

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

6th Meeting, 2022 (Session 6), Wednesday 19
April 2023

PE1610: Upgrade the A75 and PE1657: A77
upgrade

Note by the Clerk

PE1610: Upgrade the A75

Lodged 13 July 2016

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 petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1610

PE1657: A77 upgrade

Lodged 19 June 2017

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 Whitlett's Roundabout south to the two ferry
ports located at Cairnryan, including the point at which the A77
connects with the A75.

Webpage petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1657

Introduction

1. The Committee last considered the petitions at its meeting on [28 September 2022](#). At that meeting, the Committee agreed to write to the Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport.
2. The petition summaries are included in **Annexe A** and the Official Report of the Committee's last consideration of these petitions is at **Annexe B**.
3. The Committee has received new responses from Jenny Gilruth MSP, then Minister for Transport, the petitioner for PE1657, Donald McHarrie, the petitioner for PE1610, Matt Halliday, and Finlay Carson MSP at **Annexe C**.
4. Written submissions received prior to the Committee's last consideration can be found on the petition webpages ([PE1610](#) and [PE1657](#)). All written submissions received on the petitions before May 2021 can be viewed on the archive webpages ([PE1610](#) and [PE1657](#)).
5. Further background information about the petitions can be found in the SPICE briefings which can be found on the petition webpages.
6. The Scottish Government's initial position on these petitions can be found on the petition archive webpages ([PE1610](#) and [PE1657](#)).

Action

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

Clerk to the Committee

Annexe A

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 convoys 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 28th September 2022

The Convener: Item 2 is consideration of continued petitions. We are joined by two of our parliamentary colleagues, Brian Whittle and Katy Clark, who will be contributing on two of the petitions before us. Brian Whittle will be contributing in relation to the first, and we will come to him shortly.

PE1610 and PE1657 relate to the upgrades of the A75 and A77. PE1610 was lodged by Matt Halliday and 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. PE1657 was lodged by Donald McHarrie of the A77 action group and calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to dual the A77 from Ayr's Whitlets roundabout south to the two ferry ports at Cairnryan, including the point at which the A77 connects with the A75.

The committee previously agreed to consider the petitions together and has heard evidence on both petitions over a number of years, including evidence from the then Minister for Transport. We received an update from the Scottish Government outlining relevant outcomes from strategic transport projects review 2.

Recommendation 40 in the review is about access to Stranraer and Cairnryan and highlights proposals for improvements to the A75 and A77.

The petitioner for PE1657, Donald McHarrie, has sent us a written submission that raises concerns about delays in relation to landslides and draws attention to the potential solution of road tunnelling at the Rest and Be Thankful. The petitioner for PE1610, Matt Halliday, has also submitted his views, reiterating that the situation has not moved forward and that the same issues are again arising on the A75. He raises concerns about connectivity for the south-west of Scotland and highlights the benefits of shortened journey times.

We have also received written submissions from Elena Whitham MSP and Finlay Carson MSP, who are yet again reinforcing their support for the petition, highlighting the economic importance of the A77 and the A75, and stressing the need for further investment.

Before we consider the evidence that we have heard previously and where we might go next, I invite Brian Whittle to update us on his views on the petition.

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak again on these long-running petitions, which were lodged while I was on the Public Petitions Committee during the previous session of Parliament. The saga has been running for longer than that—it goes all the way back to 2010 and before. In

2010, when the then First Minister Alex Salmond opened the Cairnryan ports, he committed to improving the connectivity of the A77 and A75.

There is a huge volume of traffic, especially big 44-tonne lorries, because 44 per cent of all goods going in and out of Northern Ireland go through that port. A lot of those goods are just-in-time products, such as food. The port is hugely important to the prosperity of south-west of Scotland and the whole of Scotland. The A77 connects Cairnryan to the central belt and the A75 connects Scotland to the south and allows goods from Ireland to move on to the south.

That route is under threat because there is another route, between Dublin and Holyhead, where there has been an investment in connectivity. Vehicles coming off at Holyhead go straight on to a dual carriageway, and it is now possible to go by motorway from Belfast down to Dublin. The actual time that it takes for goods to travel between Dublin and Holyhead and between Belfast and Cairnryan is becoming closer. There is evidence that about 6 or 7 per cent of goods are now moving to the Dublin to Holyhead route. The Cairnryan route is therefore under threat.

I have, in fact, undertaken the route from Glasgow to Cairnryan in a 44-tonne lorry. I would advise that you do that sometime, convener. It is very interesting when you are going through places such as Girvan and very narrow streets, and you can see out of the cab people having their dinner about three yards away from you. Anybody who has travelled that route knows that it is a dangerous route. It is a route where, if something happens on the A77—which happens frequently—the diversion takes you on to a B road, which is extremely dangerous for 44-tonne lorries.

It is an on-going saga. It is taking too long. We need investment in the south-west. Only 0.04 per cent of the transport budget in the past decade has been spent in the south-west. I used to say that it was the forgotten part of Scotland; now, the feeling is that it is the ignored part of Scotland. We need this to move along much more quickly than is the case.

The Convener: In a previous life, I used to deliver lorries to customers—but not the largest ones. I did not have to have a heavy goods vehicle licence, but they were big enough. I always thought that the view from the cab was fascinating.

Mr Whittle gave us a figure about a transference from the Cairnryan route to the Dublin to Holyhead route. Did I hear you say that it was something like 6 per cent? Is that traffic that would previously have gone on the Cairnryan route that is now going on the Dublin to Holyhead route?

Brian Whittle: That is correct.

The Convener: May I ask where that information came from?

