

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

16th Meeting, 2022 (Session 6), Wednesday
23 November 2022

PE1906: Investigate options for removing and
reducing the impact of the central Glasgow
section of the M8

Note by the Clerk

Lodged on 25 October 2021

Petitioner Peter Kelly on behalf of @ReplacetheM8

**Petition
summary** Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to commission an independent feasibility study to investigate scenarios for reducing the impact of the M8 between the M74 and Glasgow Cathedral including, specifically, complete removal and repurposing of the land.

Webpage <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1906>

Introduction

1. The Committee last considered this petition at its meeting on [23 February 2022](#). At that meeting, the Committee agreed to write to Glasgow City Council, Transport Scotland and to other stakeholders.
2. A petition summary briefing can be found at **Annexe A** and the Official Report of the Committee's last consideration of this petition is at **Annexe B**.
3. The Committee has received written submissions from Professor Richard J. Williams, Dr Wood and Glasgow City Council which are set out at **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's initial position on this petition can be found on the [petition's webpage](#).

Action

7. The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take on this petition.

Clerk to the Committee

Annexe A

PE1906: Investigate options for removing and reducing the impact of the central Glasgow section of the M8

Petitioner

Peter Kelly of @ReplacetheM8

Date Lodged

25/10/21

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to commission an independent feasibility study to investigate scenarios for reducing the impact of the M8 between the M74 and Glasgow Cathedral including, specifically, complete removal and repurposing of the land.

Previous action

We have contacted Paul Sweeney MSP and he has suggested that the petition should go ahead.

Background information

It is not clear whether the commitment to ongoing maintenance of the elevated M8 has been evaluated in light of the new cooperation agreement between the SNP and Green Party which states "we will not build road infrastructure to cater for unconstrained increases in traffic".

- It is not clear if full removal of the central section has been considered by Glasgow Council or Scottish Government or Scottish Highways as a way of addressing GCC's Regeneration Framework Objectives which states:
 - Reinforce the city centre's economic competitiveness;
 - Re-populate the city centre;
 - Reconnect the City centre with surrounding communities and its riverside;
 - Reduce traffic dominance and car dependency;
 - Green the city centre and make it climate resilient;
 - Repair, restore and enhance the urban fabric.

- Evidence is plentiful showing removal of similar roads around the world does not have anticipated negative impacts and brings economic, social and environmental benefits (<https://www.cnu.org/our-projects/highways-boulevards>)

Annexe B

Extract from the Official Report of last consideration of PE1906 on 23rd February 2022

The Deputy Convener: Item 2 is consideration of new petitions. The committee seeks advance views from the Scottish Government on all new petitions before they are formally considered, and those views are shared with the committee as part of our meeting papers.

PE1906, which has been lodged by Peter Kelly on behalf of @ReplacetheM8, calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to commission an independent feasibility study to investigate scenarios for reducing the impact of the M8 between the M74 and Glasgow cathedral, specifically including complete removal of the road and repurposing of the land.

The Scottish Government states in its submission that Transport Scotland published a report, “Initial Appraisal: Case for Change: Glasgow City Region”, in February 2021. That was one step in the wider transport appraisal process, and it helped to identify problems and opportunities related to the transport network in the Glasgow region. The Scottish Government advises that appraisal work on a range of the transport options in that report progressed over the summer, and that a final set of draft recommendations will be published later this winter.

The Scottish Government highlights that the review has already considered a large amount of evidence that is related to the whole transport network across the Glasgow region, including the M8 corridor. It says that that has been supported by a significant engagement exercise that has, to date, not identified or proposed any significant change to the M8. The submission confirms that Transport Scotland is aware of the aspirations for an M8 cap at Charing Cross and that it has been willing to participate in those discussions and will continue to do so. Finally, the Scottish Government states that it believes that there is no need for a separate piece of work in relation to the section of the M8 through Glasgow city centre.

Do members have any comments?

Paul Sweeney: I am familiar with this interesting campaign, because @ReplacetheM8 hosted an exhibition at the New Glasgow Society during the 26th United Nations climate change conference of the parties—COP26. It seems to have been motivated by the recent developments concerning the structural condition of the Woodside viaducts in the centre of Glasgow, which could lead to hundreds of millions of pounds being spent on rebuilding that infrastructure, which was completed in 1971. That led to a discussion, during COP26, about what other cities around the world have done and about best practice. There was the big dig in Boston, and there are other examples in cities such as San Francisco, Paris, and Seoul in South Korea. There is also the international campaign for new urbanism, which advocates

for the impact of elevated, segregated, high-speed motorways through city centres to be reduced.

