

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee  
Wednesday 30 October 2024  
16th Meeting, 2024 (Session 6)

## PE1610: Upgrade the A75 and PE1657: A77 upgrade

### Introduction

#### PE1610

**Petitioner** Matt Halliday

**Petition summary** Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to upgrade the A75 Euro-route to dual carriageway for its entirety as soon as possible.

**Webpage** <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1610>

#### PE1657

**Petitioner** Donald McHarrie on behalf of A77 Action Group

**Petition summary** Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to dual the A77 from Ayr Whittlett's Roundabout south to the two ferry ports located at Cairnryan, including the point at which the A77 connects with the A75.

**Webpage** <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1657>

1. [The Committee last considered this petition at its meeting on 20 December 2023.](#) At that meeting, the Committee agreed to write to the Minister 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 new written submissions from the Minister for Transport, the Petitioner (PE1657), and Elena Whitham MSP, which are set out in **Annexe C**.
4. [Written submissions received prior to the Committee's last consideration of PE1610 can be found on the petition webpage.](#)
5. [Written submissions received prior to the Committee's last consideration of PE1610 can be found on the petition webpage.](#)
6. Further background information about the petitions are contained in the SPICe briefings which can be found on the petition webpages.
7. [The Scottish Government gave initial responses to PE1610 in 2016 which can be found on the archive website.](#)

8. [The Scottish Government gave initial responses to PE1657 in 2017 which can be found on the archive website.](#)
9. Every petition collects signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 2,871 signatures have been received on petition PE1610 and 3,278 signatures have been received on petition PE1657.

## **Action**

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

**Clerks to the Committee**  
**October 2024**

## **Annexe A: Summary of petitions**

### **PE1610: Upgrade the A75**

#### **Petitioner**

Matt Halliday

#### **Date Lodged**

13 July 2016

#### **Petition summary**

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to upgrade the A75 Euro-route to dual carriageway for its entirety as soon as possible.

#### **Previous action**

A previous petition was running on Change.Org and an action group has been set up on social media to fight for this cause. A meeting was arranged with Joan McAlpine MSP who recommended lodging a petition with the Scottish Parliament.

#### **Background information**

The A75 is not only the road to Stranraer and the ferry ports of Cairnryan but, as such, is also the road to Belfast, one of the UK's capital cities.

Due to the current design of the road and previous fact, it is a road where many differing vehicle types are thrown together often at highly differential speeds. The volume of HGVs in convoy travelling east when the ferries dock combined with the 40mph limit for those vehicles causes very high level of congestion upon the A75, a volume of traffic that was never envisioned when the current road was designed.

Throw in even slower moving agricultural vehicles, faster moving traffic, such as cars and motorcycles, and a large amount of tourist traffic unfamiliar with the vagaries of the A75, and it is easy to see how frustration can brew carelessness on the road. A change to dual carriageway would help negate the causes of this while also preventing a conflict between vehicles travelling east with those travelling west.

For the same reasons, the local economy would benefit by being more accessible to tourists, commerce and improved links with Northern Ireland and England. This is not to mention the benefits to the local populace in improved safety and reduced journey times, especially when there is more centralisation of health services to Dumfries resulting in journeys of up to 90 miles for some in the west of Dumfries & Galloway.

I have come to these conclusions as a regular user of the A75 and I know for a fact that I am not alone in holding these opinions.

**PE1657: A77 upgrade**

**Petitioner**

Donald McHarrie on behalf of A77 Action Group

**Date Lodged**

19 June 2017

**Petition summary**

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to dual the A77 from Ayr Whitlett's Roundabout south to the two ferry ports located at Cairnryan, including the point at which the A77 connects with the A75.

**Previous action**

The A77 Action Group has been formed on Facebook and we have now had a number of public meetings. The group has contacted Mr Brian Whittle MSP for advice on how to go forward with a petition.

**Background information**

The A77 is the main arterial route from the central belt to the south west of Scotland. On the way it also provides connections to a number of towns and villages. It also provides the road connection between our capital city Edinburgh via Glasgow to Northern Ireland's capital city Belfast and the Republic of Ireland's capital city Dublin beyond that. So from an economic perspective, as well as a cultural view point, the A77 is a strategic road, nationally and internationally.

