

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

1st Meeting, 2024 (Session 6), Wednesday 24
January 2024

Inquiry into A9 Dualling Programme: Evidence session

Background

1. This paper provides a brief overview of the Committee's inquiry into the A9 Dualling Programme and its consideration of petition [PE1992: Dual the A9 and improve road safety](#).
2. The subject of this petition falls within the remit of the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, which was invited to nominate a reporter to attend and contribute to Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee considerations of PE1992. The Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee nominated its Convener, Edward Mountain MSP, to this role.
3. Initial consideration of the petition included inviting written evidence from community councils, the transport and engineering industry and road safety organisations. All written submissions received to date are available on the [petition's webpage](#). Since it last considered this inquiry, the Committee has received new submissions from the Inverness Chamber of Commerce and IAM RoadSmart, which are set out in **Annexe A**.
4. The Committee also heard oral evidence from the Petitioner, the Civil Engineering Contractors Association Scotland, and Transport Scotland officials at its meeting on [14 June 2023](#).
5. Public views relating to methods for dualling the A9, road safety measures, and the proposals for a national memorial were gathered via a consultation on the Parliament's [Your Priorities platform](#), which ran from 9 August to 15 September 2023. Additional responses which could not be uploaded to Your Priorities are available on the [inquiry webpage](#).
6. In September 2023, the Committee agreed to elevate its scrutiny of petition PE1992 to the level of an inquiry.

7. The Committee heard evidence from the former Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment, Alex Neil, on [4 October 2023](#).
8. In October 2023, the Committee wrote to the Scottish Government requesting copies of advice provided to Ministers on progress to dual the A9 between 2012 and 2023. A briefing from the Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe) summarising the material provided by Transport Scotland is available on the [inquiry webpage](#).
9. The Committee also agreed to invite written evidence from former Cabinet Secretaries and Ministers who held portfolio responsibility for infrastructure and transport between 2012 and February 2023. All responses received to date are available on the [inquiry webpage](#). Transport Scotland have also provided a document highlighting ministers in receipt of advice relating to A9 dualling and which Cabinet Secretary or Minister held portfolio responsibility for the project during the period 2012 – 2023. A copy of this document is included at **Annexe B**.
10. At its meeting on 20 December 2023, the Committee considered the material provided by Transport Scotland, and agreed to invite Transport Scotland, relevant former Chief Executives of Transport Scotland, and the Civil Engineering Contractors Association (CECA) Scotland, to give evidence at a future meeting.
11. The Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Net Zero and Just Transition provided a statement to Parliament on 20 December 2023, setting out the Scottish Government's plans for the completion of the A9 dualling programme by 2035. The Official Report of the Cabinet Secretary's statement is available on the [Parliament's website](#). Following the statement, the Cabinet Secretary also wrote directly to the Committee, and a copy of the correspondence is included at **Annexe C**.
12. The Committee has invited the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Net Zero and Just Transition to provide oral evidence at its meeting on 7 February 2024.

Today's meeting

13. At today's meeting, the Committee will hear evidence from current and former Transport Scotland officials, and representatives from the civil engineering industry.
14. This evidence session will provide the Committee with the opportunity to both look backwards, with a view to identifying lessons for the future, and forward, to explore any possible weaknesses in the planned project delivery and how these might be addressed.

15. The Committee will hear evidence from –

- Grahame Barn, Chief Executive, CECA Scotland

And then from –

- Alison Irvine, Interim Chief Executive, Transport Scotland
- Rob Galbraith, Head of Project Delivery, Transport Scotland
- Roy Brannen, former Chief Executive, Transport Scotland
- Michelle Quinn, former Director of Major Projects, former interim Chief Executive, Transport Scotland

Clerk to the Committee

Annexe A

Inverness Chamber of Commerce submission of 8 January 2024

PE1992/K: Dual the A9 and improve road safety

Overview

Inverness Chamber of Commerce welcomes this petition and the consideration given to it by the Scottish Parliament. Our Chief Executive was a panel member at the Inverness Courier's "A9 Summit" in July 2023, along with the Cabinet Secretary and officials from Transport Scotland, and he took part in the public launch of the petition committee's call for evidence at Kincaig in August 2023.

Since then, the Cabinet Secretary has updated Parliament (20th December) with a renewed timetable for dualling of the A9.

