

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

10th Meeting, 2023 (Session 6), Wednesday
14 June 2023

PE1992: Dual the A9 and improve road safety

Lodged on 28 December 2022

Petitioner Laura Hansler

Petition summary Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to deliver on the commitment it made in 2011, and address safety concerns on the A9 by:

- publishing a revised timetable and detailed plan for dualling each section;
- completing the dualling work by 2025; and
- creating a memorial to those who have lost their lives in road traffic incidents on the A9.

Webpage <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1992>

Introduction

1. The Committee last considered this petition at its meeting on [22 February 2023](#). At that meeting, the Committee agreed to invite the petitioner and the Minister for Transport to give evidence at a future meeting. The Committee also agreed to write to organisations including the Society of Chief Officers of Transportation in Scotland, the Chartered Institute of Highways and Transportation, the Road Haulage Association, the Civil Engineering Contractors Association, Inverness Chamber of Commerce, Perthshire Chamber of Commerce, and local community councils.
2. During discussion on the Committee's work programme at its meeting on [19 April 2023](#), the Committee agreed to also invite the Civil Engineering Contractors Association and Transport Scotland to give oral evidence on this petition.
3. The petition summary is included in **Annexe A** and the Official Report of the Committee's last consideration of this petition is at **Annexe B**.

4. The Committee has received new responses from Nethy Bridge and Vicinity Community Council, the Society of Chief Officers of Transportation in Scotland (SCOTS), and Rhoda Grant MSP, which are set out in **Annexe C**. The Chartered Institute of Highways and Transportation declined to provide a formal response on this occasion.
5. Written submissions received prior to the Committee's last consideration can be found on the [petition's webpage](#).
6. Further background information about this petition can be found in the [SPICe briefing](#) for this petition.
7. The Scottish Government's initial position on this petition can be found on the [petition's webpage](#).
8. Every petition collects signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 3,837 signatures have been received on this petition.
9. Members may be aware that two Members' Business debates have taken place on this issue since the Committee's last consideration. The Official Report of these debates, which took place on [22 February 2023](#) and [21 March 2023](#), are available on the Parliament website.
10. Members will also be aware that Edward Mountain MSP has been appointed as a reporter from the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, and will join the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee for its consideration of this petition.

Action

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

Clerk to the Committee

Annexe A

PE1992: Dual the A9 and improve road safety

Petitioner

Laura Hansler

Date lodged

28 December 2022

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to deliver on the commitment it made in 2011, and address safety concerns on the A9 by:

- publishing a revised timetable and detailed plan for dualling each section;
- completing the dualling work by 2025; and
- creating a memorial to those who have lost their lives in road traffic incidents on the A9.

Previous action

Have been in contact with Fergus Ewing MSP and Kate Forbes MSP.

Background information

A social media awareness campaign called “A9 Dual Action Group”, was formed to highlight the following issues:

The exponential rate of fatalities. The A9 has now become a road barely fit for purpose with an unsustainable influx of traffic on the infrastructure.

In 2011, the Scottish Government pledged as "priority" an ambitious dualling scheme to be completed by 2025, between Perth to Inverness in its entirety. Since then, 59 people have lost their lives on the Perth to Inverness section of the A9 (based on figures provided by Transport Scotland).

Whether there should be an investigation into the procurement procedure associated with this project.

The need for mandatory safety features to be deployed on the A9 before any further loss of life.

The Action Group are also concerned that, more than 10 years after being labelled a priority, it is looking increasingly likely the Scottish Government will fail to deliver on their commitment to complete the A9 dualling project by 2025.

Annexe B

Extract from Official Report of last consideration of PE1992 on 22 February 2023

The Deputy Convener: Our final new petition is PE1992, lodged by Laura Hansler, which is on dualling the A9 and improving road safety. I welcome to the committee Murdo Fraser and—a regular visitor to the committee—Rhoda Grant.

The petition calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to deliver on the commitment that it made in 2011 and address safety concerns on the A9 by publishing a revised timetable and detailed plan for dualling each section; completing the dualling work by 2025; and creating a memorial to the people who have lost their lives in road traffic incidents on the A9.

As I said, we are joined in our consideration of the petition by our colleagues Murdo Fraser and Rhoda Grant.

The petition has been somewhat superseded by the Minister for Transport's statement to the Parliament on 8 February, in which it was confirmed that the 2025 completion date is now "no longer achievable". Nevertheless, I will set out some of the background to the petition, before opening it up to wider discussion.

In the background information to the petition, the petitioner, Laura Hansler, tells us that the A9 dual action group was formed to raise awareness of the number of people who have lost their lives on the A9 and of the need for a mandatory safety feature to be deployed to reduce further loss of life, as well as to explore whether there should be an investigation into the procurement procedures that are associated with the project.

