this stage of scheme development a preferred route is still to be announced. As the ultimate chosen preferred route is developed the Scottish Ministers will appoint the Valuation Office Agency to assess the level of compensation due for property or land compulsorily purchased. The District Valuer and his staff from the Valuation Office Agency will discuss the level of compensation with each landowner and/or their professional advisor.

The assessment of compensation will depend on individual circumstances. The underlying principle is to put the landowner, in financial terms, so far as money can do so, in the same position as if property had not been taken. Basically the assessment of compensation will take into account the value of property and the value of related effects (known as Severance, Injurious Affection and Disturbance). Further guidance on the Compulsory Purchase Process and Compensation is available from the Transport Scotland website at <http://www.transportscotland.gov.uk/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. How will severance to my land be addressed?**

It is recognised that the effects of the scheme may include severance of land. Consultations with individual landowners will be carried out during further scheme development work once a preferred route has been selected to identify how best to avoid or minimise severance which may occur. It should also be noted that as proposals are developed there will be further opportunities for the public to participate in the decision making process in an informed manner.

## **D3. How is the impact on agricultural and forestry land being assessed?**

As part of the environmental assessment, a specialist Consultant will provide an assessment of the effects of the route options on agriculture, forestry and sporting land uses. The findings of this assessment will be taken into account as part of the overall route option assessment process.

## **Section E: Exhibitions & Public Consultation**

### **E1. Why were the maps used at the Public Exhibitions in November 2013 out of date?**

The maps used on display boards and brochures for illustrative purposes at the public exhibitions were the current mapping available from Ordnance Survey at the time of the exhibitions. Ordnance Survey updates their different mapping products at different times and it is acknowledged that the 1:25,000 (Explorer) and 1:50,000 (Landranger) images used on the presentation material do not show certain local features which are known to have changed, e.g. the Sainburys superstore at the east of Nairn that opened in August 2011.

A check was made with the Ordnance Survey web-site on 28 February 2014, and the 1:25,000 and 1:50,000 mapping images of Nairn still do not show the Sainsburys development.

It is important to note that the mapping used at the exhibitions was for illustrative purposes only. The mapping used for design development and assessment is more detailed and is updated more frequently. The 1:10,000 mapping and the OS MasterMap data used by the design team during design development do include recent mapping changes. At the exhibitions this 1:10,000 mapping was available on the navigable GIS software running on the desktop computer.

In addition staff from the engineering team visited the route corridor on a number of occasions during development of the route options and viewed the potential routes from public roads and other locations with open access to the public. During route option assessment, staff from the environmental assessment team visited the route corridor during surveys and accessed some private land following agreement with local landowners.

Transport Scotland commissioned topographical survey and aerial photography of the A96 route corridor in 2013 and this information will be used for further design development once a preferred route has been selected.



**E2. Will the public have further opportunities to comment as the selected preferred route is developed?**

The vital feedback we have received following the exhibitions held in November 2013 will be taken into account during the route options assessment process. The Scottish Government is seeking to reach a position of confirming a preferred route in 2014, to provide certainty for affected parties, although it must be recognised that further work will be required to inform that decision.

Further public consultations will be undertaken as part of the design and development of a preferred route. This further engagement will be undertaken to ensure that communities, businesses and individuals affected by the work are kept fully informed and their vital feedback taken into account as we further develop scheme proposals.