The line of the road often reflects its design history harking back centuries to the days of coach and horses. From Edinburgh to the notorious Whitlett's roundabout at Ayr the journey is relatively straight forward on motorway or dual carriageway. From this point south the road not only narrows to a single carriageway, it also passes through eight communities all with urban speed limits ranging from 40mph to 20mph. It has very few dedicated safe passing places to overtake slower moving vehicle types that use this road.

We as a country need to build on the investments already implemented in the area, such as the £77 million, spent on the A77 & A75 from 2008 (the A77 improvements being the Symington and Bogend Toll improvements relating to safety improvements and on sections of dual carriageway north of Ayr). The design work and planning of Maybole's bypass that is scheduled to commence August 2018 is also included in this figure.

**Existing pressure on the road**

- The pulse of vehicle numbers associated with the HGV traffic coming off the ferries results in long convoyed queues in a platoon effect travelling along the road, making passing these vehicles dangerous.
- There is a large proportion of tourist traffic, which is unfamiliar with the snaking, twisting nature of the road.

- There is a mix of slow (agricultural vehicles) and fast-moving traffic (cars and motorcyclists), which can cause delays and lead to driver impatience in the form of rash and often near fatal errors of judgement.
- In some places the road width does not allow two HGVs to safely pass each other without one giving way to the other.
- The road width also does not allow road work to be carried out in a safe way without closing the road (eleven closures occurred for this reason in 2016/17), which results in lengthy diversion routes on even more unsuitable roads.
- There is increased traffic travelling south via the A77 south of Ayr to get to the North Channel ferries operating out of Loch Ryan as a result of the withdrawal of the Troon to Larne ferry service.

#### Potential benefits of an upgrade

The National Planning Framework Strategy Map unequivocally demonstrates the economic and social significance of both A77 and that of A75 to Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom in equal measure. The local and national economy would benefit by being more accessible to tourists, commerce and improve the links between Scotland and Northern Ireland and its neighbour and EU country the Republic of Ireland.

The A77 Trunk Road had nine road closures south of Whitlett's roundabout at Ayr in 2016/17 alone due to road traffic incidents. If the road was wider and upgraded, then these closures would be less frequent, so the communities along the diversionary routes could be left without the thundering traffic disturbing their idyllic settings.

The bypasses and improvements we seek are not that dissimilar to the project benefits of the A737 Dalry bypass in that these upgrades would serve to separate local from strategic traffic. This in turn would encourage improved economic & employment opportunities through better journey time reliability for both motorists and businesses along the length of the A77.

An independent study commissioned by South Ayrshire Council stated that the benefit to Scotland of events, such as the 145th Golf Open that was held at Royal Troon, was £110m as a whole. The world famous golf course and holiday complex at Turnberry owned by President Trump is being starved of such events due to the lack of investment in the road structure. The action called for in the petition could therefore have positive economic implications for Scotland as a whole.

#### Conclusion

South West Scotland needs a fit for purpose road infrastructure in order to sustain and grow with the greater community of Scotland, the United Kingdom and within whatever relationship it has with Europe.

The A77 Action Group is not alone in holding these opinions, as many people use the A77 every single day for work, or for social and domestic purposes, and have supported this campaign.

## **Annexe B: Extract from Official Report of last consideration of PE1610 and PE1657 on 20 December 2023**

**The Convener:** Welcome back. At this stage, I offer an apology from our colleague David Torrance, who is unable to be with us this morning. The committee sends its best wishes to David, and we look forward to seeing him again in the new year, hopefully.

We move to the next of our continued petitions. PE1610 was lodged by Matt Halliday, and PE1657 was lodged by Donald McHarrie on behalf of the A77 action group. PE1610 calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to upgrade the A75 Euro route to dual carriageway for its entirety as soon as possible, and PE1657 calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to dual the A77 from Ayr Whitlets roundabout south to the two ferry ports located at Cairnryan, including the point at which the A77 connects with the A75. We last considered the petitions in April, when we agreed to write to the then Minister for Transport, Kevin Stewart.

