

PE1610/ZZ: Upgrade the A75 and PE1657/WW: A77 upgrade

Cabinet Secretary for Transport written submission, 2 December 2024

Thank you for your letter dated 6 November 2024 regarding *PE1610: Upgrade the A75* and *PE1657: A77 upgrade*. You will be aware that both petitions have been under consideration by the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee consideration since 2016 and 2017, respectively. The petitions call on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to upgrade the A75 and A77 to dual carriageway in their entirety. I refer you to previous responses which set out the position of the Government on this matter in full.

Transport Scotland published the South West Scotland Transport Study in January 2020 which formed the STPR2 Initial Appraisal: Case for Change for the South West region. This robust, evidence based appraisal does not recommend taking forward the option for full dualling of either the A75 or A77. Instead, STPR2 recommends that targeted road improvements on both routes are taken forward for further consideration.

The issues raised during recent Committee Meetings on this matter, and the subsequent requests for evidence, no longer align with the original intention of either petition, instead focusing on timescales and funding for the recommendations we have set out in STPR2. It appears that the Committee understand the position of the Government with regards to full dualling. On that basis, I would therefore reiterate the call from the previous Minister for Transport for the Committee to accept this evidence, together with that previously provided, and move to close both petitions which call for the full dualling of both routes.

However, answers to the specific questions asked within your letter are as follows.

STPR2 is a long term ambitious framework for investment in transport. Development of the STPR2 Delivery Plan is underway. This takes account of the current financial climate and is examining existing schemes across all modes, in addition to the longer term STPR2 recommendations.

The latest Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) forecasts, following the UK Government Autumn Budget Statement, show an improved medium term outlook for capital. The Scottish Government will continue to consider its longer-term infrastructure plans after we receive clarity from the UK Government over our multi-year capital funding envelope in the Spring.

As referred to within your letter, the new UK Government through its Autumn Budget has announced that it will fulfil the commitment made by the previous Government to fund initial design work for improvements to the A75 at Springholm and Crocketford with the provision of up to £5 million funding in 2025-26.

Following the previous UK Government's commitment, Transport Scotland officials had progressed a robust procurement process to appoint technical advisors to take forward the initial design and assessment work to consider appropriate options for realigning the A75 trunk road at Springholm and Crocketford. This process was paused whilst the new UK Government re-confirmed the commitment made by the previous UK Government.

The recent announcement of funding for next financial year has allowed Transport Scotland to complete this procurement process with more certainty. On 15 November 2024, I announced our intention to award the contract to undertake this work to Jacobs UK Ltd, subject to completion of a 10 day standstill period.

I am pleased that we can now get on and commence the initial design and assessment work for by-passing these two villages on the A75. This design and assessment work will be the first step for this project as we seek to improve the critical link between Ireland and the markets in the rest of the UK and Europe by improving connectivity between the port at Cairnryan and the wider trunk road network. Transport Scotland will be engaging with members of the public, road users and other stakeholders in the coming months as the improvements project progresses.

The provision of £5 million for next financial year is in addition to funding received this year. As a result of the delay to the procurement process during the UK spending review, we have been unable to spend any of this years' funding until this point. My officials at Transport Scotland are working closely with UK Department for Transport counterparts to ensure a shared understanding of the updated cost profile for future years. This is a complex piece of work which will require multi-year spending, and I will therefore continue to work with the UK Government to fulfil the commitment in future years within Phase 2 of its multi-year spending review.

To conclude, this Government has a firm commitment through STPR2 Recommendation 40 to invest in the safety, resilience and reliability of the A75 and A77. The evidence I have set out here, and within previous responses, clearly signals this Government's intent for the improvement of both the A75 and A77. Whilst the recommendation is not to dual either road, the robust evidence based approach that has been taken by the South West Transport Study and STPR2 in coming to this recommendation ensures that the proposed alternative supports regional transport objectives, whilst more proportionately meeting the Sustainable Investment Hierarchy set out in the National Transport Strategy. This supports our commitment to delivering transport projects which will help us to create the conditions for an inclusive and net zero emissions economy.

Yours Sincerely,

FIONA HYSLOP