The Scottish Government made a clear commitment to complete the dualling of the A9 by 2025. It is our view that the primary reason for failing to meet this deadline was a lack of commitment. We can't know whether that lack of commitment was from Government Ministers or from officials at Transport Scotland, but there is sufficient expert evidence to support the notion that the original timetable was achievable. The lack of commitment has been exacerbated by procurement methods that sought to pass an unreasonable level of risk to contractors.

The lack of progress has limited the growth potential of Highland businesses and has, almost certainly, led to loss of life that could have been avoided.

Others have submitted responses to this petition that cover the issues of procurement and loss of life. Our role is to comment on behalf of the business community, but we note that the whole community served by the A9 feel let down by the lack of commitment from Scottish Government that would have seen the A9 dualling completed by its target date of 2025.

Highland Business community response

Inverness Chamber of Commerce represents business in Inverness and the wider Highlands, and we have received many comments about

dualling the A9 from across all sectors including tourism, food, farming, health, construction, and manufacturing.

These responses fall into 3 broad areas:

1. Reality – the journey time from Inverness to the central belt is too long. The rail service journey times are longer than by car (and are getting worse) so there is an over-reliance on the A9. This applies equally to goods, staff and tourists. However, it's not only about how long the journey actually takes. The issue is that much of the route is single carriageway and has no possible diversions, so journey times are unreliable, as even a small single incident, like a broken-down car, can have a disproportionate effect on the journey time. This has an enormous cost impact to business (which is well detailed in Transport Scotland's 2016 A9 business plan).
2. Perception – the road has such a bad reputation that people are put off from coming here and from doing business with us. Tourists find other places where their journey doesn't include a "dangerous road". Businesses can be reluctant to locate here, and staff are reluctant to work here, because of the perception of how hard it is to get to anywhere else.
3. Worry - This is summed up perfectly by the business owner who said "as I get older, and the gulf increases in age between myself and younger members of the team, I find myself increasingly worrying for their wellbeing while driving on the A9". We all share that worry – whether it is about our employees or our family members – and we don't believe it's a burden shared by the rest of Scotland.

Why this is important

Connectivity to and across the Highlands is simply not good enough. As well as the A9 we also have sub-standard rail connections between Inverness and Glasgow and Edinburgh, and poor connectivity by road and rail across the Highlands and to Aberdeen.

This means that Highland businesses cannot always reach their full potential as travel time for goods (many of our leading industries rely on import or export of fresh products) and people is too long. It also has a serious impact on our ability to attract top quality talent from outwith the area.

The Scottish Government recognises that Scotland can't reach its net zero targets without the Highlands. Whether that's wind energy, battery storage or hydrogen, most of it is going to happen in our region. And sorting the A9 is crucial for that – not only for the transport of supplies, but because of the barrier it's causing to business growth – including our ability to attract the staff we need to these essential new industries. Without completion of the A9 dualling there's a serious danger that the potential benefits of the Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport won't be fully realised, and that Scotland will continue to miss its net zero targets.

Memorial to those who have lost their lives in road traffic accidents on the A9

Inverness Chamber of Commerce thinks this is a suggestion that should be taken forward if, and only if, there is support for it from the relatives of those who have lost their lives.

20th December 2023 announcement

Given the delays to date, the 20th December announcement with a commitment to full dualling of the A9 between Perth and Inverness by 2035 was welcome.

However, given the track record to date on delivering this project, it is being treated with scepticism by the business community. For each of the remaining 9 sections – which will now be tackled as 6 projects - we need clear dates for when design will be published, when procurement will start, when contracts will be awarded and when sections will be completed. We got some of that information, but we also need to know how we will be updated.

It was disappointing that the Cabinet Secretary sought to blame external factors, like inflation and complexity, for the lack of progress to date, when there has been plenty of expert evidence that the original deadline of 2025 was achievable.

During the debate the former Deputy First Minister, John Swinney, sought to reassure that the Scottish Government was good at delivering large scale infrastructure projects by listing projects that have been completed elsewhere in Scotland. This only strengthened the feeling within the Highland business community that other parts of Scotland have had greater investment, and that the A9 project has never had sufficient focus.

Interim safety measures

Although further interim safety measures were mentioned, there was little detail given. The overwhelming community calls are for clear and regular signage to remind drivers whether they are on single or dual carriageway sections, and for better lighting at all junctions. It is not clear what work is planned or whether these community calls are going to be heeded. The community calls for regular speed limit signs have been rejected by Transport Scotland because they don't conform to their own technical standards. But the community of road users feel strongly that these would have a major impact.