We are joined this morning by our colleague Brian Whittle. Good morning, Brian. I will invite you to comment in a moment.

The response that we received from the then minister states that Transport Scotland officials are aware of the environmental impact assessment report on the A75 and A77 and are considering its findings. However, the response notes that the report appears to reflect only the positive impacts of dualling, and does not consider the outcomes of the strategic transport projects review 2, and the response notes that the report does not provide any benefit cost ratios to summarise the overall value for money. The response also states that prioritisation work for the STPR2 recommendations is being undertaken, and that that will feed into the publication of a delivery plan later this year—but I take it that that will probably be early next year. Until that work has been completed, it will not be possible to provide timescales for delivery of individual recommendations.

The petitioner expresses the view that the then minister's response seems to disregard the report. He highlights the positive inward investment seen in Maybole since the completion of the £29 million bypass there. The submission also questions how the Scottish Government's target of zero road fatalities by 2050 will be possible when the conditions on the south-west of Scotland's road network are considered.

Our colleague Finlay Carson is unable to join us this morning, but he has sent a written submission in support of the petitions. He reports that, in the past five years, there have been seven fatal collisions on the A75. In the light of the UK Government's £8 million funding for improvements to that road, Mr Carson suggests that the Scottish Government should redirect any budget savings to accelerate improvements on the A77.

Brian Whittle, before I invite committee members to comment at this stage, would you like to contribute to our discussion?

**Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con):** Thank you very much, convener. Good morning. I thank the committee for the opportunity to speak again on the petitions, which have been running since I was a member of the Public Petitions Committee in the previous parliamentary session.

Since the last time we discussed the petitions, matters have moved forward in that the United Kingdom Government's connectivity fund has indicated its desire to help with the upgrading of the A75. Initially the A77 and the A75 were taken as a group. We did not want to separate them, but that has happened, given that the A75 is a Euro route. My concern is that the A77 might be overlooked, because the A75 will now be considered in depth by the UK Government and we have a fairly hefty MSP cabal looking at the A9 and the A96. For example, I know that my colleague Fergus Ewing has been vocal in his desire to have the A9 and the A96 dualled.

**The Convener:** I would not like to refer to him as a "hefty cabal", though, Mr Whittle. [Laughter.]

**Brian Whittle:** Together with others, he has been very vocal on that issue and, with a number of colleagues, has pushed very hard for the A9 and the A96 to be dualled. My fear is that that issue has overtaken the concern over the A77, which has been long running. It first came to my attention when, in opening the Cairnryan facility, Alex Salmond promised significant upgrades to the A77 and the A75. Subsequent transport ministers have offered the same assurances. However, STPR2 has been going for some considerable time now, and there has been very little movement at all.

As you rightly said, convener, even though the Maybole bypass was not dualled—which was a missed opportunity—it has had a significant impact on the health and wellbeing of the community there, as well as bringing inward investment, and it has changed the whole aspect of the town. That represented an investment of £29 million.

The evidence is there for everyone to see of the impact of the significant dualling and bypassing of various towns along the A77. That should be coupled with the fact that 110 44-tonne lorries come off the Cairnryan crossing every single day and travel up that route. What is not often mentioned is that also on that road is a major distillery, where 50 wagons come in and out every day. The road is a connection between Northern Ireland, the European Union, central Scotland and beyond. As everyone who has been on it or seen it will agree, it is currently not fit for purpose.

My concern is that the A77 is falling further and further down the list of priorities as other matters take over and that eventually it will be kicked to the kerb and nothing will be done about it. I therefore ask that the committee continues to consider the petition and to put pressure on the Scottish Government to maintain its promise to deliver significant upgrades to the A77.

**The Convener:** Thank you very much for that, Mr Whittle. Committee members have had an opportunity to consider the relevant papers. Do colleagues have any proposals or suggestions as to how we might proceed?

