

A96 DUALLING INVERNESS TO NAIRN (incl. Nairn Bypass)



A96 Inverness to Nairn (incl. Nairn Bypass) Preferred Option

October 2014



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Introduction

The Strategic Transport Projects Review (STPR), published in 2008, set out the Scottish Government's transport investment priorities for the coming decades and included upgrading the A96 between Inverness and Nairn to dual carriageway and also the creation of a bypass of Nairn.

The intention to fully dual the A96 was thereafter announced in December 2011, when Scottish Ministers published their Infrastructure Investment Plan which contained the commitment to dual the A96 between Inverness and Aberdeen by 2030, thus completing the dual carriageway network between all Scottish cities.

The A96 Dualling Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass) scheme consists of a new 30km dual carriageway between the roundabout for Inverness Retail Park and a point approximately 3km east of Auldearn.

Public information exhibitions were held in November 2013 to present the options under consideration for the scheme and seek public feedback. Since then, work has continued on the route option assessment process. Following public feedback, three changes were made to the design options and published on Transport Scotland's website in May 2014.

The route option assessment process has now been completed. This leaflet provides a summary of the outcome of the assessment process, as well as the preferred option for the scheme.

The Scheme

The new 30km dual carriageway scheme can be divided into two sections:

- Inverness to Gollanfield
- Nairn Bypass.

Inverness to Gollanfield

The preferred option is **Option 1C (MV)** which includes:

- 15km dual carriageway
- four grade separated junctions at Smithton, Newton, Mid Coul and Brackley
- no other direct/local accesses onto the new trunk road
- local road alterations
- major utility pipeline diversions.

Nairn Bypass

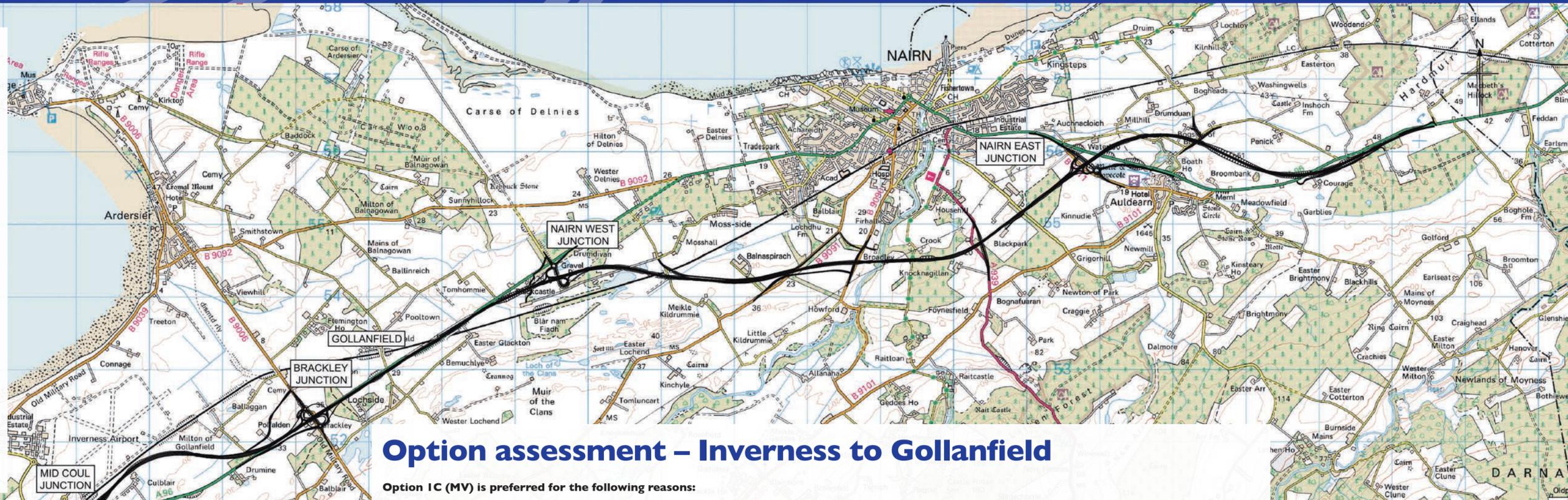
The preferred option is **Option 2E** which includes:

- 15km dual carriageway
- two grade separated junctions at Nairn West and Nairn East
- no other direct/local accesses onto the new trunk road
- local road alterations
- approximately 200m River Nairn crossing
- two mainline railway crossings
- major utility pipeline and overhead power line diversions.