What needs to be done - public and business accountability

To give full confidence to the business community that this new completion date for dualling the A9 will be adhered to, the Scottish Government needs to:

- Publish more milestones on the route to the 2035 completion
- Publish a timetable for regular updates
- Be clear about the further interim safety measures and listen to the community demands on these
- Engage in regular progress updates with the business community - including with construction and procurement experts who can verify progress.

IAM RoadSmart submission of 12 January 2024

PE1992/L: Dual the A9 and improve road safety

Introduction

IAM RoadSmart is the UK's largest independent road safety charity. It has a vision of a society where all road users can safely and sustainably use the public highways together. It does this through a range of means including through the advanced driving and riding tests. IAM RoadSmart was formed in March 1956 and has over 75,000 members that supports

its campaigns on road safety. IAM RoadSmart's policy and standards division publishes original research on road safety issues.

IAM RoadSmart have been members of the A9 Safety Group since its inception. We also represent our members interests on the Transport Scotland Road Safety Operational Board and work closely with Road Safety Scotland influencing education campaigns and materials. Our local Groups in Scotland work with Police Scotland and a range of other bodies to deliver initiatives such as Rider Refinement North. We also serve on ad hoc expert committees such as the Transport Scotland Motorcycle Safety Group and the Older Driver Working Group.

We have no objection to our response being reproduced or attributed.

Petition Overview

This petition has three sections and the IAM RoadSmart response to each is laid out below.

Section 1 – Publish a revised timetable and detailed plan for dualling each section.

IAM RoadSmart strongly support this suggestion. It has made no sense to us over the many years of monitoring and commenting on the upgrade of the A9 that a detailed plan has not been published giving a timetable for each section. The Scottish Parliament has supported the dualling of the A9 for decades and yet the planning process has not been expedited to deliver the final project.

Local people do of course need to be consulted on the detail of the new road, but the vast majority of the improvements are along the existing line of the A9. It should therefore be possible to amalgamate planning permissions and enquiries to quickly deal with any objections. The need for dualling is widely supported and accepted and the Scottish Government just needs to get a confirmed funding package in place to allow contractors to bid with confidence. IAM RoadSmart are not experts on contract design and implementation, but it does seem that the Scottish Government's variable approach to funding has

exacerbated the problem – culminating in the recent issues on the Tomatin section where not enough bids came forward and further delays have occurred.

Section 2 - Complete the dualling work by 2025

It has been clear for years that this target cannot be met and yet the Scottish Government left it until the last minute to confirm the obvious. This simply delayed the possibility of further discussion on alternative funding approaches and contractual changes.

IAM RoadSmart welcome the recent statements from the Scottish Government on the revised timetable, but we do want to see more detail on how this will be achieved including the detailed plan as mentioned above.

Section 3 - Create a memorial to those who have lost their lives in road traffic incidents on the A9.

This is not a top priority for IAM RoadSmart, but we would not stand in its way. It is vital that any memorial is located in a safe place that does not encourage illegal or unsafe stopping on the carriageway. It should also be well maintained and carefully looked after.

IAM RoadSmart are aware of some local authorities having guidelines in place for such memorials which should be part of any consultation process. Overall, in our view the most lasting memorial to those who have tragically lost their lives on the A9 would be the construction of a safer road that removed many of the reasons for fatal crashes completely. This is why dualling is so important as it reduces the risk from head on crashes and side impacts at junctions – the least survivable types of collision.

IAM RoadSmart have frequently raised the issue of fatigue and the lack of roadside services and high quality rest areas along the A9 which bypasses all the communities between Perth and Inverness. If there was a modern network of safe rest areas and stopping points they would make ideal locations for memorial to those who had lost their lives locally as well as acting as a reminder to future road users.

Annexe B Inquiry into A9 Dualling Project

Context and timeline provided by Transport Scotland

Ministers in receipt of advice related to the A9 Project

Blue shading indicates the lead Minister for A9 as confirmed by Cabinet Secretariat records. Other Ministers will have received copies of advice provided.

