

## **PE1610/J and PE1657/I**

Petitioner for PE1657 submission of 01 February 2018

On behalf of the A77Action Group, I would like to thank the committee for their interest in the above petitions. Although I am the petitioner for PE1657 regarding the A77 upgrade to dual carriageway from Ayr, I also support the PE1610 petition regarding the upgrade of the A75. No matter which city residents of the South West who wish to visit in the UK, the journey will involve one or the other.

Despite the Transport Minister's figures for road maintenance, it must be remembered that the time period for this spend is over ten years. On the A75 an average annual spend of £6.6m or in the case of the A77, an average spend of £4.8m is not so impressive and even less impressive from an end-users' perspective.

Could the Committee establish from the Minister that the figures produced by the Minister refer to the full length of the A77 or from Whitlett's Roundabout south to Stranraer which petition PE1657 actually refers to?

**Maybole-** a bypass rather than dual carriageway is a missed opportunity.

From a number of perspectives including safety issues, business, environment and in hard economic terms, dual carriageway is by far the best solution, 100% better. The A77 Action Group would like to know when the dual carriageway option for Maybole was explored and by whom? We refer to the "in-depth study" which shows the bypass scheme will deliver 85% of the journey time that a dual carriageway would deliver at 60% of the capital cost. It should be noted that the current plan offers zero-time improvement for HGV traffic journey times. A single carriageway limit remains at 40mph for HGVs. This would increase to 50mph on a dual carriageway, an improvement of 80% which surely must be compelling reason.

May we please have a copy of the study?

On the cost analysis, having a dual carriageway rather than a bypass at Maybole would cost in the region of £50m which is relatively modest compared to spending elsewhere. We would draw your attention to the A737 trunk road that has only had trunk road status since 1996. It certainly does not carry the freight volumes that the A77 and A75 do, therefore, its economic benefit to the tax payer is considerably less than what we are requesting.

From the Minister of Transport "I do not envisage having to go back to the Maybole bypass and extend it from a single to double carriageway." Are we to deduce from this reply that he has no intention of dualling the A77 south of Whitlett's roundabout? Is he basically saying "NO" to our request in the petition?

**We would encourage the Committee to seek clarification from the Minister for Transport on this matter!**

Our information is that the bypass decision stands and companies are already onsite near Maybole. This being the case, we wish to impress upon the Minister the necessity of

future-proofing the three proposed bridges in this project to be able to accommodate a future dual carriageway.

We require a reply to this suggestion.

Official estimates of traffic flows are looking 15 years ahead. Too many miles of the A77 south of Ayr were laid more than 150 years ago. Will the Minister please ensure that the proposed independent study announced at our meeting in Parliament on 15<sup>th</sup> November, 2017, looks much further ahead than 15 years in relation to the A77 and the A75. When does this study begin and can the people here wait that long? If the surface on parts of the A77 e.g. the coast road from Girvan to Lendalfoot, is further eroded, we may be back to driving on the original drove roads!

The study will no doubt include analysis of SIMD figures as well as those from each Neighbourhood Profile report produced for Health and Social Care Partnerships. We are aware there are areas in the South West with significant multiple deprivation.

Will the results of the study be open for public consultation? Would it be possible for the Committee to establish from the Minister if this would be possible, and if not why not?

The Welsh Assembly is looking at other means to strengthen its road structures to the port of Holyhead by building another tunnel and adding a third Menai Strait crossing, as well as upgrading the dual carriageway by adding a lane on the A55. While we agree with the government taking a holistic approach to the South West of Scotland, please be aware of how vital immediate improvement of our infrastructure really is. We operate in one of the most fragile economies in the country, via roads which continue to deteriorate at an alarming rate. There is widespread acknowledgment of the strategic importance of the A77 and A75, now it's time for government to show that it too is aware of their strategic importance.

Is the Government aware that even the partial withdrawal of ferry services would impact on the whole Central belt as our members so ably demonstrated at Holyrood. Growth in the freight market has increased over the last year. During the meeting on the 15<sup>th</sup> November A77 Action Group had with the Minister, the Stena Line representative announced that they had seen a growth of 1.6% some 5% behind growth levels on the Dublin/Holyhead corridor over the last 12 months. P&O on the 8<sup>th</sup> January announced that they had seen a 1.3% growth and the best figures since 2011 <http://www.poferries.com/en/pr-contact/press-release/08012018-larne-cairnryan-freight-traffic-hit-six-year-high-in-2017-says-P&O-ferries>

But both ferry companies are seriously concerned regarding the increasing deterioration of the roads. For an example of this concern, please see Stena Line's press release published on 11<sup>th</sup> January. <http://news.stenaline.co.uk/pressreleases/poor-road-access-at-scottish-ports-disadvantages-ni-economy-2369664>

This crucial issue needs the Scottish Government's full attention to make the competitiveness of the Scottish routes greater. Irish Ferries are committing to €165.2m new build for 2020 for Dublin/Holyhead to run with the already huge Ulysses cruise ferry.

The new build will have the capacity for 330 freight units, and Ulysses has a capacity of 240 freight units. <http://www.icg.ie/documents/2018/2018-01-02-Company-Announcement.pdf> Irish Ferries state that they are investing because they have confidence in the markets in which they operate. The additional capacity on this route will mean the Scottish Ports are left at an even greater disadvantage.

As previously shown by the A77 Action Group, A77T provides a link in the chain of roads that connects Edinburgh via Glasgow to Belfast, Dublin and beyond. Does this not qualify as connecting two cities? Likewise, does the A75 not link Belfast with Carlisle and beyond? Applying the Scottish Government's own policy on connecting cities, the A75 and A77 should therefore be dual carriageway for their entire length.

With reference to South Ayrshire and Dumfries & Galloway Councils, much greater budgetary demands continue to be placed on both Councils to try to maintain roads damaged by diverted traffic. At a recent meeting with South Ayrshire Council, the Leader Douglas Campbell, assured the Action Group the issue of the A77 is a Council priority and the matter would be raised with COSLA.

The Group suggests that if the Trunk Road Budget for the next twelve years was totalled, including the monies for new roads through the City Growth Deals/Ayrshire Growth Deal, and 10% was allocated to the roads in the South West, it would amount to a minimum of £600m. Our information is that £3billion will be required to dual A9 carriageway from Perth to Inverness bypassing every town and village. An additional £3billion will be spent on the A96 Inverness to Aberdeen to build dual carriageway along the whole road. By extending the time frames on current infrastructure projects, this would allow the upgrading on A75 and A77 to start much sooner.

Please do not reject this suggestion out of hand. It certainly warrants further discussion and consideration.

The people of the South West of Scotland are weary of the "sticking plaster" approach to improving the A77 and the A75. We must insist that our roads are afforded the same parity of spending as other parts of Scotland, only dual carriageways will now suffice.

The A77 Action Group firmly believes there is greater urgency to act than the Government may care to acknowledge and that this matter must now involve other Government departments. We would ask that they examine closely the consequences to Scotland of failing to bring the infrastructure in the South West into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**Finally, we would like to again thank the members of the Petition Committee for all their work. We invite them to visit us this year with other interested bodies and continue positive dialogue about our future here in the South West.**