

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee
Wednesday 26 November 2025
18th Meeting, 2025 (Session 6)

PE2132: Publish a timeline for the dualling of the A96 between Inverness and Nairn by Easter 2025

Introduction

Petitioner The Inverness Courier

Petition summary Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to publish a clear timeline for the dualling of the A96 between Inverness and Nairn and the construction of a bypass for Nairn, ensuring that this timeline is made public by Easter 2025.

Webpage <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE2132>

1. [The Committee last considered this petition at its meeting on 23 April 2025](#). At that meeting, the Committee agreed to write to the Cabinet Secretary for Transport.
2. The petition summary is included in **Annexe A** and the Official Report of the Committee's last consideration of this petition is at **Annexe B**.
3. The Committee has received a new written submission from the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, which is set out in **Annexe C**.
4. [Written submissions received prior to the Committee's last consideration can be found on the petition's webpage](#).
5. [Further background information about this petition can be found in the SPICe briefing](#) for this petition.
6. [The Scottish Government gave its initial response to the petition on 14 January 2025](#).
7. Every petition collects signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 508 signatures have been received on this petition.

Action

8. The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take.

Clerks to the Committee
November 2025

Annexe A: Summary of petition

PE2132: Publish a timeline for the dualling of the A96 between Inverness and Nairn by Easter 2025

Petitioner

The Inverness Courier

Date Lodged

13 December 2024

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to publish a clear timeline for the dualling of the A96 between Inverness and Nairn and the construction of a bypass for Nairn, ensuring that this timeline is made public by Easter 2025.

Background information

For decades, people in Nairn and surrounding areas have called for a bypass to take traffic from the A96 trunk road out of its town centre.

In 2011 the Scottish Government pledged to complete the dual carriageway network between all of Scotland's cities – including the dualling of the A96 and Nairn Bypass, with a preferred route published in 2014.

In March 2024, Made Orders were published and the process for the acquisition of land required for the scheme started in May 2024.

At present there is no timeline for when the project is set to be delivered.

After more than a decade of delays, local communities continue to face worsening traffic congestion, pollution, and road safety risks.

With significant developments set to bring thousands of new residents and workers to the area, urgent action is needed to address these growing challenges which will further impact the livelihoods of communities affected.

Annexe B: Extract from Official Report of last consideration of PE2132 on 23 April 2025

The Convener: The last of the road petitions is PE2132, lodged by the *Inverness Courier*, which calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to publish a clear timeline for the dualling of the A96 between Inverness and Nairn and the construction of a bypass for Nairn and to ensure that the timeline is made public by Easter 2025—which ended two days ago.

During the evidence session on 2 April, the cabinet secretary confirmed that the procedural steps for the acquisition of land had been concluded, and we understand that Scottish ministers took title to the land in question earlier this week. We also heard that the potential use of the mutual investment model to fund the dualling of the A96 from Inverness to Nairn is currently being consulted on as part of engagement with industry. The cabinet secretary indicated that the timetable for the project will be determined by the type of procurement that the Government decides to progress. She also indicated a willingness to provide a statement to the Parliament on dualling the A96 Inverness to Nairn bypass before the end of the current parliamentary session—that would be a statement, at least.

Mr Ewing raised the issue of the certainty that could be provided to the public and contractors by having a long-term plan for road infrastructure plans, noting the approach that has been taken in Germany over a 30-year period. Although the cabinet secretary acknowledged that constructive suggestion, she also highlighted the challenges involved in adopting such an approach, particularly as we await the outcome of the UK Government's capital spending review, which will subsequently inform the update to the Scottish Government's infrastructure investment plan.

Do members have any comments or suggestions for action???

Fergus Ewing: I declare a very strong interest as the constituency MSP for this section of the A96 and as someone who has campaigned for at least three and a half decades for the dualling of the road.

The cabinet secretary's evidence raised more questions than it provided answers, so I respectfully suggest that we write to her to seek clarity on a number of issues. The first issue is the progress that the Scottish Government is making to develop a detailed timeline for the dualling of the A96 between Inverness and Nairn and the construction of a bypass for Nairn, given that the acquisition of the land is now about to take place or is about to be completed.

The second issue is whether the expected statement to the Parliament, to which the convener alluded, on the decision on the use of mutual investment model contracts for the remaining sections of the A9 will also include an update on the use of MIM as a procurement option for dualling the A96 between Inverness and Nairn, or whether the cabinet secretary expects that there will be separate parliamentary statements—one for the A9 and one for the A96.

There are three other brief issues that I wish to include in the letter to the cabinet secretary. First, the Auditor General has expressed some criticism about the use of MIM, and it would be interesting to hear the cabinet secretary's response to that.

12:30

Secondly, the convener referenced the review of the capital budget. However, the capital budget this year is over £6 billion, and it is to be expected that it would be of that order for the next 10 years—in other words, £50 billion or £60 billion over the next 10 years. By my reckoning, the combined cost of the commitments on the A96 and the A9 would be far less than a tenth of that. What the cabinet secretary has never done—and what we might usefully invite her to do—is say why we cannot use the existing capital budget and the design and build options. It seems that, if the Highlands is to be attributed the priority that I believe that the area should be given, there is more than enough money for the investments in those roads, given the likely scale of the capital budget historically and going forward.