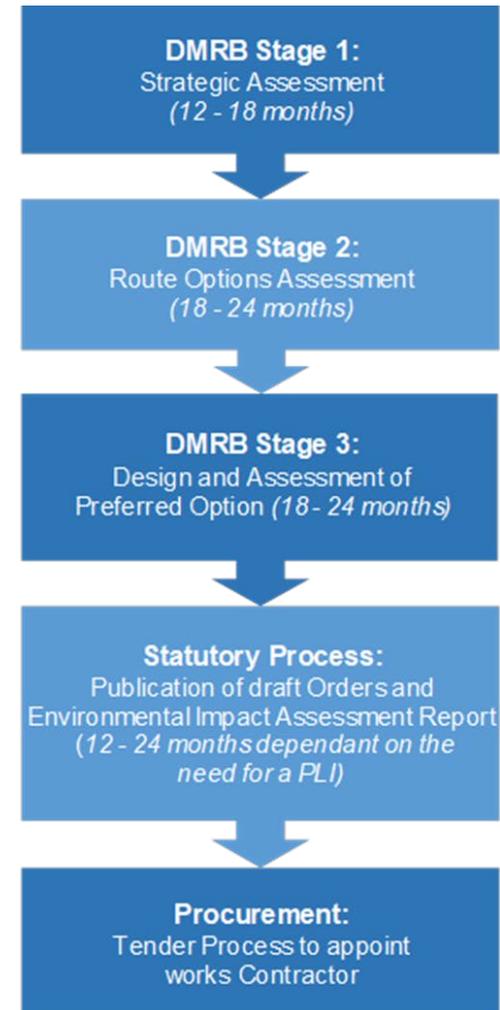
Cabinet Secretaries				Ministers			
Name	Post	from	to	Name	Post	from	to
Alex Neil	Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment	19-May-11	05-Sep-12	Keith Brown	Minister for Transport and Infrastructure	12-Dec-10	25-May-11
				Keith Brown	Minister for Housing and Transport	25-May-11	04-Sep-12
Nicola Sturgeon	Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure, Investment and Cities	05-Sep-12	19-Nov-14	Keith Brown	Minister for Transport and Veterans	05-Sep-12	25-Nov-14
Keith Brown	Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure, Investment and Cities	21-Nov-14	18-May-16	Derek Mackay	Minister for Transport and Islands	25-Nov-14	18-May-16
Fergus Ewing	Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Connectivity	18-May-16	26-Jun-18				
Keith Brown	Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Jobs and Fair Work	18-May-16	26-Jun-18	Humza Yousaf	Minister for Transport and Islands	18-May-16	28-Jun-18
Michael Matheson	Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity	26-Jun-18	19-May-21	Paul Wheelhouse	Minister for Energy, Connectivity and the Islands	26-Jun-18	20-May-21
Michael Matheson	Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport	19-May-21	29-Mar-23	Graeme Dey	Minister for Transport	19-May-21	24-Jan-22
				Jenny Gilruth	Minister for Transport	24-Jan-22	30-Mar-23
Mairi McAllan	Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Net Zero and Just Transition	29-Mar-23		Kevin Stewart	Minister for Transport	29-Mar-23	06-Jun-23
				Fiona Hyslop	Minister for Transport	14-Jun-23	

A9 Dualling Perth to Inverness timeline (for locations and process definitions see next page)

Process stage (see diagram)	DMRB 1 and 2	DMRB 3		statutory processes				construction period
		Date Preferred Option Announced	Publication of Draft Orders	Public Local Inquiry Dates	Date of Scottish Ministers Decision	Publication of Made Orders	Date of General Vesting Declaration (GVD)	
Luncarty to Pass of Birnam	2008-June 2013	June 2013	19 March 2014	8 June 2015	24 March 2016	20 December 2016	21 November 2017	Feb 2019 - August 2021
Pass of Birnam to Tay Crossing	2009-date	tbc	tbc	tbc	tbc	tbc	tbc	tbc
Tay Crossing to Ballinluig	Sept 2012 – Feb 2017	Feb 2017	31 July 2018	No Inquiry, written subs only (November 2019)	02 March 2021	26 November 2021	tbc	tbc
Pitlochry to Killiecrankie	Sept 2012 – Nov 2016	Nov 2016	15 December 2017	No Inquiry, written subs only (March 2019)	11 February 2020	26 November 2021	tbc	tbc
Killiecrankie to Glen Garry	Sept 2012- March 2016	March 2016	28 November 2017	w/c 13 January 2020	10 November 2022	tbc	tbc	tbc
Glen Garry to Dalwhinnie	Sept 2012 – Nov 2016	Nov 2016	19 December 2017	No Inquiry, written subs only (March 2019)	31 May 2019	30 July 2021	tbc	tbc
Dalwhinnie to Crubenmore	Sept 2012 – March 2016	March 2016	19 December 2017	No Inquiry, written subs only (June 2019)	23 November 2020	30 July 2021	tbc	tbc
Crubenmore to Kincaig	Sept 2012 – March 2017	March 2017	4 September 2018	No Inquiry, written subs only (Feb 2021)	17 January 2022	tbc	tbc	tbc
Kincaig to Dalraddy	2003 - Nov 2013	November 2013	November 2013	No inquiry or written subs	19 August 2014	September 2014	11 December 2014	June 2015 - Sept 2016
Dalraddy to Slochd	Sept 2012 – March 2017	March 2017	28 August 2018	No Inquiry, written subs only (October 2020)	15 November 2021	tbc	tbc	tbc
Tomatin to Moy	Sept 2012 – Nov 2016	Nov 2016	18 May 2018	No Inquiry, written subs only (August 2019)	11 February 2020	February 2021	September 2021	(first tendered 19 August 2021; currently being retendered as Sept 2023)

