

Cabinet Secretary for Transport submission of 20 March 2024

PE1916/I: Request a public inquiry into the management of the rest and be thankful project

Thank you for your letter of 23 February 2024 concerning the above petition following further consideration at the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee meeting on Wednesday 21 February 2024.

In your letter you are seeking further detail on the delivery plan, funding, and governance of the A83 Rest and Be Thankful project including information on work being undertaken to ensure the statutory processes and construction are completed without unnecessary delay. You are also seeking an indication of where this project sits in relation to the delivery of other major infrastructure projects currently being undertaken. I will address each of these points in turn.

Delivery plan for the Permanent Long-Term Solution

I can assure you that the Scottish Government is steadfastly committed to an infrastructure solution to address landslip risks at the A83 Rest and Be Thankful. Delivery of a permanent and resilient solution is a priority and we will continue to seek ways to achieve that as quickly as possible.

I fully recognise the impacts landslips have on the local community and businesses and I share the urgency required on maintaining and improving connectivity of this vital route, which is why we are progressing measures for the short, medium and long term in tandem.

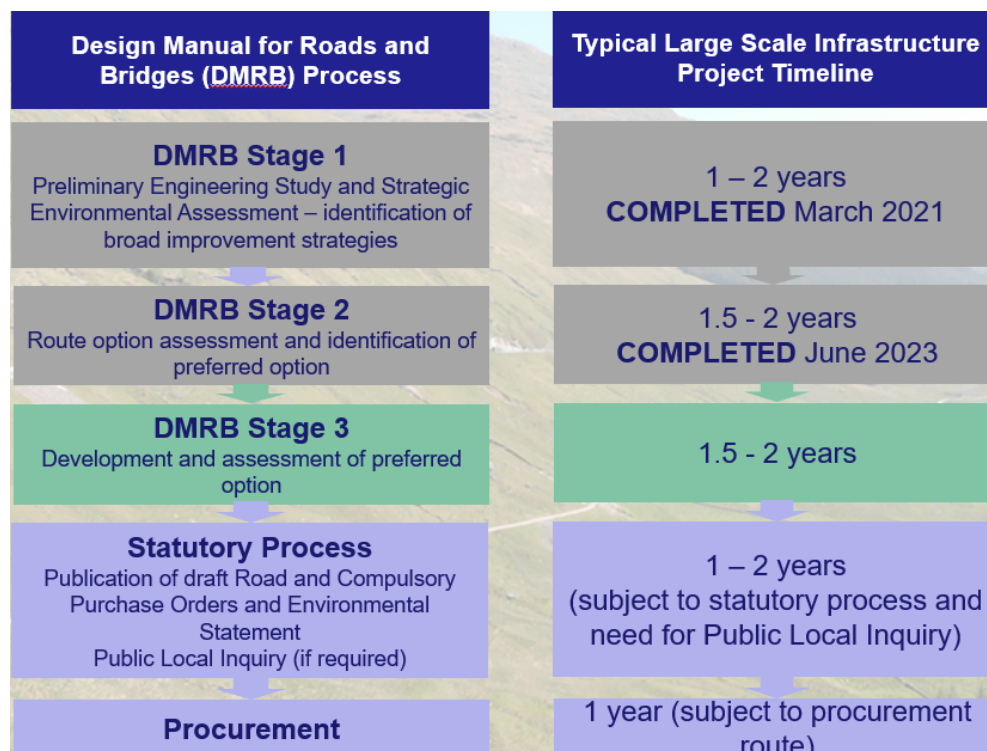
We continue to progress design work at pace and the announcement on 2 June 2023 of the preferred route option for the long term solution through the Glen Croe valley is a very important milestone to this long-standing problem. The proposed new debris flow shelter will help protect the road and road users from future landslides.

The next step for the project, which is the detailed design and assessment of the preferred option, is progressing swiftly and will conclude with the publication of draft Orders for comment, with publication expected by the end of 2024. Progress following publication of draft Orders will depend on the level and nature of any representations, including objections, to the published draft Orders.

As with all our infrastructure projects, construction of the long term solution can only commence if it is approved under the relevant statutory authorisation process and thereafter a timetable for construction can be determined.

However, let me assure you this scheme is a priority for us, it is a key recommendation in the Strategic Transport Projects Review 2 (STPR2), it is included in the Programme for Government 2023 to 2024 as well as the First Minister’s Policy Prospectus, highlighting our commitment to a solution to the challenges at the Rest and Be Thankful. In addition, I can confirm that at the travelling cabinet meeting in Inveraray on 2 October 2023 the First Minister gave a commitment for a solution at the Rest and Be Thankful with the funding to support it.

The diagram below shows typical timescales for the various stages of a large infrastructure project, such as this scheme, and was presented at A83 Taskforce meetings in January and October 2023. The project is currently at Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (DMRB¹) Stage 3 as indicated in green in the diagram.



¹ The Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (DMRB) assessment process is considered standard good practice and used throughout the UK for assessing road schemes of this scope. The three-stage assessment process considers engineering, environment, traffic and economic criteria.