That approach does not seem to have been much of a feature in Transport Scotland's considerations so far, as it itself has identified. It has never fundamentally reappraised the merits of having an elevated concrete motorway through the centre of the biggest city in Scotland or considered whether a sanity check, such as the one provided by the campaign, is needed.

Large numbers of the population of Glasgow were displaced to construct the road. The communities of Cowcaddens, Townhead and Anderston were cleared. Glasgow is the only city in the western world, apart from Detroit, that previously had a million people in it but whose population declined below a million—it lost a third of its population in the space of 30 years, from the 1960s to the 1990s.

The urban blight that was caused by the motorway, along with adjacent redevelopment, continues to have a negative effect on the city's urban environment. There are high correlations with poverty, ill health and other issues that are associated with the road. Recently, a study was carried out that identified that the noise pollution at Charing Cross in the centre of Glasgow is equivalent to standing on the runway at Glasgow airport. That has been discovered only recently.

The negative environmental effects of the road need to be invested thoroughly. The petitioner has identified that as a major public policy need. The issue is one that seems to fall between the cracks. Glasgow City Council is responsible for the general urban condition of Glasgow and the normal road network, whereas Transport Scotland and its contractor, Amey, are responsible for the maintenance of the trunk road network. There is a bit of a disconnect between the national responsibility for trunk roads and local considerations to do with the urban environment. There is a need for the two to be married and for a co-ordinated study to be undertaken.

I fully support the petition's intent, and I think that it would be worth while gathering further submissions from relevant stakeholders and attempting to understand whether there is scope to carry out a more thorough investigation of the merits of doing something. The petition is not necessarily about removing the motorway; it is not hard and fast about that. Some people might advocate for that, while others might be alarmed by the prospect, which is quite reasonable, given the potential implications. There are certainly practical measures that can be taken to reduce the environmental effect of the road, such as the capping project at Charing Cross. It would be good to investigate a spectrum of options that could be pursued to solve some of the problems that the petitioner has identified.

The Deputy Convener: What stakeholders do you have in mind? Glasgow City Council and Transport Scotland are two obvious stakeholders, but are there any others that you can suggest?

Paul Sweeney: There is the New Glasgow Society, which is an amenity body in the city. We could also write to the Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland and civil engineering bodies such as the Institution of Civil Engineers. There is the Congress

for the New Urbanism in the United States. There is also Glasgow's city urbanist. There are a number of figures who may well be able to offer expert advice. Urban planner Brent Toderian undertook a similar project in America. There might be other projects around the world that we might want to write to to ask how they did it.

There are a number of ways in which we could proceed; however, we might require to reflect further on them, and we should therefore invite the petitioner to suggest stakeholders to engage with. In that respect, it might be worth communicating with the community councils adjacent to the road as well as the Glasgow Institute of Architects. There is a range of bodies and interest groups that we could go to. I have not compiled an exhaustive list, and I could probably come up with more, but there is definitely merit in thinking about who we should speak to. I am not necessarily saying that all those people are relevant or that it is necessary to contact everyone, but there are a number of groups out there that it might be worth engaging with. Those are just some initial ideas.

The Deputy Convener: Thank you very much for that comprehensive list of stakeholders, Paul. I hope that the clerks got them all.

Paul Sweeney: I am happy to follow this up in writing once I have reflected on it, and I am sure that the petitioner, too, will have some ideas.

The Deputy Convener: That would be great. Does everyone agree with that course of action?

Members *indicated agreement*

Annexe C

Prof. Richard J. Williams submission of 30 May 2022

PE1906/B - Investigate options for removing and reducing the impact of the central Glasgow section of the M8

Background and expertise

I am an art historian with expertise in the architecture and urbanism of the modern period. I have particular interests in car-oriented design, and over the years I have investigated a number of areas relevant to the petition in question, including Cumbernauld and Milton Keynes in the UK, the Los Angeles freeway system, and most recently in Brazil, São Paulo's car-oriented reconstruction of the 1960s.

