

Minister for Transport submission of 22 March 2023

PE1610/N: Upgrade the A75 and PE1657/K: A77 upgrade

Thank you for your letter dated 17 October 2022 to the Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport regarding *PE1610: Upgrade the A75* and *PE1657: A77 upgrade*. In addition, thank you for your patience as I note an administrative error has unfortunately resulted in a delay to your letter being actioned. The current contact details for Scottish Ministers can be found on the Scottish Government website. I will respond in my capacity as Minister for Transport.

I would note that both petitions have been ongoing for a number of years, and I refer you to the previous response that was issued to the Committee by Fiona Brown, Interim Director of Transport Strategy and Analysis, Transport Scotland on 31 August 2022. Within this, Transport Scotland pointed to the fact that STPR2 would outline what future investment was required for both the A75 and A77. Now that the final 45 recommendations have been published, as of 8 December 2022, I would like to take this opportunity to confirm the outcomes of STPR2 with regards to A75 and A77 strategic corridors.

Recommendation 40 (Access to Stranraer and the ports at Cairnryan) highlights the need for improvements to both the A77 and A75. As correctly outlined within your letter, STPR2 recommends that safety, resilience and reliability improvements are made on the A75 and A77 strategic road corridors. This would include, but is not limited to, enhancing overtaking opportunities, widening or realigning carriageways, and improving junctions.

The Review has been undertaken in line with the Sustainable Investment Hierarchy which aims to reduce the need to travel unsustainably and prioritises making the best use of existing infrastructure before targeted infrastructure improvements. Some STPR2 recommendations relate to the maintenance and improvement of the Trunk Road Network within this context, however none of these recommendations seek to increase road capacity.

I note that during the committee's deliberations on these petitions on 28 September 2022, a point was raised regarding the South West Scotland

Transport Study. This study was published in January 2020 and formed the STPR2 Initial Appraisal: Case for Change for the South West Region. I would like to reiterate the recognition of the fact that this study does not recommend taking forward the option for full dualling of either the A75 or A77. Instead, as previously mentioned, STPR2 recommends that targeted road improvements on both routes are taken forward for further consideration. This was on the basis that this option supported the regional transport objectives, whilst more proportionately meeting the Sustainable Investment Hierarchy set out in the National Transport Strategy and our commitment to delivering transport projects which will help us to create the conditions for an inclusive and net zero emissions economy.

STPR2 is an ambitious plan for investment for the next 20 years, is subject the funding allocations agreed by Parliament each year through the annual budget process. A Delivery Plan to provide further insight on the prioritisation of the STPR2 recommendations will follow later this year, when there is more clarity and greater certainty on the available capital budget and fiscal policy for the coming years.

The Scottish Government recognises the strategic and economic importance of the ports at Cairnryan and continues to monitor freight and passenger movements at the ports. The UK Department for Transport produce annual statistical data about the international and domestic movement of freight by water. The most recent statistics for the 2021 port freight annual report were released in July 2022. An extract of freight level statistics for ports facilitating Irish Sea crossings are shown in Annex A to this letter. The Scottish Government is not aware of any credible evidence to suggest that business is being directed away from the ports at Cairnryan towards alternative routes. As outlined earlier, STPR2 Recommendation 40 highlights the need for improvements to both the A77 and A75 which will provide more resilient connections to the ports at Cairnryan.

In summary, I believe that the evidence that I have set-out here with respect to the STPR2 Recommendation 40, clearly signals this Government's future intent for the improvement of both the A75 and A77 routes. While the recommendation is not to dual either road the robust evidence based approach that has been taken by the South West Transport Study and STPR2 in coming to this recommendation ensures that the proposed alternative meets the future needs and requirements, whilst addressing our need to achieve Net Zero by 2045. I am therefore hopeful that the Committee will accept this evidence, together with that previously provided, and move to close these two petitions.