**Fergus Ewing:** I am broadly supportive of the petitioner's aims. I should say that I do not think that I am part of a cabal. Cabals operate in secret, and we have not been doing that. [Laughter.] However, Nairn is still waiting for its bypass and I see the arguments about the practical and significant economic benefits of the bypass to Maybole, so I take that into account.

Mr Whittle, Emma Harper and, I believe, Finlay Carson are pursuing this matter with others. Although I come from the opposite end of Scotland, I think that the rural transport network really needs far more attention, not only in the Highlands but in the south-west of Scotland, and Mr Whittle expressed the feelings of frustration of people down there. They feel forgotten, as do the citizens of Nairn. Frankly, it is a rural issue that affects the whole of Scotland, and perhaps more resources—more cash from the capital budget—needs to be devoted to building roads, rather than some other schemes that I had probably better not mention. I suggest that we write to the Minister for Transport to pursue those points.

I noticed that the previous cabinet secretary with responsibility for transport urged us to close the petition. I wonder whether ministers should urge us to close petitions. I wonder whether that is for Parliament to do.

However, setting that aside for the moment, we could write to the Minister for Transport to seek an update on when the STPR2 delivery plan will be published and whether the delivery plan will set out timescales for the delivery of specific recommendations and information about the Scottish Government's approach to prioritising those recommendations and, secondly, to ask whether the Scottish Government will redirect any STPR2 savings that arise from UK Government funding from the A75 to accelerate improvements on the A77.

**The Convener:** Are colleagues content that we initiate those actions?

**Members *indicated agreement.***

**The Convener:** Thank you. We will keep the petition open and seek to get that information.

Thank you, Mr Whittle.

## Annexe C: Written submissions

### Minister for Transport written submission, 29 January 2024

#### PE1610/WW: Upgrade the A75 and PE1657/TT: A77 upgrade

Thank you for your letter dated 5 January 2024 regarding *PE1610: Upgrade the A75* and *PE1657: A77 upgrade* and requesting updates on the STPR2 delivery plan. This is the first opportunity that I have had to respond to the committee on this matter, since my appointment as Minister for Transport. I will set-out my response to the points you have raised in turn below.

#### STPR2 Delivery Plan

As highlighted by the Deputy Finance Minister in her letter to the Public Audit committee [Letter from the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance to the Convener of 21 November 2023 \(parliament.scot\)](#) on the 21 November 2023 and during the pre-budget speech, the Scottish Government is facing a real terms cut in our capital budget.

The flat and falling funding trajectory from the UK Government will and has significantly impacted our ability to deliver on our capital infrastructure commitments. The UK Government have not inflation-proofed their Capital Budget which is forecast to result in 9.8% real terms cut in our capital funding over the medium term between 2023-24 and 2027-28. Given the worsening outlook for capital, it will take more time to prepare the multi-year capital allocations and to refresh the infrastructure investment pipeline. We are therefore having to make tough decisions on our infrastructure projects pipeline to ensure we spend within our means while delivering for the people of Scotland.

Development of the STPR2 delivery plan is underway. This takes account of the current financial climate and is examining existing schemes across all modes in addition to the STPR2 recommendations. This is a complex piece of work, particularly given the substantial financial uncertainty beyond a single year, with consultation ongoing across the Scottish Government, including with Statutory Bodies and Exchequer officials. This exercise will allow for the timeline for the publication to be confirmed and confirm any statutory requirements, which of course Parliament will be informed of at the earliest opportunity.

Please be assured that my officials, the Cabinet Secretary and I are working towards the earliest possible publication.

In a positive step forward, and by way of an update to Mr Stewart's letter to the committee in May, I can confirm that the Scottish Government has secured a commitment from the UK Government for multi-year funding of £8 million. This money comes from the Union Connectivity Development Fund and was successfully secured following approval of the previously noted business case to undertake design development work on the A75 to bypass the villages of Springholm and Crocketford. My officials are now progressing the detailed arrangements with the UK

Department of Transport, including securing the allocation of funds for next financial year.

### Recommendation Timescales

STPR2 is a long term vision of this government's ambition for transport investment and highlights projects that we must invest in over the next 20 years. The delivery plan will follow the same principles.

