

Minister for Transport submission of 17 May 2023

PE1610/SS: Upgrade the A75 and PE1657/PP: A77 upgrade

Thank you for your letter dated 21 April 2023 regarding *PE1610: Upgrade the A75 and PE1657: A77 upgrade*, and noting that written evidence to the Committee on 19 April 2023 highlighted the [A75 A77 Strategic and Economic Impacts Report](#) (The EIA Report) commissioned by Dumfries and Galloway, South Ayrshire and Mid and East Antrim Councils and undertaken by the independent transport consultancy Sweco.

The EIA Report

My officials at Transport Scotland are aware of the above report and are already considering its findings, including the headline comments that dualling the A75 and A77 would bring £5bn of “positive benefits” to the UK economy, including from reduced journey times, CO2 emissions and vehicle operating costs. While Transport Scotland officials welcome robust evidence led transport appraisal work, the initial observation is that the report only appears to reflect the positive implications of dualling these routes and seeks only to demonstrate benefits that could accrue from the proposed interventions.

The committee will be aware, in their consideration of this petition, that full dualling of either/both the A75 and A77 were considered in the appraisal for STPR2, and previously in the South West Scotland Transport Study (SWSTS). Extensive and robust appraisal, undertaken in compliance with Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance (STAG) has, at each stage of this process, demonstrated that targeted improvements to both routes, rather than full dualling better align with the Sustainable Investment Hierarchy which aims to reduce the need to travel unsustainably and prioritises making the best use of existing infrastructure and targeted improvements before expanding existing, or constructing new, infrastructure.

In this context it is welcomed that the EIA Report Packages 1 and 2 (various combinations of Bypasses of key towns and junction improvements along both the A75 and A77) confirmed the findings of

both the SWSTS and STPR2 by demonstrating benefits in economic terms, journey times and road safety of targeted improvements along the routes.

The value, however, of undertaking detailed transport modelling of the Report's Packages 3, 6 and 9 (which comprise full dualling of the A75 and/or the A77) seems questionable, given the conclusion of the aforementioned studies, which were informed by detailed transport modelling and appraisal undertaken on behalf of the Scottish Ministers and in line with STAG.

Despite referring to them, the EIA report does not take into consideration the outcomes of either STPR2 or the SWSTS, both of which do not recommend the full dualling of either route. Furthermore, the EIA Report does not provide any indication of potential capital or operational costs associated with the proposed interventions, hence it does not provide any benefit-cost ratios (BCR) to summarise the overall value for money. If cost information were to be included, it would likely change the ranking of options as full dualling, which is currently top of the list based on benefits, is also likely to have the highest cost.

Delivery of STPR2 Recommendation 40

The Scottish Government recognises the strategic and economic importance of the A75 and A77 Trunk Roads which was reflected in publication of second Strategic Transport Projects Review (STPR2) in December 2022 which recommends that safety, resilience and reliability improvements are made on the A75 and A77 strategic road corridors, under Recommendation 40. This could include, but is not limited to, enhancing overtaking opportunities, widening or realigning carriageways and improving junctions.

Prioritisation work in respect of STPR2 recommendations is currently being undertaken by Transport Scotland which will feed into publication of the STPR2 Delivery Plan later this year. Until this work is completed it is not possible to provide timescales for delivery of individual recommendations or a completion date for work relating to Recommendation 40 – Access to Stranraer / Cairnryan in STPR2, therefore I would challenge that it is delayed. It is not yet programmed. The former Cabinet Secretary was clear when STPR2 was finalised, and as stated in the report – STPR2 is not a funded plan and whilst the majority of the recommendations are in progress, many are subject allocation of funding.

Nonetheless, I am pleased that both the Scottish and UK Governments agree that investment is needed on the A75 to improve safety and reliability, ensuring that the main route between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK is fit for purpose. It is, however, an unprecedented requirement for a devolved administration to submit a business case to Treasury for funding of a project which is fully within devolved competence. Despite this, my officials at Transport Scotland have submitted a proposal to the UK Department for Transport on 28 April. Receipt of this has been acknowledged and my officials stand ready to continue to work with the UK Government to access this funding.

Minister for Transport, Kevin Stewart MSP