1. Design of all schemes commenced in September 2012 with corridor wide Preliminary Engineering studies (PES), Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and a Case for Investment.
2. The PES and SEA were published for public consultation in June 2013. An SEA addendum was published on the 19 March 2014 along with the split of the A9 into the project areas for design development.
3. Earlier work (pre 2012) had been commissioned on Luncarty to Birnam, Pass of Birnam to Tay Crossing and Kincaig to Dalraddy which allowed the Luncarty to Birnam and Kincaig to Dalraddy projects to move more quickly through the process.

Context: A9 route map and schematic of typical design and construction process



Annexe C

Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Net Zero and Just Transition submission of 20 December 2023

Inquiry into A9 Dualling Project

Thank you for your letter of 30 October 2023 and the invitation to provide a written submission for the Committee in advance of my appearance.

Introduction

The A9 dualling programme is a vital part of our ambition to support the people and businesses of Perthshire and the Highlands by providing safer and more reliable connections to the Central Belt.

This Government is the only Government to commit to dualling and to make the substantial investment required to make sure that we get the right road, in the right place at the right price.

I welcome the range of evidence that the Committee has already gathered and I understand the strength of feeling there is around the need for this programme and for improved safety on the A9 more generally.

As the committee is aware, I was appointed Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero and Just Transition on 29 March 2023. Transport was explicitly added to my Cabinet portfolio on 14 June 2023. My role is therefore focussed on forward planning for the completion of the programme. In that regard I have today made a statement to Parliament setting out our delivery plan for the projects that remain to be completed, and will summarise that plan later in this written submission for the Committee.

As part of preparing this submission, officials have briefed me on the previous programme activities so that I may provide some reflection. However, such reflections are provided based on the advice I have received rather than any direct experience. I understand that you have

heard from other former Ministers and Cabinet Secretaries on historical aspects of the project.

Development of the Programme

Firstly, I would like to address the safety of the A9 as being of primary importance to us all. Alongside other Ministers I offer my sincere and heartfelt condolences to the families who have lost a loved one on the A9 or those who have been injured.

Our commitment to improving safety on the A9 is resolute which is why we have continued with a programme of specific road safety improvements to the route. Since 2007, we have invested £300M in the maintenance and safety of the A9, plus a further £3.6M on average speed cameras on the route. The A9 Safety Group was formed in 2012 to deliver measures that improve road user behaviour and, crucially, reduce casualties both before and during the dualling process. The Group met most recently on 8 November 2023, and was chaired by the Minister for Transport.

In addition to our ongoing maintenance and safety programmes, we are investing approximately £5M in short term safety improvements over three financial years (2022/23, 2023/24 and 2024/25) on the A9 to enhance safety in advance of dualling.

As Ms Gilruth noted in her statement to the inquiry, it is often difficult to relate the causes of accidents with a lack of dualling. However we do know that accidents can be more severe in nature on the A9 where they involve attempts to overtake on single carriageways. We also know that the changes in route standards and numerous minor accesses can also present hazards to drivers unfamiliar with the road. Given the rightful popularity of Perthshire and the Highlands as tourist destinations this has always been a significant concern.