The intention is that the delivery plan will set out how we intend to deliver the 45 STPR2 recommendations including Recommendation 40 covering the A75 and A77, noting of course that a significant number of these are already underway or in development. As you would expect with any 20 year programme, some elements will not commence immediately and are subject to suitable resources and funding being in place. The level of detail will depend on the scale of recommendation, stakeholders involved, expected funding sources and the complexity involved in delivery. Given the range and scale of some of the projects that are recommended within STPR2, these will have their own statutory processes to be completed and will be subject to future capital spending reviews for funding allocation.

### Assigning Priorities

In developing the delivery plan use is being made of a multi-criteria approach to assist with assessing each recommendation and how that planned investment will contribute to delivering the objectives of the National Transport Strategy. Set against this and as I have noted above in response to your first query, we are currently working within an extremely challenging fiscal position and therefore need to make a take account of expected future funding to help with determining "value for money" of this range of recommendations.

Given the high degree of uncertainty that has existed over the last 18 months, with respect to current and future funding position this has significantly delayed how we have been able to assess this aspect. Lastly, we must also factor in how we deliver in our current range of transport priorities and commitments, whilst also delivering our statutory duties and requirements on the trunk road and rail networks, together with the planned investment on ferries, buses and active travel. The Plan will be transparent in explaining the way we have approached prioritisation.

I would like to thank the committee for their continuing work on the issue and hope that this submission provides the clarification needed on the queries that have been raised.

**FIONA HYSLOP MSP**

## **Petitioner written submission, 7 February 2024**

### **PE1657/UU: A77 upgrade and PE1610XX: Upgrade the A75**

Since the Petitions Committee last met, we have seen huge changes and increased activity to see the A77 and A75 improved and brought up to dual carriageway standard.

On 29 January the two ferry companies operating out of Cairnryan Ports, Stena Line and P&O, along with Belfast Port Authority, hosted a Transport Summit under the banner of South West of Scotland Transport Alliance. This was attended by businesses, Dumfries and Galloway and South Ayrshire Councils, NHS Dumfries and Galloway, the Road Haulage Association, local Councillors and South of Scotland MSPs, and both A77 Campaign Team and Dual the A75 Group. The Summit was Chaired by Liz Cameron, Scottish Chamber of Commerce.

Everyone who spoke at the Summit had the same message being that the A77 and A75 needs its share of investment to improve the safety of the trunk roads, upgrading to dual carriageway standards for economic benefits, and to contribute toward Climate Change with a daily saving of 2 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions per road. So, by doing both A77 and A75 there is annual saving of 1460 tonnes of Co<sub>2</sub> prevented from going into the atmosphere. The benefits to this saving of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and the bypassing of the 7 town and villages on the A77 will be felt by the environments who are currently being subjected to the existing massive emissions from vehicles travelling through these villages.

Adding to this Transport Summit, we have seen the reopening of the Northern Ireland Assembly following the cross political party agreement to a shared Administration of the Assembly.

The catalyst to this Assembly Agreement was the agreement between the DUP and UK Government's agreement on cross border movement of goods. This was significant and a huge step forward to securing the reopening of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

This DUP/UK Government agreement could bring tremendous economic benefit to the Ports of Cairnryan with more businesses wanting to relocate, and hauliers using the short sea crossing to Northern Ireland and further into Southern Ireland from the EU18 and EU16 routes. But it also means this could accelerate the development of the Scottish Government's Enterprise Zone in the West of Dumfries and Galloway Council at Cairnryan and surrounding area. This would greatly boost the local economy and bring very much needed jobs to the southwest of Scotland.

In addition to the above activities, the Galloway National Park Association has submitted a bid to the Scottish Government to become the next National Park. This bid covers all of the Galloway Hills that stretches across Dumfries and Galloway and Ayrshire. If successful, it will bring increased traffic numbers to both the A77 and A75.