I would like to comment on the petition in relation to my recent work in São Paulo, done between February and April 2022, supported by the Leverhulme Trust and the University of São Paulo. The work focused on the reuse of the Elevado João Goulart, popularly known as the Minhocão ('Big Worm'), a 3.5km elevated highway in the in the centre of São Paulo which has been the focus of intense public debate since its completion in 1971.

The Minhocão, São Paulo, case study

The Minhocão has been closed progressively to traffic since 1976. It remains open to cars during weekdays, but since 2018 it has been entirely closed at weekends and public holidays, as well as at night. At these times it becomes a well-used public park, in some ways the nearest thing the city has to a beach. Since at least 2013 plans have been put forward by architects and politicians to close the Minhocão permanently to traffic, creating a park along the lines of the High Line in New York, a converted disused rail that receives upwards of 8 million visitors per annum. Those proposals however remain the subject of debate. In the meantime, the municipality of São Paulo has funded temporary access structures, temporary wooden furniture for use at weekends, and over 40 large scale

public artworks on adjacent buildings. The Minhocão is now often promoted (and used) as an outdoor art museum.

I would make the following points about the Minhocão and its future

- There is limited, if any, appetite now for its demolition
- The Minhocão is now understood to be a 'place' by all parties, if a complex and imperfect one.
- Different communities 'own' the Minhocão at different times (eg. runners and cyclists at weekends, drivers during the day).
- The popularity of the weekend park has encouraged a significant amount of new real estate development along the Minhocão, particularly residential towers.
- The Associação Parque Minhocão (Minhocão Park Association) has had some political success in advancing the idea of a permanent park. But the Association is also widely believed to be a front for developers.
- There is a significant part of the local population that is hostile to a permanent park because they understand it to be a real estate-led gentrification project For more, see <http://bit.ly/minhocaocontragentrificacao>)
- The weekend and evening closure of the Minhocão depends on a high level of security. Access is controlled by chicanes formed by steel barriers at all entry points, along with private security staff (usually 20-25 in total, patrolling the length of the Minhocão) and sometimes military police.
- There is a significant homeless population (up to 200, including some families) living underneath the Minhocão who are excluded from any park arrangements, either temporary or permanent. The structure provides a significant amount of shelter from the weather, and is 'home'.

Lessons from São Paulo for the M8 petition:

- Temporary closures or urban motorways can produce well used new public space. Little investment is required in the first instance.
- The central section of the M8 may be understood locally as a 'place' – any investigation of a change of use should recognise this possibility, however counter-intuitive.
- The investigation should be open to gradual and contingent changes of use of the M8. Using the carriageway as a temporary park may be popular. There does not need to be a total solution.

- It is possible to balance apparently contradictory uses; different constituencies can 'own' the space at different times.
- Proposals to replace the M8 with parks and boulevards are likely to be widely understood as gentrification, unless carefully managed.

Recommendation

I would support the petition for a feasibility study to investigate options for removing and reducing the impact of the central Glasgow section of the M8.

Further reading:

A. Hochuli, 'The Minhocão Highway of São Paulo: Living with the Big Worm', *Domus*, 1044 (12 March 2020)

N. Millington, 'Public Space and Terrain Vague on São Paulo's Minhocão' in C. Lindner and B. Rosa (eds.) *Deconstructing the High Line* (New Brunswick: Rutgers, 2017), pp. 201-18.

Dr Wood submission of 15 June 2022

PE1906/C: Investigate options for removing and reducing the impact of the central Glasgow section of the M8

Please find below my response to "PE1906: Investigate options for removing and reducing the impact of the central Glasgow section of the M8", submitted as a university academic and independent sustainability researcher.

Commissioning an independent feasibility study on the city centre sections of the M8 creates opportunities to fundamentally improve outcomes for the Glasgow City Region. The novel and political aspect of the study would be to expand beyond a tight focus on maintenance vs demolition costs, to take in economic redevelopment, community and health benefits. Institutionally, this would link to whether the study focuses on the powers and responsibilities of Transport Scotland and Glasgow City Council, or expands to the Glasgow City Region, Strathclyde Partnership for Transport, and Public Health or NHS Scotland.