I also understand that considerable work has been undertaken by officials to look at the effects of driver frustration on driver behaviour. Survey work undertaken just prior to the average safety cameras being installed showed that frustration and, in some cases, even fear of driving

the route, were of concern to those who must use the A9 as a lifeline route.

If you add to these issues the lack of reliability of the A9 that can come from incident related closures and a lack of local diversionary routes, it is clear that the A9 has not provided the standard that we expect from our road system.

As you have heard from Alex Neil, when we embarked on our ambition to dual the A9 we were under no illusions of the time that the preparation work would take and the capital investment that it would entail before we could break ground. However, we understand that major infrastructure comes with local impacts alongside the undoubted benefits. As such, we remain committed to an inclusive and transparent development process that gives local residents and businesses a voice and also respected the outstanding natural environment we were working in.

In short we knew the challenges but were determined to invest in our ambition and to drive progress.

Delivery of the Programme

In 2015 we were able to make use of previous development work and bring forward construction of the Kincaig to Dalraddy project, with the completed dualling works becoming operational in September 2017. In 2019 we were able to progress the Luncarty to Pass of Birnam project, with the completed dualling works becoming operational in August 2021.

In 2021 we launched a Procurement for the Tomatin to Moy project. Three bidders were invited to participate in dialogue, but unfortunately only one tender return was received, which offered a significantly higher than expected price. Following careful consideration, Ministers concluded that an award of the contract at that time would not represent best value for the taxpayer.

Following the outcome of the procurement for Tomatin to Moy, Transport Scotland undertook extensive market consultation with the construction industry to gather views on how contracting opportunities for its major roads projects could attract more interest and generate improved tender

competition. As a result of this engagement the New Engineering Contract, with amendments, was adopted for use on a new procurement for the Tomatin to Moy project. This change in contracting approach was welcomed by The Civil Engineering Contractor's Association.

The New Engineering Contract, known in its current version as "NEC4", is preferred by the industry and is widely used across the UK. In addition to the change in form of contract, the terms and conditions adopted by Transport Scotland now offer a more balanced approach to sharing risk between the Scottish Ministers and contractors. This means that although the contract offers less cost certainty for the Government than was achieved by the contract used successfully by Transport Scotland for an extended period of time, it is more attractive to contractors as they carry less liability for cost increases if particular risk events occur.

Following publication in September this year of the contract notice for the new procurement for the Tomatin to Moy project, Transport Scotland confirmed on 28 November 2023 that three contractors had been shortlisted. Invitations to participate in dialogue were issued to these contractors on 11 December 2023 and a first meeting between Transport Scotland and the individual contractors has already taken place. It is expected that award of this contract will take place in early summer 2024 and, with the completed dualling expected to be operational by the end of 2027, subject to no significant impacts through events such as exceptionally adverse weather.

Delivery Plan to Complete A9 Dualling

In my statement today I set out the delivery plan that has been adopted for completion of A9 Dualling. Developing this plan has been a complex exercise, involving consideration of options that involved procuring all projects using either design and build contracts or the Mutual Investment Model, known as MIM, or a hybrid approach using both forms of contract. In addition to the form of contract, we have also considered how works are sequenced to provide an efficient overall programme that is aligned with the market's capacity to deliver, minimises disruption to road users, and is achievable within wider financial constraints, outlined

yesterday by the Deputy First Minister, not least the impact of the UK Government's not inflation-proofing their Capital Budget, which has resulted in nearly a 10% real-terms cut in our capital funding between 2023/24 and 2027/28..

The Government has concluded that the hybrid approach is the best way to complete A9 Dualling. This approach entails, progressing the three remaining A9 Dualling South projects (Pass of Birnam to Tay Crossing, Tay Crossing to Balinluig and Pitlochry to Killiecrankie) as capital funded design and build contracts. In addition, at this time, we anticipate progressing the three A9 Dualling Central projects and the two remaining A9 Dualling North projects via two resource funded MIM contracts, subject to ongoing due diligence and further decision making in late 2025, including an updated assessment of expected market conditions.

As I indicated in my statement to Parliament, work will begin immediately on preparations for the procurement for the next design and build contract, which will be for the Tay Crossing to Ballinluig project, with the contract notice planned for publication in Spring 2024 and contract award expected in Summer 2025. Thereafter, procurement of the Pitlochry to Killiecrankie project and, subject to completion of statutory processes, the Pass of Birnam to Tay Crossing project, will commence in Summer 2025 and Summer 2027 respectively.