Brian Whittle: It came from Belfast harbour. As part of my investigation into the issue, I travelled to Belfast to meet businesses across there and meet Belfast

harbour. I looked at how the south-west infrastructure is impacting on Belfast and the goods over there. At that time, Belfast harbour said that the figure was 6 per cent. I cannot accurately tell the committee where it is now, but that percentage will certainly not be declining. I would think that it would be increasing.

The Convener: That is helpful. Do colleagues have comments, questions or suggestions?

David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP): The petitions have been with us a long time. From the information that we have got back, the south-west Scotland transport study does not recommend taking forward the option of full dualling either the A75 or the A77, opting instead to recommend targeted road improvements. A draft report on the strategic transport projects review also recommends that safety, resilience and reliable improvements are made on the A75 and A77 strategic road corridors. The Scottish Government's response signals that it intends to upgrade both those routes.

With that information, I would like to close the petitions under rule 15.7 of standing orders. However, I would also like to write to the Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport to seek information on a timescale for those improvements, because that is what has been missing in the committee.

The Convener: Personally, I am reluctant to close the petitions without trying to drill down on that information. I accept that we need to get some sort of date. I wonder whether the clerks could verify that information from Mr Whittle in relation to Belfast. If we are asking for a timeline, it would be good to couple that with evidence that the delay in establishing a timeline is leading to a transference of the potential business that would use that route, which could have a compound effect in due course and undermine the financial viability of the region and the route. That is why we think that the delay in getting any firm timescale is unhelpful.

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I concur with the convener. We require clarity from the cabinet secretary with reference to access to Stranraer and Cairnryan. Notwithstanding that the petitions have been here a long time, there is merit in trying to find more information and clarity before we get to the stage of closing them. I support the convener's suggestion that we should get the information and not close the petitions at this stage.

David Torrance: I would be quite happy to agree with the committee's decision.

The Convener: Okay. There is only so far that a committee can take things, but I think that it is worth pursuing, because there is a commitment to do something but no commitment as to when it will be done. We might want to try to get the latter.

Members *indicated agreement.*

Annexe C

Minister for Transport (Jenny Gilruth MSP)

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 to 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.

Petitioner submission of 30 March 2023

PE1657/LL: A77 upgrade

The three mostly affected councils have collaborated to produce a very telling piece of work in the Economic Impact Assessment. I am not aware of anything being so in-depth into upgrading A77 and A75.

South Ayrshire Council, Dumfries & Galloway Council along with Mid-East Antrim Borough Council worked with Sweco. These papers were only published on 30th March 2023. I would like the Committee to be aware of this piece of work and the findings. By turning A77 and A75 into dual carriageway roads would also be the green thing to do and the right thing to do for the economy of the South West!

This is practically the opening of the whole piece of work *“Dualling the A75/A77 trunk roads linking Scotland and England with Northern Ireland would bring £5bn of "positive benefits" to the UK economy, according to a new report.*

Benefits range from reduced journey times and vehicle operating costs (£700 million) to combined CO2e (carbon dioxide equivalent) savings of around £95 million.”

These links are found on the Dumfries & Galloway Council website

<https://www.dumgal.gov.uk/A75-A77>

- [📄 Strategic and Economic Impacts Report \[PDF - 5.39MB\]](#)
- [📄 Strategic and Economic Impacts Report Appendices \[PDF - 7.43MB\]](#)
- [📄 Economic Activity and Location Impacts Report \[PDF - 5.24MB\]](#)

<https://youtu.be/Zr1GDzj9mU0>

Petitioner submission of 2 April 2023

PE1610/PP: Upgrade the A75

I am writing to draw the committee's attention to the newly released Economic Impact Study for SW Scotland, of A75/A77 upgrades, by Dumfries & Galloway, South Ayrshire and Antrim Coast & Glens councils. I have attached these reports here for the Committee's consideration. [See links above.]

Also, the Transport Minister's reply is the same line we have heard from all the Transport Ministers since the petition was first lodged.

Finlay Carson MSP submission of 5 April 2023

PE1610/QQ: Upgrade the A75 and PE1657/NN: A77 Upgrade

It is my understanding that the Transport Minister has written to the Citizens Participation and Public Petitions Committee asking that the petitions PE1657 and PE1610 be closed.

Unfortunately I will not be in parliament when petitions PE1657 and PE1610 will once again be heard, but I would strongly make the case these petitions are continued given the powerful evidence provided by the publication of an Economic Impact Assessment carried out by the European-wide transport consultancy company SWECO.

This report was commissioned by three local authorities – Dumfries and Galloway Council, South Ayrshire Council and Mid and East Antrim Councils – and only published on 30th March 2023. It is fair to say that this is a crucial, in-depth piece of work and it is only right that the committee is made fully aware of it.

Among the findings is the conclusion that dualling the A75 and A77 trunk roads linking Scotland and England with Northern Ireland would bring £5 billion of positive benefits to the UK economy as well as significant environmental gains, including CO2 emissions reduction.

Benefits range from reduced journey times and vehicle operating costs of approximately £700 million to combine carbon dioxide savings of around £95 million.

As the constituency MSP for Galloway and West Dumfries, I believe the impact assessment report clearly shows that STPR2 simply does not go far enough and, furthermore the commitment from the previous Transport Minister and the First Minister to improve transport infrastructure in the south west corner of Scotland has clearly not been delivered.

Despite promises of round-table discussions this has not happened and, the timetable of STPR2 has still not happened and with no proposed date either.

We also have an indication that Transport Scotland and UK Government are having positive discussions on producing a business case for both Governments' funding improvements on the A75 on the back of The Union Connectivity Review, however information is difficult to come by. In a response to my letter to Jenny Gilruth the former Transport Minister dated 15th March 2022, confirmed that Transport Scotland would consider the EIA in full when published. There has not yet been any public response to the EIA.

I fully support the letter from Donald McHarrie and given the findings of the EIA report I think it is only right and proper that both petitions remain active.