In its initial response to the petition, which was received prior to the minister's statement, the Scottish Government highlighted the short-term road safety measures that have been developed by Transport Scotland to take account of the recent trend of fatal accidents on the A9.

The response states the Scottish Government's firm commitment to completing the dualling of the A9 between Perth and Inverness, albeit without providing a revised timetable on when the work is likely to be completed.

Following the minister's statement, the committee received a submission from the petitioner in which she calls on us to consider a public inquiry into the matter.

I open up the discussion to members.

Fergus Ewing: I commend Laura Hansler for bringing the petition to the Parliament. I believe that it has been signed by several thousand people.

Last year, 13 people lost their lives in incidents on the A9, and 12 of those occurred on sections of the A9 that are single carriageway. There is evidence that the risk of fatality or incapacitating injuries as a result of incidents is three times greater on single carriageway than on dual carriageway, and the risk is 10 times greater on single carriageway than on motorway. There are no dual carriageway links in the Highlands; therefore, for a Highlander—a Highland resident—the chance of dying on the road is between three and 10 times greater than for people living in the central belt. Every death has been a tragedy for families and has caused absolute devastation. That is the backdrop that has brought representatives from nearly all parties to the conclusion that we need to get to the bottom of what is happening.

My suggestion is that there should be a parliamentary inquiry. Perhaps the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee could be approached privately to see whether, if it wishes, it has the time to undertake such an inquiry, given its busy work schedule. If the net zero committee is not able to undertake such an inquiry, I suggest that this committee carries it out.

The important point is that an inquiry is required. Why? There are several questions to be considered, but there are two main ones. I would be interested to hear what Murdo Fraser and Rhoda Grant say about this, because we have been working cross party—including with the Liberal Democrats—on the issue, which is good.

The first of the two main questions is about what exactly went wrong with the Tomatin to Moy section. Around the spring of 2021, it was announced that the work would be going ahead, and it was only fairly recently that we heard that it would not go ahead. What happened in that intervening period? Why did it go wrong, and will a retender solve the problem or could it lead to the same situation, with apparently only one bidder left, at a price that was reported to be unacceptably high?

The second and perhaps the main question—and this is the thrust of my recommendation—is about the scope of the inquiry, which should be on how we can most swiftly complete the dualling of the A9 between Perth and Inverness. How can that be done and what procurement options and choices should be carried out?

I have had extensive discussions with people in the civil engineering sector, including the Civil Engineering Contractors Association, which is the representative body. Those discussions have led me to the conclusion that the industry believes that, if things proceed as they do at the moment, where we procure one section consecutively after another and only build one at a time, given that it takes three years minimum for each section—one year to procure and two years to build—and there are nine remaining sections, the work will be completed in 2050, because nine threes are 27 and 2023 plus 27 years is 2050. The prospect of the road not being dualled until 2050 is utterly unacceptable to all parties and certainly to my constituents in the Highlands.

This is the final point that I will make, convener, because I appreciate that you have given me some latitude. The very same senior industry insiders tell me that, if

everything is done as swiftly as it could be done, and if companies—if they can be persuaded to do the work by Transport Scotland—have the capacity to do it, the dualling could be completed by around 2030.

The key is the procurement options, and I think that Transport Scotland recognises that the current model of procurement, in which all the risks are passed to contractors, has resulted in a situation with one company leaving Scotland entirely and another company no longer bidding for roads, leaving a limited pool of potential bidders from whom competitive bids can be acquired. In that circumstance, competitive bidding might well again lead to a scenario with no competitive bids, particularly since it costs about £500,000 to prepare a bid and four or five companies would have to do the same preparation work four or five times over. Therefore, a framework contract, which I understand is applicable in Highways England, some local authorities and Scottish Water, would seem to be the way ahead. That would allow the dualling of several sections of the road to be done, as well as parts of the A96, which should also be dualled and the dualling of which from Smithton to Auldearn, including the Nairn bypass, is another Government commitment.

An inquiry into all those things by a parliamentary committee would allow us all to display critical but supportive forensic questioning of Transport Scotland, the minister and industry figures in order to get the work done. Frankly, people in the Highlands and throughout Scotland have been frustrated and, in many cases, angry that the pledge that the Scottish Government made has not been kept and, furthermore, that there has not even been an apology for that.

The Deputy Convener: Perhaps Murdo Fraser would like to comment.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Thank you for letting me come to the committee, convener. I endorse everything that my friend Fergus Ewing has said. He is absolutely right to say that there is strong cross-party concern about the issue. My colleague Jamie Halcro Johnston apologises—he would have been here this morning to support the petition, but he has been detained elsewhere.

