

PE1610/N and 1657/M

Scottish Government written submission of 15 May 2018

Thank you for your letter of 9 April to my colleague, Alan Runcie, regarding the A75 and A77 petitions that the committee is considering. I have been asked to respond to the points you have raised.

I note the committee's first query concerns the A77 Maybole Bypass and the assessment process and rationale for selecting the standard of road that is currently being taken forward to construction. Transport Scotland carries out a rigorous assessment process to establish the preferred option for a trunk road improvement like the A77 Maybole Bypass. The three-stage assessment process is based on the standard of good practice set by the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (DMRB).

The DMRB Stage 1 assessment (strategic assessment) (undertaken by Transport Scotland's consultant, Atkins) considered nine bypass routes to the north-west and south-east of Maybole along with a do-minimum scenario. The conclusion from the report recommended that three routes to the north-west of Maybole and the do-minimum scenario be taken forward and subjected to DMRB Stage 2 assessment (route option assessment) for a variety (single and dual) carriageway cross sections.

A value for money exercise undertaken as part of the DMRB Stage 2 assessment found that the journey time saving benefits for a dual carriageway cross section were not sufficiently better than for other configurations and attracted substantially greater construction cost, reducing the value for money of a dual carriageway proposal. The exercise which considered how well options contributed to achieving the scheme objectives found that for the significant extra cost the benefits of a dual carriageway were not sufficiently better than for single carriageway options which provided guaranteed overtaking opportunities through climbing lanes required as a result of the topography. On this basis twelve single carriageway options were taken forward and subjected to an engineering, environmental and traffic and economic assessment in accordance with DMRB Stage 2 assessment process, with the conclusion recommending a single carriageway with climbing lanes option be taken forward and developed through the DMRB Stage 3 assessment process.

A subsequent review of this previous work was undertaken by Transport Scotland's consultant, Amey, following their appointment in 2012 to take forward the DMRB Stage 3 assessment (development and assessment of the preferred option). The findings of this review were reported in a Position Paper and supported the original conclusion of the work undertaken during the DMRB Stage 2 assessment. For the volume of traffic, the guaranteed overtaking opportunities offered by the single carriageway with climbing lanes option meant that the additional benefits of the dual carriageway did not justify the additional cost. In summary, the proposed scheme as developed and assessed through the DMRB Stage 3 assessment process delivers approximately 85% of the journey time improvements for 60% of the capital cost of a dual carriageway option offering better value for money with less environmental impact.

In securing the necessary powers required to construct the bypass the DMRB Stage 1, 2 and 3 Assessment Reports, together with the Position Paper were considered

by an independent Reporter as part of the Public Local Inquiry into the scheme in May 2015 and following consideration of the Reporter's recommendations the Scottish Ministers decided that the Orders for the scheme should be made without modification.

The Scottish Government is committed to completing the A77 Maybole Bypass at the earliest possible opportunity. The bypass will help separate local traffic from traffic travelling further afield, including to our key ports, improve road safety for local communities and road users, and provide better journey time reliability for motorists and businesses along the full length of the A77. Procurement of the scheme is well underway with the award of the main construction contract expected in Autumn 2018.

The committee's second query relates to a request for further details regarding an increase in the HGV speed limit. As set out in the Minister for Transport and the Islands follow-up letter of 11 December 2017 to the Public Petitions Committee, whilst there are no current plans to increase the HGV speed limit on the A77, or any other trunk road, this will be re-examined once evidence becomes available.

The committee's third point relates to what are the long terms plans for the A75 and A77 and how members of the public will be able to contribute to South West Scotland Transport Study. As you will be aware Transport Scotland recently announced the appointment of consultant AECOM Ltd to undertake the study. We are at the early inception stage, however as the study moves forward stakeholder engagement will be a key element, consisting of both targeted engagement with key stakeholders as well as opportunities for the wider public to contribute to the study. Dumfries & Galloway, South and East Ayrshire Councils will be part of the project steering group and plans for how the public engagement phase will be undertaken on the study are still in development. This study will inform any decisions on future transport investment on both routes which will be for consideration as part of the forthcoming, Scotland-wide, second Strategic Transport Projects Review. I would be happy to keep the committee notified of opportunities for engagement as the study moves forward.

I hope this is helpful.