Legend

— Preferred option

This 1:50,000 OS Map was obtained in March 2014 and is for illustration purposes only.



Option assessment – Inverness to Gollanfield

Option 1C (MV) is preferred for the following reasons:

Engineering: The existing A96 has 17 local road junctions, 23 private accesses and at least 33 accesses into agricultural and forestry land. Options involving longer stretches of dualling on the line of the existing A96 will require more extensive construction works to provide alternative means of access to property and land adjacent to the existing A96.

Option 1C (MV) is generally offline (away from the existing A96) with fewer impacts on accesses from the existing A96 to property, agricultural land and businesses, the extent of construction work is less than the other options resulting in reduced material volumes and reduced costs, and has the shortest route length affected by areas of unfavourable ground conditions such as peat and alluvium (loose soil or sediment). Option 1C (MV) can be constructed with less disruption or impact during construction to road users and the local community.

Environment: While there are differences between the options at individual topic level, the conclusion of the overall environmental assessment is much more finely balanced, with no one option substantially and materially better than the others.

Option 1C (MV) is one of four options which are expected to have some of the lowest impacts in relation to habitats and biodiversity, geology and soils, effects on all travellers (e.g. path network), resource use and waste, residential and commercial assets, and development land.

It avoids one property demolition at Mid Coul and the potential acquisition of two further properties near Allanfearn. It also avoids impacts on the development capacity of the development land allocations for Inverness Airport and Tornagrain new town.

Option 1C (MV) performs less favourably in relation to noise and vibration, landscape and visual, water quality, cultural heritage and agriculture and forestry land.

For air quality and flood risk the environmental assessment concluded that the effects of all the route options were broadly similar.

Safety: For Option 1C (MV) the existing A96 is retained between Smithton and Brackley. Safety benefits will be realised on the existing A96 for both motorised and non-motorised users (pedestrians, cyclists and equestrians) due to the significant reduction in traffic.

Economy: For all options, dualling of the A96 between Inverness and Gollanfield will reduce journey times and improve journey time reliability. Option 1C (MV) has the lowest estimated scheme cost of all the Inverness to Gollanfield options, and provides value for money.

Integration: Option 1C (MV) offers benefits for public transport and active travel (cycling, etc.) through use of the existing A96 single carriageway between Smithton and Brackley, which will have significantly reduced traffic on it.

Accessibility and social inclusion:

Option 1C (MV) is expected to have some of the lowest impacts on all travellers (e.g. path network) when compared to other options.



Artist's impression: Culloden (looking east)

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Option assessment – Nairn Bypass

Option 2E is preferred for the following reasons:

Engineering: Quarrying operations are complete over a large part of Blackcastle quarry, and the dual carriageway, and Nairn West Junction under Option 2E can be located in the former quarry site.

The River Nairn crossing at Broadley is preferred to the crossing at Howford since it is shorter and the lower cost of the structure more than offsets the cost of diversion of the 132kV overhead electricity transmission lines.

Option 2E has the best earthworks balance, hence the lowest volume of required imported material. It can be constructed with less disruption or impact during construction to road users and the local community since the route is further away from the existing A96 and the communities at the west of Nairn and Auldearn.

Environment: While there are differences between the options at individual topic level, the conclusion of the overall environmental assessment is much more finely balanced, with no one option substantially and materially better than the others.

Overall, Option 2E is expected to have some of the lowest impacts in relation to noise and vibration, geology and soils, water quality, materials, residential and commercial assets, and development land.

Option 2E avoids impacts at Delnies Wood relating to habitats and biodiversity and the path network throughout the woodland.

Option 2E is also further from receptors (e.g. properties) at Moss-side reducing the potential impacts from noise and air pollution and has one of the lowest impacts on the Alton Burn flood plain.

The River Nairn crossing at Broadley is preferred to the crossing at Howford since it is shorter and has a lesser impact on the sensitive

landscape at Howford. It also avoids the Kildrummie Kames SSSI.