Looking to the potential removal or reduced impact of the M8, there are successful precedents for reducing traffic volumes and physically reducing the size and cost of road transport infrastructure. The petition focuses on US examples, but examples can be found across the UK, including Birmingham's Paradise Forum, London's Elephant and Castle, Liverpool's Strand, and Newcastle's Gateshead flyover. Across Europe, newspaper reports indicate that experiences of lockdown have increased support for permanent measures to reduce air pollution.¹ Perhaps most comparably, over the last decade Paris has entirely closed motorways along both banks of the River Seine to such positive effect that the Parisian government recently announced further plans to reduce the size and traffic-volumes of the city's main ring road. In my opinion, a study should establish both how far the M8 is a physical barrier to Glasgow's redevelopment, but also how its removal or significant-alteration could be used to build Scotland's economic development and public institutions. This would occur in the particular context of Glasgow and Clydeside's having no shortage of vacant or derelict land, as detailed in the Glasgow City Region (GCR) Economic Strategy.

Turning to barriers, the M8 may be blocking the current and future redevelopment of the Glasgow City Region. The GCR Economic Strategy highlights research from the Connected Cities Catapult and Centre for Cities on the potential for growth through nurturing agglomeration economies and economic clusters. Urban redevelopment of this type improves productivity through creating a virtuous cycle of better public transport connections (at mass transit intensities) and higher residential population densities, creating more efficient labour markets, more informal information sharing or knowledge networks, and more intensive business land uses (supporting greater demand for mass transit and high density residential population, etc). The benefits are also non-linear, so that one large cluster is more productive than two clusters of half the size. This is relevant in the context that large and busy roads do not only tend to mean reduced residential and land use density, but they cause 'community severance' by reducing the number and quality of social or economic links across such roads. In Glasgow, the M8 cuts in half an area that would otherwise be the central part of the city, the hub best served by train and subways, and a meeting point for innovation.

The potential effects of the M8 upon Glasgow's potential agglomeration economy are large. Research by the Centre for Cities has shown that, for example, when comparing the similar sized populations of Glasgow

and Lyon only 53% of Glasgow's population can reach the city centre by public transport in 30 minutes or less, compared to 74% in Lyon.² The premium on housing sited close to public transport links in Glasgow is rapidly increasing, even during COVID and social distancing.³ A study of the potential agglomeration economy could also establish whether strategic redevelopment should include developing a particular set of anchor institutions, land-use types or facilities on any released land, and why this cannot be achieved elsewhere.

Finally, if significant spend on maintenance and redevelopment is mandatory as the M8 reaches the end of its initial working life, this could be an opportunity for institutional reforms. Motorways are the responsibility of Transport Scotland, but transforming the M8 to a surface level trunk road with urban and economic redevelopment aims may justify the devolution of funding and powers to regional bodies. The study could review the feasibility of reforming links between, or combining, the local highways and economic authority, as with Transport for London and the Mayor of London. More radical and holistic reform could even include health and Community Wealth Building, as in Manchester where NHS devolution to the Mayoral level was designed to combine with economic development and transport change, to increase wellbeing and health outcomes.⁴ Proactive planning is likely to secure significant gains here, as the city centre's low residential and business density has previously limited the negative effects of traffic pollution. If redevelopment leads to land use intensification without traffic pollution reduction, health negatives will offset much of the economic positives.⁵

Faithfully,

Dr Peter Wood

Associate Lecturer, The Open University in Scotland

<https://www.open.edu/openlearn/profiles/prhw3>

Glasgow City Council submission of 11

November 2022

PE1906/D – Investigate options for removing and reducing the impact of the central Glasgow section of the M8

Glasgow City Council has recently published a new [Council Strategic Plan 2022-27](#). This is a key document that sets out the priority Grand

Challenges, the Missions that will be undertaken to address them, and Commitments that will be delivered over the next five years by our Services and arms-length external organisations. It is an essential part of the council's strategic planning and performance management framework.

Within Grand Challenge 3 – Fight the climate emergency in a just transition to a net zero Glasgow, and Mission 1: Deliver sustainable transport and travel aligned with the city region, Commitment 6 states “Commission research on and explore options to reduce the impact of the M8 on the city centre, and review opportunities to re-engineer other roads infrastructure to become more people-friendly including options for long-term replacement.”

The Council is therefore responding positively to the spirit of the petition. We would highlight however there is a need to identify funding for this research, and a need to work collaboratively with stakeholders including Transport Scotland who legally manage the trunk road network including the M8.

We are also progressing a project that would deliver a new public greenspace over the M8 between Sauchiehall Street and Bath Street, as a way of reducing severance and the impacts of the M8 infrastructure at this important location, and are awaiting funding announcements from the Levelling Up Fund.