Lastly, there is considerable industry concern about the method of procurement at present—and under MIM, which might be unpopular with some contractors, because they would not be able to bid against European companies due to the scale of the contract. There is a belief that a framework approach, as used by Scottish Water and SSEN, should be used, which would mean that a number of companies would be qualified to obtain work over the next, say, 10 years, which considerably reduces the costs and bureaucracy involved and would provide certainty for the companies, as they would know that they would have an order book. It would also mean that we can deliver our roads contracts. Otherwise, the civil engineering contracting companies in the Highlands may well choose to do other less risky and more profitable work, such as projects involving pump storage, railways, grid upgrades, wind farms, housing, health infrastructure and so on.

Even if, after 15 years of dithering and indecision, we resolve the funding issue, there are increasing worries, as expressed by Grahame Barn of the Civil Engineering Contractors Association, that we might find that there is no one left to come to the ball—that is, there is no dance partner or contractor, because they are doing other work that has to be done, to the scale of around £50 billion to £60 billion in the Highlands alone over the next 10 years.

I am sorry to speak at such length—not for the first time, I daresay, convener—but I hope that members will agree that we should seek answers now to each of those issues, rather than waiting to the very fag end of the parliamentary session. Lastly, I thank the *Inverness Courier* for its campaigning efforts to stand up for the people whom I represent and the people who read it.

The Convener: Thank you for your comprehensive set of recommendations. I can see that the clerks have been scribbling furiously as they try to keep up with the various additional thoughts about how we might proceed.

Do members agree keep the petition open and proceed as suggested?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Annexe C: Written submission

Cabinet Secretary for Transport written submission, 16 May 2025

PE2132/B: Publish a timeline for the dualling of the A96 between Inverness and Nairn by Easter 2025

Thank you for your letter dated 28 April 2025 regarding petition number PE2132: Publish a timeline for the dualling of the A96 between Inverness and Nairn by Easter 2025.

I would like to reassure the Committee that the Scottish Government is committed to improving the A96. The current favoured position is to fully dual the A96 and we are already starting the dualling process from Inverness to Nairn, including the Nairn Bypass.

Following the publication of Made Orders last year, which completed the statutory process for the scheme, my officials at Transport Scotland have been pressing ahead with the procedural steps to take forward the final stage of the process to acquire the land required to construct the scheme.

As I advised the committee during my appearance on 2 April 2025, the procedural steps to make this happen have now been completed, marking another key milestone for the project and a further strong sign of the Scottish Government's commitment to deliver this project. I can advise that the Scottish Ministers have taken title to the land which has been acquired through the General Vesting Declaration (GVD) process on 21 April.

We also continue to progress the work to determine the most suitable procurement option for delivering the schemes and thereafter a timetable for progress can then be set in line with available budgets.

The Government's preference would be to deliver the scheme using capital funding, but because of erosion to our capital budget, we need to look at all possible ways of delivering the road improvement. It is fundamental that contracting authorities allow sufficient time to properly consider the range of procurement routes available for any given project. This is important to ensure that the chosen procurement option generates sufficient competition to maximise value for money, delivers against the objectives of the intervention and complies with all statutory and regulatory requirements.

A market consultation was launched on 24 February 2025 to inform further decision-making for completion of A9 Dualling and also to seek industry views to inform development of the procurement approach for the A96 Dualling Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass) and A9/A96 Inshes to Smithton projects. The feedback received from this market consultation will be important for developing the approach to procuring and constructing the A96 Dualling Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass) scheme.

As part of this work, consideration will be given to the feasibility and attractiveness of combining with adjacent schemes to form larger contracts or splitting the scheme and delivering through smaller contracts, for example the Nairn Bypass.

It is expected that the work to determine the most suitable procurement option and develop the business case will closely align with the Mutual Investment Model (MIM) assessment work being undertaken on the A9 Dualling, with the decision on the use of MIM for the A96 Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass) being considered alongside or following the A9 decision, which is currently expected later in 2025. We will also include consideration of delivery options for the adjacent A9/A96 Inshes to Smithton scheme (part of the Inverness and Highland City Region Deal) as part of this work.

In regards to your reference to comments by the Auditor General on the use of MIM, whilst the Committee has not identified specific comments that it is referring to, I note from comments at the time of publication of the report "Privately financed infrastructure investment" that the Auditor General recognised that 'The Scottish Government has accepted the costs of using these contracts to increase total infrastructure investment' and called for the Scottish Government 'to be clearer about the additional costs of investment associated with using privately financed contracts for specific projects'. The Government will, of course, set out the basis on which it makes decisions on the use of MIM contracts once those decisions are taken.

I hope this is of assistance.

Yours Sincerely,

FIONA HYSLOP

Cabinet Secretary for Transport