

Rhoda Grant MSP submission of 8 June 2023

PE1992/E: Dual the A9 and improve road safety

I would like to thank the Committee for allowing my submission to be heard today. I am very sorry I cannot attend in person as I now sit on another committee that meets at the same time.

I would however reiterate what I have said previously on this subject - that the A9 is an issue that impacts on my constituents well beyond Inverness; the A9 is the gateway to the Highlands and beyond.

Many people say there are no dangerous roads, only dangerous drivers, but roads play a huge part in mitigating driver error and keeping people safe.

I drive this road regularly and have seen very strange driver behaviour but most of it would have been mitigated had it been a dual carriageway.

The SNP made a manifesto commitment to dual this road at the 2007 election. They have repeated that commitment and the Scottish Government promised, in 2011, full dualling to Inverness by 2025.

Sadly progress has been slow. Of the 11 stretches to be dualled we have only seen 2 delivered, and one delayed.

Our new First Minister gave a commitment at the SNP Leadership Debate in Inverness in March of this year that the A9 will be 'the priority' for the new leader. Mr Yousaf admitted not making more progress was "a failure" and said "If I am First Minister, the first thing I will do is sit down with my Finance Secretary who I will appoint and say this is the priority and the budget has to reflect this." He continued "This is not just about connectivity, it is about lives and safety, the A9 and A96."

Last year, there were 8 deaths on a 25-mile stretch near Slochd in just 3 months. Total deaths between Perth and Inverness in 2022 was 13.

A previous Transport Minister, Jenny Gilruth, has blamed the war in Ukraine, Brexit, Covid and inflation for the delay.

However, in truth had the work been carried out with the 2025 goal as a clear target, contracts would have already been issued, land would have

been purchased and designs would have been signed off long before any of these issues became an impact.

A construction industry source said recently: "If the Scottish Government chooses to build the remaining 9 sections just one at a time [as has happened so far], you need to factor in that it will take roughly one year to procure and 2 years to build each section. If they do not run elements of the process concurrently then you are approaching 2050 for the completion of the dualling.

The average cost of a fatal road traffic accident investigation is £2million – that's £26million last year just on the A9 south from Inverness.

I would suggest the Committee asks the First Minister how he will make good his promise to the people of the Highlands and provide a timescale for doing that.

We also need an inquiry to see what has gone wrong, to examine what progress has been made and to bring forward realistic timeframes within which this promise can be delivered. I unequivocally support petition PE1992.