

Scottish Government submission of 31 August 2022

PE1610: Upgrade the A75 / PE1657: A77 upgrade

Thank you for your letter of the 10 September 2021 to the Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport regarding PE1610: Upgrade the A75 / PE1657: A77 upgrade that the committee is considering. In addition, thank you for your patience, as an administrative issue has unfortunately caused a delay in your letter being actioned. I have been asked to respond given that both routes have been subject to review as part of the second Strategic Transport Projects Review (STPR2).

I would note that both petitions have been ongoing for a numbers of years and I am aware that previous evidence provided by Scottish Ministers and Transport Scotland officials has pointed to the fact that STPR2 would outline what future infrastructure investment was required for both the A75 and A77. I am therefore happy to report that on the 22 January 2022 the Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport reported to Parliament the publication of the reviews' outcomes in the form of 45 draft recommendations. Included within the review is Recommendation 40 – *Access to Stranraer / Cairnryan* which highlighted proposals for improvements for both the A75 and A77, together with the need to consider further, future improvements to Stranraer railway station. Specifically, STPR2 recommends that safety, resilience and reliability improvements are made on the A75 and A77 strategic road corridors, in turn supporting placemaking opportunities. This would include, but is not limited to enhancing overtaking opportunities, widening or realigning carriageways and improving junctions.

To assist the committee in their further consideration of both these petitions, it may be helpful to note that the South West Scotland Transport Study (which formed the STPR2 - Initial Appraisal: Case for Change for the South West Region), published in January 2020, did not recommended taking forward the option for full dualling of either the A75 or the A77. Instead an option for targeted road improvements on both routes was recommended to progress for further appraisal as part of STPR2. This was on the basis that this option supported the regional transport objectives, whilst more proportionately meeting the Sustainable

Investment Hierarchy set out in the National Transport Strategy and our commitment to delivering transport projects which will help us to create the conditions for an inclusive and net zero emissions economy.

I would further note the appraisal process for STPR2 has considered the performance of all options against transport planning objectives, which are aligned to our National Transport Strategy priorities. STPR2 in coming to the conclusion that it has, has also considered Value for Money based on performance against these objectives and the five Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance Criteria. This is an important consideration given the current and future pressures on public finances.

With regard to your second query, STPR2 did consider surface access and the necessary infrastructure requirements to Scotland's major ports and airports, including those on the west coast. It also recommends an investment programme in port infrastructure, including power supplies, to support STPR2 recommendation (24) renewal and replacement of the Clyde and Hebrides Ferry Services (CHFS) and Northern Isles Ferry Services (NIFS) vessels including progressive decarbonisation by 2045.

However, I believe your specific query refers to investment in ports along the South and West coast of Scotland in order to attract further freight movements to the Island of Ireland and thereby reduce the number of HGV movements on the A77. In this wider regard, consideration of port infrastructure was "out of scope" of STPR2. This was on the basis that, ports in Scotland are independent statutory bodies – each governed by their own local legislation – and are deemed commercial entities. Therefore, the Scottish Government has no say in the day-to-day running of their business, nor can it dictate business decisions made by a company on how to best utilise its resources. This remains the responsibility of the port authority.

The final point that you have raised is in connection with the A75 and the Union Connectivity Review (UCR). I would note that the UCR was published in two steps, with an interim report presented in March 2021 and the final report on the 26 November 2021.

I must firstly highlight Scottish Ministers' concerns that the UCR was established without consultation with the Devolved Governments. Their position is that some of the recommendations in the UCR final report present a risk of encroachment into Scotland's devolved settlement.

Although the UCR's findings recommends improvements for the A75, a shared view by Scottish Ministers, the trunk road network in Scotland is and must continue to be the responsibility of Scottish Ministers. The UK Government (UKG) must respect the devolution settlement and accept that it is for Scottish Ministers to determine their priorities and provide funding in line with established budgetary mechanisms for Scotland.

A £20m Union Connectivity Development Fund was also announced at the same time as the UCR interim report was published. This funding is not for delivery, it is for development – which Scottish Government were already doing. The UCR offers funding support for the A75 and Transport Scotland officials are in discussion with their UKG counterparts to understand how this may be accessed. Scottish Ministers are prepared to discuss funding with the UK Government, but need assurance that this would be additional funding and not top-sliced and repackaged existing monies.

In conclusion, I hope that I have been able to clarify the position with respect to the Committee's queries and with the publication of the STPR2 draft recommendations have clearly signalled the Scottish Government's intent to upgrade both routes. The 12 week consultation on all 45 draft STPR2 recommendations closed on the 15 April and Transport Scotland is now considering all of the responses received, including a number from stakeholders in the South West of Scotland. This analysis will inform the final reporting and investment delivery plan which is scheduled to be published later this year. Taken together, these documents, when published, will then provide the evidence base behind the future strategic transport investment priorities for Scotland for the next 20 years, whilst informing future Scottish Government spending reviews and budgets.