

REPORT TO GARIOCH AREA COMMITTEE – 13 NOVEMBER 2018

A96 DUALLING - INITIAL ROUTE OPTIONS CONSULTATION

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 route options for the Eastern Section of the A96 Dualling, for consideration at Infrastructure Services Committee on 29 November 2018**

2 Introduction

- 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 Transport Scotland appointed the AmeyArup Joint Venture team in July 2017 to take forward the A96 Dualling East of Huntly to Aberdeen scheme, which is to provide a dual carriageway from the tie-in with the existing A96, east of Huntly, to the A96 junction with the Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route (AWPR).
- 2.3 Garioch Area Committee was previously consulted on 13 March 2018, where it was asked to provide comments on the proposed Position Statement in advance of the Statement being considered at the full meeting of Aberdeenshire Council on 26 April 2018.
- 2.4 During the week of 8 October 2018, initial route options under consideration for the A96 Dualling East of Huntly to Aberdeen Scheme were presented by Transport Scotland, online and at a series of public exhibitions.

3 Proposals

3.1 Public Exhibitions

- 3.1.1 On 26 September 2018, Transport Scotland announced that a series of public exhibitions were to be held during the week of 8 October 2018 to allow the public and road users to see and comment on a number of initial options that have been developed. Details of the public exhibitions that took place are outlined in the following table, with all running from 12:00-19:00.

Date	Location
8 October 2018	Inverurie Town Hall
9 October 2018	Inverurie Town Hall
10 October 2018	Stewarts Hall, Huntly
11 October 2018	Kinellar Community Hall, Blackburn

3.2 Route Options

3.2.1 The initial route options being considered can be viewed at the following link: <https://www.transport.gov.scot/media/43257/leaflet-october-2018-east-of-huntly-to-aberdeen-a96-dualling.pdf>, with the route options plan also included in **Appendix 1**. Copies of the consultation material will also be available for Members at the Area Committee. It is important to note that the route standard proposed for the upgraded A96 Trunk Road is in essence a wholly stand-alone dual carriageway with grade separated junctions.

3.2.2 Three route sections can be identified with three distinct route options provided for each section of the corridor between Aberdeen and Huntly.

- a. Between Huntly and Colpy, the three route options are Lime (L), Cyan (C), and Red (R). The Cyan options sit broadly along the existing alignment of the A96; the Lime option runs to the north of the current A96; and the Red option runs to the south.
- b. From Colpy to Pitcaple, the three route options are Blue (B), Pink (P), and Brown (B). The Brown option runs west of the existing alignment between Colpy and Old Rayne and north-east of the alignment between Old Rayne and Whiteford. The Pink options run to the north-east of Colpy and Old Rayne; and the Blue option runs further north, running close to the alignment of the A920.
- c. Between Whiteford and Kintore, there are four route options, three of which go to the north-east of Inverurie, and one of which goes to the south-west of Inverurie. The Orange (O) option ties into the existing A96 at Thainstone. The Violet (V) option connects Whiteford to the Tavelty Junction to the north of Kintore and is the closest to Inverurie on the north-east. The Green (G) option connects Whiteford to Tavelty, but runs closer to Oldmeldrum. The Blue (B) option continues from the A920 alignment to the west of Oldmeldrum with options to intersect with either the Green or Violet routes.

3.2.3 The consultation documentation sets out that the options (as considered in Spring 2018) to the south-west of Inverurie, which ran in close proximity to Bennachie, have been discarded. It is also worth highlighting that following further analysis by Transport Scotland, the specific route option which included the A947 corridor between Oldmeldrum and Dyce has not been taken forward (Option Q).

3.2.4 It should be noted that the lines shown on the route options plan are not fixed and do not yet represent the actual width of the road footprint required in any particular location. The location and form of junctions connecting the new dual carriageway to the local road network will be considered further as the design process continues. There is a commitment that the junctions will be grade separated i.e. using flyovers/underpasses and slip roads.