The A77 Campaign Team has been conducting traffic movements around Ayr Bypass that suffers from serious congestion problems for most of the working day. Unless this is looked at now with strategic planning being considered for a proper road infrastructure commitment before yet another housing development is considered, we believe it is only storing up traffic movement problems for the future as these housing developments are to the east of A77.

The A77 Campaign Team request we make a presentation to the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee to highlight the added activities, and illuminate the opportunities with all the potential opportunities from the above-mentioned developments. We further request the Committee to take the time to travel the A77 to experience the difficulties of this trunk road.

Just as all 5 of our South of Scotland MSPs echoed at the Summit meeting, we need the A77 to be raised to National status and not considered as a southwest of Scotland issue. The A77 is a crucial link between the central belt of Scotland's warehouses to and from Northern Ireland delivering anything from bread to teabags, and everything in between. Stena Line has already intimated that it is to purchase two new ships for the Heysham/Belfast sea crossing routes where we could see warehouses relocate to Northern England. It is essential to see investment on the A77 and A75 with these trunk roads upgraded if we are to protect the 24/7 North Channel sailings.

### **Elena Whitham MSP written submission, 14 October 2024**

#### **PE1657/VV: A77 upgrade and PE1610/YY: Upgrade the A75**

I am writing to you in my capacity as the constituency MSP for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley as I regrettably cannot attend the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions (CPPP) Committee session in person on Wednesday 30<sup>th</sup> October 2024, due to my Committee Member commitments to the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee.

As per my appearance before the CPPP Committee on 8th September 2021 as the new MSP for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley and my written submission on 5<sup>th</sup> September 2022, I wish to note that I remain fully supportive of petition "PE1657: A77 upgrade" as the majority of the single lane section of the route lies within my constituency boundary; coupled with the real desire for significant improvements to the A77.

It is also the case that I have continued to campaign and support many constituents and community organisations since my last hearing of this petition; and as such I wish to reinforce my support for this important petition.

As the constituency MSP I have supported concerned residents in Ballantrae, Girvan, Kirkoswald, Lendlefoot, Minishant and Turnberry – all who see their daily lives impacted by the high volumes of HGV movements en route to the port of Cairnryan; and it is imperative that improvements are delivered on this strategic route that will mean that citizens are protected and communities are nurtured allowing for tourism, trade and commerce to flourish.

With the A77 Maybole Bypass now having been in operation for over two years, and having seen how this huge infrastructure investment has massively improved the local community in terms of lower volumes of HGV movements in the narrow high street in the town and associated cleaner and fresher air; as well as the multi-million pound town centre regeneration projects now commenced; and whilst not

underestimating the amount of campaigning, due process, funding and time it took to deliver this much needed infrastructure for the benefit of residents in Maybole – it is understandable that residents of other towns and villages where the A77 cuts through are keen for consideration of similar interventions.

Following the publication of the Strategic Transport Projects Review 2 (STPR2); my hope is we will see a number of improvement recommendations delivered for both routes to provide more resilient connections to the ports in Cairnryan, and benefitting both the citizens who live here and the communities that these roads pass through; along with those who journey on these strategic routes – whether that be for tourism, trade or commerce.

I specifically welcome the proposed improvement schemes for the A77 Turnberry to Girvan; Ballantrae to Smyrton; as well as improvements to the A77 Dutch House, Whitletts and Holmston roundabouts.

With the A77 and A75 being vital strategic routes for Ayrshire and Scotland, supporting both our communities and businesses, I have been continuing lobbying activities with my colleague Emma Harper MSP to see continued investment in my constituency and for the South of Scotland, on the grounds of safety and journey time efficiency for our respective constituents, as well as for all those who use these main arterial routes which connect people from across Scotland and England to Northern Ireland and Ireland.

Accordingly, I have also welcomed and supported the recent report “Safer Green Better A75 and A77 Upgrades” by the South West Scotland Transport Alliance which sets out reasonable and realistic improvement requests that are backed by evidence; and note that the need for safer, healthier and greener communities along these strategic routes are a key concern of my constituents.

I thank you for allowing me the opportunity to submit my supportive written submission for this petition to the Committee for consideration.

Yours sincerely

Elena Whitham MSP