

REPORT TO GARIOCH AREA COMMITTEE – 13 MARCH 2018

A96 ABERDEEN TO INVERNESS DUALLING POSITION STATEMENT

1 Recommendations

The Committee is recommended to:

1. **note the progress that has been made to date on the A96 Aberdeen to Inverness dualling project; and**
2. **provide comments on a position statement in respect of the future assessment of route options, for consideration at a future Aberdeenshire Council meeting, and to be communicated to Transport Scotland and its consultants thereafter.**

2 Background / Discussion

2.1 In December 2011 the Scottish Government published its first Infrastructure Investment Plan, which contained a commitment to dual the A96 between Inverness and Aberdeen by 2030, thus completing the dual carriageway network between all Scottish cities.

2.2 The project is being progressed as three geographic sections in addition to the previously identified Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass) section:

- 1) The Western Section, from the tie-in of the Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass) scheme to the east of Auldearn to east of Fochabers;
- 2) The Central Section from east of Fochabers to east of Huntly; and
- 3) The Eastern Section from east of Huntly to the proposed junction with the Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route (AWPR).

In July 2017, Transport Scotland appointed consultants Amey Arup to take forward route option assessment and design work on the Eastern Section.

2.3 Transport Scotland and its consultants undertake a rigorous three stage assessment process to establish the preferred line for a trunk road improvement. Based on the standard of good practice set by the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (DMRB), this covers environment, engineering, traffic and economics. The overall process for the development of a trunk road scheme follows a general sequence of:

- 1) strategic assessment and identification of potential broadly defined improvement strategies (DMRB Stage 1);
- 2) development and assessment of alternative route options and identification of a preferred route option (DMRB Stage 2). This includes an engineering, environmental, traffic and economic assessment of each option to inform a preferred route option choice;

- 3) development and assessment of preferred route option proposals and preparation of an Environmental Statement (DMRB Stage 3);
- 4) 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
- 5) procurement and construction of the scheme.

In terms of the Eastern Section, Stage 1 Assessment has been undertaken and Stage 2 Assessment is now underway

2.4 DMRB Stage 1 Assessment

2.4.1 Sixteen broadly defined improvement strategies that could provide a dual carriageway between east of Nairn and Aberdeen were developed and assessed by Transport Scotland. These were different high-level approaches to providing a dual carriageway, for example a bypass north or south of towns along the existing A96, and did not represent specific corridors or route alignments at this stage.

2.4.2 Prior to Stage 1 Assessment, a number of options were sifted out, largely on the basis that they failed to meet objectives relating to:

- Providing opportunities to grow the regional economies on the corridor;
- Facilitating active travel on the corridor; and
- Facilitating integration with public transport facilities.

Or it was considered that these options:

- Were remote from the main population centres, meaning public transport would be likely to continue to serve these population centres using the existing road network rather than the new A96 dual carriageway;
- Were remote from the Aberdeen to Inverness railway line and the stations located in towns along the A96, such as Inverurie and the future station at Kintore, meaning traffic would be unlikely to use the new dual carriageway to access these stations;
- Bypassed one or both of the airports located along the A96; and
- Failed to take account of the fact that existing travel patterns along the A96 are predominantly between communities and not end to end. Therefore the remoteness of these options from the existing A96 would mean that the majority of traffic would remain on the existing A96, limiting opportunities to facilitate active travel in the towns along the existing A96 and failing to bring traffic relief (and consequent environmental benefits) to these towns.

2.4.3 Following sifting, it was determined by Transport Scotland that the following options would proceed to Stage 1 Assessment:

- 1) Option B: Existing A96 Corridor with offline bypasses - the principle of this option is an upgrade generally located along the route of the existing A96 corridor, with the exception of offline bypasses of settlements along the existing A96. Under consideration are three potential strategies for bypassing Inverurie, comprising an upgrade to the existing Inverurie bypass and offline bypasses to the north or south of the town;

- 2) Option C: Offline from Huntly to Blackburn - this option was developed, irrespective of constraints, to provide a more direct line from Huntly to Blackburn, bypassing Inverurie to the south and avoiding a number of sections of poor road alignment on the existing A96; and
- 3) Option D: Offline from Glens of Foudland to north-west of Inverurie - this option was developed to provide a more direct line between a section of the A96 between the Glens of Foudland and north-west of Inverurie.

2.4.4 The Stage 1 Assessment concluded that improvement strategy options B, C and D were worthy of further consideration at the next stage of development and would proceed to DMRB Stage 2 Assessment. An overview of the Improvement Strategies sifting process is contained in the DMRB Stage 1 Assessment Report, available from Transport Scotland's website at: <https://www.transport.gov.scot/publications/?project=2274>.

2.4.5 The initial consideration of corridors included an Option Q, which would see a new section of road constructed to the north and east of the existing A96 between Glens of Foudland and Dyce, bypassing Inverurie, Blackburn and Aberdeen International Airport, and linking with the A947 north of Dyce, but this option was ruled out during pre-assessment sifting stages. It is the view of Council officers, however, that this option was ruled out prematurely and that it may have certain advantages that have perhaps been overlooked during the assessment process:

- 1) It would alleviate concerns about the effects of the project on the iconic and protected landscape around Bennachie and the Keith Hall House and Gardens Designated Landscape;
- 2) It could aid economic development opportunities associated with enhanced access to the strategic road network for communities and businesses to the north and north-east of the current A96 and A947 road corridors;
- 3) It could facilitate the future development of Inverurie as much of the future growth planned for the town is to the east and south of the settlement;
- 4) It could relieve traffic pressure in Inverurie by enabling businesses in the Oldmeldrum catchment area and beyond to access the trunk road network without having to pass through Inverurie, which would not be the case if the new road went to the west of Inverurie;
- 5) It could potentially relieve traffic pressure on the A947, improving safety and reducing journey times between Oldmeldrum and Aberdeen;
- 6) Although further from Inverurie than other options, it would improve access to the A96 and the wider strategic road network for other population centres in Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City such as Newmachar, Oldmeldrum, Dyce and Bridge of Don;
- 7) Although the trunk road would be further from Kintore Station it would be closer to Dyce Station;
- 8) It provides an opportunity to develop other interchange locations such as the potential reopened railway line from Dyce to Ellon and beyond and an interchange between Inverurie and Oldmeldrum;
- 9) It affords the opportunity to enhance active and sustainable transport provision along the current A96 for the benefit of residents of Blackburn, Kintore, Port Elphinstone and Inverurie; and

10) There may be different permutations of this option, such as re-joining the existing A96 somewhere west of Dyce, which provide additional or alternative benefits.

2.4.6 These concerns were raised with Transport Scotland, who subsequently confirmed that all feedback, including feedback received following completion of the DMRB Stage 1 assessment, continues to inform the option assessment process and that Aberdeenshire Council's observations with respect to the A947 and Option Q will be considered with all other feedback received as route corridor options are developed for assessment in the coming period.

2.5 DMRB Stage 2 Assessment

2.5.1 Amey Arup are currently progressing with the DMRB Stage 2 Assessment, which involves the identification and detailed assessment of route alignments developed from the broadly defined improvement strategies progressing from Stage 1, including engineering, environmental, traffic and economic assessments of the potential impacts of each option to inform a preferred option choice.

2.5.2 Meet the team events were held in November 2017 in Huntly, Inverurie and Blackburn to keep members of the public up to date with the assessment process and further public and stakeholder consultation will take place as the study progresses.

2.5.3 The outcome of this stage of the assessment will be the confirmation of a preferred option for upgrading each section of the A96. For the Eastern Section it is anticipated that routes will be consulted on by the end of 2018 and a preferred route identified by the end of 2019.

2.6 DMRB Stage 3 Assessment

2.6.1 Following selection of the preferred option, the design will be further developed and assessed with an Environmental Statement prepared and the land required for the scheme identified. Thereafter draft Statutory Orders will be published to define the new road that may then see a Public Inquiry held to consider any statutory objections to the proposals. The final part of the process would then take the scheme through procurement and construction.

2.7 Position Statement

2.7.1 The following three paragraphs are proposed by officers as a position statement for Aberdeenshire Council to submit to Transport Scotland as part of the current DMRB Assessment.

- a) It is the view of Aberdeenshire Council that, due to the range of competing pressures and constraints along and around the corridor that require to be considered (including the importance of the Bennachie special landscape area; the availability and quality of agricultural land north of Inverurie; and the presence of two nationally important battlefields, high quality Listed Buildings, significant areas of ancient woodland, Keith Hall House and Gardens Designated Landscape, and floodplains around the Rivers Don and Ury), it is essential that all viable route options as far north as the

A947 and A920 remain under consideration at this stage and are included within the DMRB Stage 2 Assessment. This will allow as much information as possible to be gathered on the range of possible options, thus enabling sound and objective decision-making.

- b) In addition, current and future assessment work should also take into account:
- Development pressure in Inverurie and the constraint on this that transport is imposing on the long term development;
 - Development pressure on Oldmeldrum and the willingness of the community to accept significant growth should issues with the A947 be resolved. Allied to this is the increase in attractiveness to communities such as Turriff which could also be served, in part, by this road;
 - Development pressure on Newmachar and the opportunity for further development that would be presented with a proximal trunk road;
 - The importance of Aberdeen City as an economic, social and educational hub served by a wide rural population and the importance of intermediate travel origins and destinations along the A96;
 - The scale of patterns of traffic distribution beyond Inverurie and Oldmeldrum; and
 - The importance of the route for Heavy Goods Vehicles (HGVs), agricultural vehicles and vehicles servicing the energy sector and how these can be accommodated.
- c) Aberdeenshire Council has asked officers to work openly and transparently with Transport Scotland and its consultants in their ongoing efforts to identify the optimum route alignment, in the expectation that they in turn continue to engage with Council officers in a similarly positive manner.

2.7.2 Garioch Area Committee is therefore being asked to provide comments on the proposed position statement in advance of the statement being considered at the full meeting of Aberdeenshire Council in April 2018.

2.8 The Head of Finance and Monitoring Officer within Business Services have been consulted in the preparation of this report and their comments are incorporated within the report. They are satisfied that the report complies with the Scheme of Governance and relevant legislation.

3 Scheme of Governance

3.1 The Committee is able to consider this item in terms of Section B1.2 of the List of Committee Powers in Part 2A of the Scheme of Governance, which delegates powers to Area Committees to consider, comment on, and make recommendations to any other appropriate Committee on any matter or policy which impacts their Area.

4 Implications and Risk

4.1 An equality impact assessment is not required as the scheme is being promoted by Transport Scotland and a preferred option has not been identified at this stage therefore there is no differential impact on those with protected characteristics.

- 4.2 There are no staffing and financial implications arising from this report. Officers will continue to engage with Transport Scotland and Amey Arup as assessment processes continue, as they have done to date.
- 4.3 No Risks have been identified at Corporate or Strategic Level.
- 4.4 A Town Centre Impact Assessment has not been undertaken as the scheme is being promoted by Transport Scotland and a preferred option has not been identified at this stage.

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21 February 2018