Subject to future decision making in late 2025 on the use of MIM contracts, procurement for the two remaining A9 Dualling North projects under a single MIM contract could then commence in winter 2026/27. The second MIM contract, comprising the three A9 Dualling Central projects, could then commence procurement in winter 2028/29.

The hybrid approach will create a rolling programme of construction leading to the progressive opening of dualled sections. By the end of 2030, we anticipate that nearly 50% of the A9 between Perth and Inverness will be operational dual carriageway, rising to 85% by the end of 2033 and 100% by the end of 2035. This means all those who travel on the A9 will see significant benefits from A9 Dualling years ahead of the final section being operational.

I understand that the Committee is now in possession of papers from 2021 that set out the options for funding and procuring the dualling. It is helpful that the information on the challenges around the decision making on capital or resource funding are now publicly available. These papers illustrate the significance of the decision, not just in relation the A9, but in the context of the impact on wider public sector budgets. That is not to say Ministers are not prepared to make those difficult decisions but it does serve to show that matters are far from straightforward and various factors must be balanced to get the dualling that we all want in a way that we can afford and that doesn't prevent us meeting our other needs and ambitions. It is important to note that the wider economic environment has been particularly volatile in recent years, and that the assessment of absolute and relative costs set out in earlier papers has had to be updated on a number of occasions to reflect significant changes in market conditions, including recent increases in costs of borrowing.

Costs and Benefits

As part of our work, Transport Scotland has prepared updated total scheme cost estimates for each project. The total cost of the programme is now estimated at £3.7bn at April 2023 prices. When adjusted for inflation, that is equivalent to £2.45bn at April 2008 prices, which is well within the original cost estimate of £3bn at 2008 prices.

The improved safety expected from dualling is a crucial benefit from A9 Dualling. It is forecast that A9 Dualling will result in an average of 3 fewer fatality casualties and 6 fewer serious injury casualties each year. Dualling will see driver stress and journey times for emergency vehicles reduce. Dualling also offers resilience, limiting the need for lengthy diversions.

The A9 is critical to the movements of freight, business and leisure travellers. Dualling improves reliability and reduces average times of journeys by 20%, which is a reduction of around 26 minutes for a journey between Perth and Inverness. This is transformative for a route that serves 35% of our land mass and carries around 10% of Scotland's GDP in terms of cargo.

Stakeholder Engagement

I know that this update on the delivery plan for A9 Dualling has been keenly anticipated by all stakeholders, representing the many Scottish communities and businesses for whom the A9 is essential. I'm acutely aware of the strength of feeling on this issue.

As I indicated in my statement, comprehensive stakeholder engagement on this delivery plan will begin early in the new year, building on the extensive engagement already undertaken. I will today invite all interested MSPs to attend a briefing in Parliament as a first step. Regular engagement will continue as the programme progresses, including with local communities on individual projects.

Anyone with an interest in the A9 can also register for email updates at www.a9dualling.scot prior to the full launch of a new A9 Dualling website early in the new year. We will advertise engagement opportunities here and also through media and social media channels as normal.

Statutory Processes

In my statement to Parliament today I confirmed that next year the Government will complete the statutory process for the three outstanding schemes (with Ministerial consent Killiecrankie to Glen Garry, Crubenmore to Kinraig and Dalraddy to Slochd) and will acquire the necessary land to support the procurement timetable.

Ministerial decisions to complete the statutory process are already confirmed for over 92% of the programme. The only project not to have started statutory processes yet is Pass of Birnam to Tay Crossing, and today, I confirmed that the preferred route for this section includes a number of the elements of the community's preferred option, including a roundabout at Dunkeld and the junction layouts at The Hermitage and Dalguise. Further details of the preferred route are available on Transport Scotland's website and local communities and road users will have the chance to see and comment on our plans at public exhibitions at the end of January.

Summary

This Government has restated its firm commitment to completing A9 Dualling between Perth and Inverness with a clear delivery plan.

The approach I have set out means that the Highlands can have confidence that the considerable benefits of A9 Dualling will be delivered in full.

As I noted in my statement, under this delivery plan there will be no let-up. When construction starts on Tomatin to Moy next year, it will roll continually until the route between Perth and Inverness is fully dualled.

I trust that this written statement is helpful to the inquiry process and I will be happy to provide evidence in person to the committee at the earliest opportunity.

Yours sincerely

MAIRI MCALLAN