- 3.2.5 No indication has been given as to the further work that Transport Scotland will also take forward in looking at the junctions on the existing A96 dual carriageway between Kintore and the AWPR.
- 3.2.6 Transport Scotland is seeking comments on the initial route options by 22 November 2018. Garioch Area Committee is therefore being asked to provide comments on the route options presented. These comments will be fed back to the meeting of the Infrastructure Services Committee on 29 November 2018, alongside officer observations. Transport Scotland has accordingly been advised that the Council's full and formal response will be a week later than its published cut-off date for comments.

4 Key Issues

4.1 Option Q

- 4.1.1 The initial consideration of corridors presented by Transport Scotland 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. This option was ruled out during the pre-assessment sifting stages, and Aberdeenshire Council along with other stakeholders raised concerns that this option had been ruled out prematurely.
- 4.1.2 In response to these concerns, Transport Scotland has carried out a further review of Improvement Strategy Option Q.
- 4.1.3 Transport Scotland has concluded that the A920 corridor between Colpy and Oldmeldrum (which formed the western element of Option Q) is being considered further as part of the DMRB Stage 2 Assessment on the basis that it follows an existing road corridor, facilitates a connection to a northern bypass of Inverurie and performs well against the scheme objectives. In essence the western end of Option Q is represented by the Blue option in this consultation.
- 4.1.4 However, Transport Scotland has explained that the south-eastern element of Option Q, which followed the A947 corridor between Oldmeldrum and Dyce, is not being considered further on the basis that it does not perform well against the scheme objectives, in particular highlighting the following issues:
- a) Traffic modelling indicates that the majority of A96 traffic will continue to use the existing route from Inverurie, past Kintore and Blackburn, rather than transfer to a new route in the A947 corridor;
 - b) Existing A96 operational performance issues between Aberdeen and Inverurie would not be addressed, the existing A96 dual carriageway being de-trunked without improvement despite it carrying the majority of the traffic;
 - c) Side roads, accesses and existing settlements limit opportunities for online dualling of the A947;
 - d) Dualling in the A947 corridor will induce impacts in an area unspoiled by dual carriageway, with no compensatory benefit generated along the existing A96 dual carriageway;

- e) Significant junction amendments to the new AWPR Goval junction would be required to facilitate a dual carriageway connection; and
- f) The A947 route through Dyce towards Aberdeen is longer and of a poorer standard than the existing A96 from the AWPR into Aberdeen.

4.1.5 Council officials have formally requested copies of the technical assessments that have led Transport Scotland and their consultants to reach these conclusions, but at the time of preparing this committee report, the information was still to be received. However, the crux of the argument appears to rotate around the attractiveness to traffic of an improved dual carriageway broadly along the alignment of the A947, as opposed to the existing alignment of the A96.

4.1.6 Council officers are of the view that if options to the north-east of Inverurie were taken forward as the preferred option of Scottish Ministers, this would likely provide an attractive route into Aberdeen for existing users of the A947 who have origins or destinations to the north of Oldmeldrum. This in turn may provide some traffic relief for users of the A947 to the south of Oldmeldrum. However, analysis of traffic forecasts would be required to further evidence this and this additional area of work has been flagged in initial discussions with Transport Scotland officials and their consultants. Such a re-distribution of traffic may also indicate a requirement to consider improvements to the road network between Inverurie and the upgraded A96, due to the consequential change in strategic importance of these links.

4.2 Aberdeenshire Council Position Statement

4.2.1 At its meeting on 26 April 2018, Aberdeenshire Council agreed a Position Statement on the A96 Dualling – East of Huntly to Aberdeen. The agreed Position Statement is outlined in **Appendix 2**.

4.2.2 It is considered that the options presented by Transport Scotland partially address the comments raised by Aberdeenshire Council as part of the Position Statement, provided that the preferred option is one to the north-east of Inverurie (Blue, Green or Violet, as opposed to Orange). The options presented:

- a) Alleviate concerns about the effects of the project on the landscape around Bennachie;
- b) 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;
- c) 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;
- d) Could potentially relieve traffic pressure on the A947 and improve the commuting experience for northern communities located along the A947 corridor including Banff, Macduff, and Turriff by improving safety and reducing journey times between Oldmeldrum and Aberdeen; and
- e) Afford the opportunity to enhance active and sustainable transport provision along the current A96 for the benefit of residents of Port Elphinstone and Inverurie.