Options north of Auldearn through Penick, which includes Option 2E, are preferred:

- impacts associated with the online options (2B and 2F) past Auldearn are avoided relating to noise, cultural heritage, path network and disruption during construction
- impacts associated with the more southern options (2C, 2D, 2G and 2I) are avoided relating to landscape and visual impacts particularly around the A939 junction, Newmill and at Kinstearly House.

Option 2E performs less favourably in relation to landscape and visual, habitats and biodiversity, cultural heritage and agriculture and forestry land. For air quality the environmental assessment concluded that the effects of all the route options were broadly similar.

Safety: The significant reduction in traffic using the existing A96 should reduce the number of accidents in Nairn. Option 2E offers greater safety benefits than other options:

- options south of Auldearn (2C, 2D, 2G and 2I) have an additional junction with the A939 which would increase traffic entering Nairn on this road, with the potential for increased conflicts with non-motorised users (NMUs) such as pedestrians, cyclists and equestrians
- On-line options (2B and 2F) would have greater NMU conflicts in the vicinity of Auldearn.

Economy: The Nairn Bypass offers significant benefits to the town by removing trunk road traffic from the existing A96. Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT) on the existing A96 through Nairn is expected to reduce from 17,400 AADT to 7,000 AADT in future year 2031.

Option 2E has the lowest estimated scheme cost of all the Nairn Bypass options and provides value for money.

The junction locations provide opportunities to grow the regional economy through improved access to the wider strategic transport network:

- Nairn West junction located at Blackcastle quarry maintains direct access from the trunk road to Port of Ardesier
- Nairn East junction located between Nairn and Auldearn provides better strategic access than options south of Auldearn.

Integration: The reduction in traffic passing through Nairn should provide benefits to public transport and active travel e.g. walking and cycling in the town. Under Option 2E existing bus routes through Auldearn can be maintained.

Accessibility and social inclusion: Option 2E is expected to have some of the lowest impacts on all travellers (e.g. path network) than other options.



Artist's impression: Nairn West junction



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Preferred option

The preferred option for the A96 Dualling Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass) scheme shown on the drawing overleaf is indicative and will be developed further during the next stage of design development. This includes the preferred option alignment and layout of all the junctions, side roads and private means of access. Environmental mitigation will also be added to the scheme design. Drawings can be viewed at the exhibitions and are available on the project website.



Artist's impression: **Auldearn (looking east)**



Artist's impression: **River Nairn crossing**

What happens next?

Transport Scotland has begun a procurement exercise to appoint a design consultant early next year to take forward the development, assessment and promotion of the preferred option for the scheme (DMRB Stage 3 assessment).

This will allow development of the preferred option. Transport Scotland will look to publish for draft Orders and Environmental Statement for the scheme in 2016 for public comment.

The draft Road Orders will define the line of the developed preferred option. The draft Compulsory Purchase Order will define the extent of land required to deliver and maintain the scheme.

The next stage of assessment process will include: consultation with affected parties, further consultation with statutory bodies, Community Councils and other relevant interest groups, design development of the preferred option, ground investigation works, identification of the land required for the scheme and preparation of draft Orders, environmental impact assessment of the developed preferred option and preparation of Environmental Statement and

development of suitable mitigation measures to reduce impacts on the environment. For example: appropriate construction management plans, mammal (e.g. badger and otter) underpasses, ledges and fences, landscape planting and noise barriers or environmental bunds.

We invite your comments and feedback using the feedback form. Please leave in the feedback box provided at the exhibition or email: a96dualling@transportscotland.gsi.gov.uk

You can also post to:

**A96 Dualling Team
Transport Scotland
Buchanan House
58 Port Dundas Road
Glasgow
G4 0HF**

By 28 November 2014

Further information

For further information on the A96 Dualling Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass) scheme please visit the Transport Scotland website: www.transportscotland.gov.uk/project/a96-inverness-nairn-including-nairn-bypass

Information on the wider A96 Dualling Inverness to Aberdeen programme can be found at: www.transportscotland.gov.uk/a96dualling

If you have any queries or any comment on the project, please contact The A96 Dualling team at the address above or by telephone or email.

Telephone: **0141 272 7100**

Email: a96dualling@transportscotland.gsi.gov.uk