Delivery plan for the Medium term solution:

The medium term solution consists of improvements to the existing Old Military Road through the Glen Croe corridor to make it a more resilient diversion route until the long term solution is in place. These improvements will improve the resilience of the diversion route, reduce journey times, and are the quickest to implement and would have the least impacts overall across the range of criteria assessed of the medium term options considered.

It is expected that these works will be carried out on a phased basis with Phase 1, which is the realignment of the southern end of the route, having commenced in December 2023 and due for completion this Spring. A detailed programme for future phases of the proposed medium term improvements is currently being developed. These include debris catch fences, temporary bunds, drainage improvements and road widening. It is anticipated that Phases 2 and 3 will commence during 2024/25, subject to obtaining any necessary statutory authorisation consents. Construction of these phases, to complete the medium term works, are expected to take approximately 12 months, subject to weather conditions.

Funding

The current estimated cost for the permanent, long-term solution is between £405 million and £470 million at 2023 prices. At this stage we present a range as there remain a number of unknowns (e.g. ground conditions), so as we gather more information and develop the design in greater detail during DMRB Stage 3, we will be able to more accurately estimate the cost of the scheme.

Funding as set out in the Scottish Budget 2023-24 provides allocation to commence delivery of the medium-term improvements, which started in a phased manner in December 2023, along with taking forward preparatory work on the long-term solution. As we move into 2024-25, I would like to reassure you that funding is included in the Budget approved by Parliament to continue to progress both the medium and long term solutions.

Funding to take forward the construction stage of the long term solution will be determined as part of the annual Scottish Budget setting process and subsequent capital spending reviews (CSR).

The Scottish Government has been consistently open about the challenges facing our capital investment plans and tough decisions will need to be taken to ensure we remain fiscally sustainable. The challenging economic conditions of the last few years resulting from Brexit and high inflation as well as the real terms fall in the capital grant allocation from the UK Government has significantly impacted our ability to deliver on all capital infrastructure commitments. However, despite the challenges to our capital investment plans, the Scottish Government remains committed to delivering the vital improvements needed to address the landslip risks at the Rest and Be Thankful.

Governance of A83 Rest and Be Thankful

As highlighted above the scheme is being designed and assessed in accordance with the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (DMRB) assessment process. As an integral part of this assessment process, Transport Scotland has and will continue to consult with a diverse range of stakeholders, local communities and interested parties, including, environmental, public transport and active travel groups.

We are currently progressing DMRB Stage 3 which is the detailed development and assessment of the preferred option and this stage will culminate in the publication of draft road Orders, compulsory purchase Orders and Environmental Impact Assessment in accordance with the Road (Scotland) Act 1984. We expect to publish draft Orders by the end of 2024. Progress thereafter will depend on whether any objections are received to the proposed scheme.

Construction of the scheme can only commence once the statutory process is complete and a main works contractor appointed. We are duty bound to properly follow the correct statutory planning process which rightly includes consultation with communities, landowners and others with a direct interest in the scheme.

Additionally, Transport Scotland is progressing the project through the necessary governance approval procedures which is standard practice for projects of this scale. These procedures include: preparation of a Strategic Business Case; preparation of the Outline Business Case; and approval from Transport Scotland's Investment and Decision Making (IDM) Board at key milestones of the project to inform investment decisions.

Indication of where this project sits in relation to the delivery of other major infrastructure projects currently being undertaken

With respect to the point you raised on delivery and where this project sits within Transport Scotland's priorities, I would note the impact of the UK Government's Spring budget is forecast to see our block grant for capital reduce in real terms by 2027-28 – a cumulative loss of over £1.3 billion. Despite this, the 2024-25 Scottish Budget includes over £3.87 billion to be spent on transport across Scotland. At the same time, we are prioritising our spending towards our core missions and making difficult choices to ensure our finances remain on a sustainable trajectory.

However, next financial year we plan to spend over £1 billion on our critical safety, adaptation, maintenance and improvement priorities on the trunk road network. This is essential for undertaking the vital work on the A83 at the Rest and Be Thankful and for the repair of the M8 Woodside Viaduct, which are just two examples of the investment that is being undertaken to look after our transport assets.

Looking forward, we are carefully considering the implications for all our capital improvement programmes. The intention is that this will be set out in a forthcoming transport investment Delivery Plan. Further details on how we are approaching this work are set-out in my letter to the Committee, dated 29 January 2024, in relation to a similar question regarding the A75 and A77, in relation to Petitions: PE1610 and PE1657. For reference, a copy my letter is available on your webpage here: [pe1610ww_pe1657tt.pdf \(parliament.scot\)](#).

I would like to thank the Committee for their letter and hope that this response provides clarification on the queries that have been raised. Rest assured, delivery of a permanent and resilient solution is a priority, as I have outlined above, and we will continue to seek ways to achieve that as quickly as possible.

Your sincerely

Fiona Hyslop
Cabinet Secretary for Transport