4.2.3 Concerns still remain that:

- a) The Violet option does not alleviate concerns about the effects of the project on Keith Hall and Gardens Designated Landscape;
- b) None of the options would improve access to the A96 for population centres in Newmachar, Dyce or Bridge of Don; and
- c) None of the options would improve access to Dyce Station.

4.2.4 With respect to active travel, opportunities to enhance active and sustainable transport provision along the current A96 for the benefit of residents in Blackburn and Kintore will probably depend on the detail that comes out of the next stage of the design process. There are opportunities as the existing local road will be retained in addition to the new dual carriageway. However, these opportunities will only be realised by appropriate design details and allocation of funding.

5 Next Steps

5.1 Transport Scotland and its consultants will continue to progress the development and assessment of route options for the A96 Dualling East of Huntly to Aberdeen Scheme.

5.2 The initial route options presented will be subject to further design and development as part of the DMRB Stage 2 Assessment process, and will take into account:

- a) Detailed dialogue with landowners and stakeholders directly affected by the published route options;
- b) Continued consultation with key organisations such as the Council, and community organisations;
- c) Continued environmental assessment, including specific site walkover surveys along the identified route options;
- d) Development of the potential form and location of junctions using traffic modelling;
- e) Preliminary structures, earthworks and drainage design;
- f) Flood modelling; and
- g) Consideration of the needs of Non-Motorised Users (NMUs).

5.3 Transport Scotland will provide updates during the process and further public exhibitions will be held when the preferred option is announced, to provide an opportunity for vital comment and feedback from stakeholders, local communities and members of the public. A preferred option is expected to be selected during 2019.

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

6 Scheme of Governance

6.1 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.

7 Implications and Risk

- 7.1 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.
- 7.2 There are no direct 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.
- 7.3 No Risks have been identified at Corporate or Strategic Level as a preferred option has not been identified at this stage. Whichever offline option is taken forward will have a direct impact on the scale of the road network that Aberdeenshire Council will be responsible for maintaining and managing.
- 7.4 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.

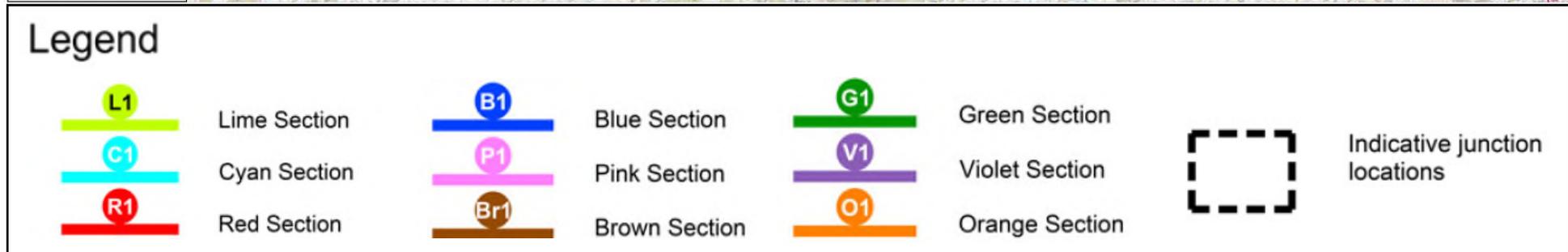
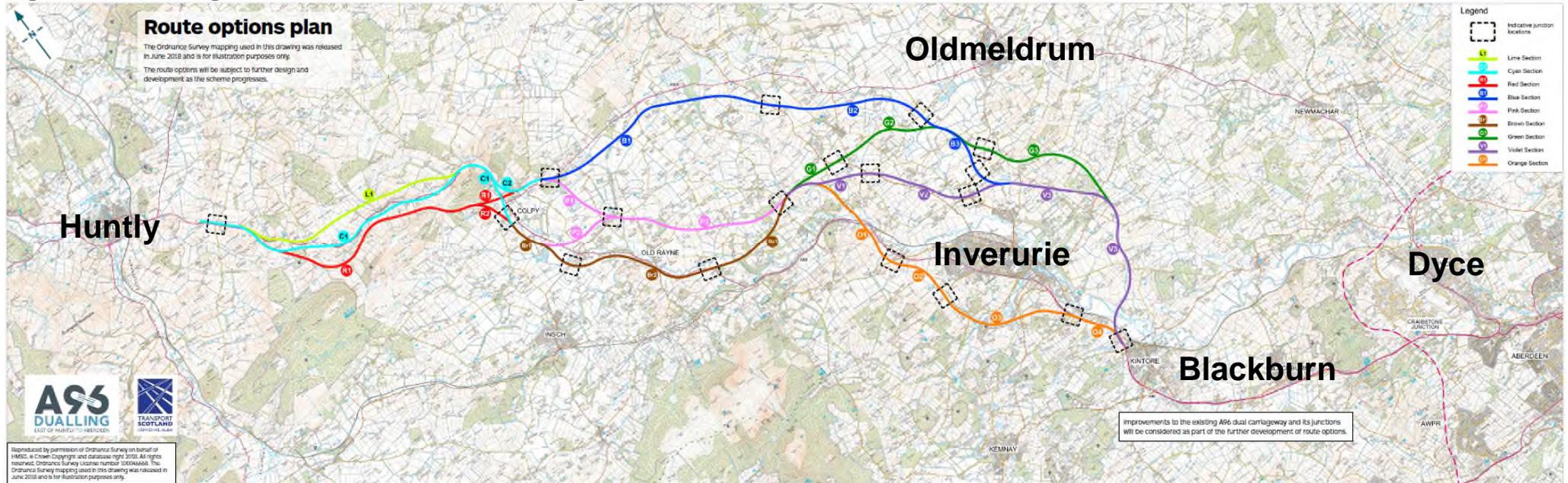
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10 October 2018

Appendix 1: Route Options

Figure 1 shows the route options plan, extracted from the Transport Scotland publication available at: <https://www.transport.gov.scot/media/43257/leaflet-october-2018-east-of-huntly-to-aberdeen-a96-dualling.pdf>.

Figure 1: Indicative Alignments for A96 Eastern Section Dualling



Appendix 2: Position Statement

The Position Statement on the A96 Dualling East of Huntly to Aberdeen as agreed by Aberdeenshire Council on 26 April 2018 is as follows:

- 1) 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. In particular, route options to the north-east of Inverurie:
 - a. 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;
 - b. 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 corridors;
 - c. 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;
 - d. 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;
 - e. Could potentially relieve traffic pressure on the A947, improving safety and reducing journey times between Oldmeldrum and Aberdeen;
 - f. Although further from Inverurie than other options, 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;
 - g. Although the trunk road would be further from Kintore Station it would be closer to Dyce Station;

- h. Provide 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;
 - i. Afford 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
 - j. 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) In addition, current and future assessment work should also take into account:
- a. Development pressure on Inverurie and the constraints on this that transport is imposing on the long term development;
 - b. 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;
 - c. Development pressure on Newmachar and the opportunity for further development that would be presented with a proximal trunk road;
 - d. The necessity of not imposing constraints on the positioning of the Huntly bypass due to the positioning of the Eastern Section;
 - e. 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;
 - f. The scale of patterns of traffic distribution beyond Inverurie and Oldmeldrum;
 - g. The importance of the route for Heavy Goods Vehicles (HGVs), agricultural vehicles and vehicles servicing the energy sector and how these can be accommodated; and
 - h. Future aspirations for transport in the north east of Scotland, particularly the benefits of considering the A96 and A947 corridors together as part of a combined transport and accessibility strategy for the north-west of the region.
- 3) 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.