We are holding a debate on the issue in the chamber this afternoon, so I will say more about the matter then. However, briefly, to summarise, I have a strong personal interest in the matter. More than 30 years ago, I was involved in a head-on collision on a single carriageway section of the A9, which left me with multiple fractures. I spent weeks in hospital recovering. However, I was one of the lucky ones, because many other people who have been involved in similar accidents have not survived, as Fergus Ewing made clear when stating the stark figures for the past year, during which 12 people died on single carriageway sections.

There is little doubt that, if we had had a dual carriageway with central barriers between the lanes, there would not have been the same level of serious fatality and accident on the A9 as we have seen. It is a crucial issue from a road safety perspective. There was a lot of celebration in the Highlands and across Mid Scotland

and Fife—the area that I represent—particularly in Perth and Kinross, when the current Scottish Government announced in, I think, 2011 a timetable for progressing the A9 dualling project to complete by 2025. We know that that will not now happen, which was confirmed by the minister just two weeks ago.

It is important that we keep on the pressure and press for a completion date and that we better understand the reasons why there is not faster progress. I entirely endorse the call for a parliamentary inquiry to be done by a committee of this Parliament. Such an inquiry could drill down into the issues and ensure that we have a proper understanding of what exactly is holding up this vital road safety project. If it does not progress, there will, sadly, be more fatalities over the next few years.

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): I, too, thank the committee for allowing me to speak to this petition. I agree with what colleagues have already said.

The A9 is a road that impacts not only on constituents in Inverness, but on the whole of the Highlands and Islands. I pay tribute to Laura Hansler for lodging the petition and all those who are campaigning to improve the road.

A lot of people say that there is no such thing as a dangerous road, and there are only dangerous drivers, but the road plays a huge part in mitigating driver error. I think that everybody can admit to driver error at one point or another, but the design of the road can keep people safe. I drive the A9 weekly and I see very strange driver behaviour, most of which would not happen if it was a dual carriageway.

Last year, there were eight deaths on the 25-mile stretch near the Slochd in just three months, and that was tragic. The total amount of deaths last year was 13. The deaths of those people are losses to not only their families but their communities. We all lose out, as we lose their contribution to society, so the issue impacts on everybody.

The Scottish National Party made dualling the A9 a manifesto commitment back in 2007. In December 2011, ministers confirmed the commitment and they put the timeframe of 2025 on it at that point. Sadly, progress has been slow, and I do not believe that the war in Ukraine, Brexit, Covid or inflation is the underlying reason for that. Had that target of 2025 been a goal, the contracts would have already been issued, the land would have been purchased, and we would probably be on the last stretch rather than looking towards the third stretch.

Eleven sections of the road still have to be dualled and we have no timeframe for them. The closest timeframe that we have had is the one that Fergus Ewing alluded to—an industry representative said 2050. I would say that it might even be longer than that, because the stretches that have been dualled have not been done back to back. There have been gaps between that work, so we need an investigation into the matter.

If we look at the cost to the public purse, we see that every fatality costs about £2 million to investigate, so last year the total for that was £26 million, and the loss of life is a loss to the public purse as well.

I am keen to see an inquiry. Like Fergus Ewing, I think that it would be worth while for the committee to see whether the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee had space to do that. I also wonder whether this committee would want to get its teeth into the matter and carry out an inquiry. You might have the scope for it. I know that, from time to time, the committee likes to look into an issue that a petitioner has raised. Will you consider that? Certainly, a committee of this Parliament should carry out an inquiry that would tell us what has gone wrong and what progress has been made, and give us realistic timescales.

The Deputy Convener: Thank you, Rhoda Grant.

I suggest that the clerks continue to discuss with the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee the possibility of an inquiry, and in the meantime we continue to gather evidence on the matter. We could also invite the petitioner to provide evidence to the committee and invite the Minister for Transport to provide evidence at future committee meetings, if that is acceptable to committee members.

Alexander Stewart: That would be very acceptable. The strength of feeling on the matter is immense, and we have found out today that there is cross-party support for the petition. Thousands of individuals have made the petition part of their process and there is no doubt that there has been neglect of that process. That is coming through very strongly from the petitioner. Having the petitioner here would give us much more clarity. I also think that your idea of having the Minister for Transport come to the committee would be useful.

We need to get information from other organisations that are affected by the situation. Organisations such as the Society of Chief Officers of Transportation in Scotland have a part to play in this, as does the Chartered Institution of Highways and Transportation and even the Road Haulage Association. Those are the organisations whose members are using the road and are suffering from the situation. This morning, we have heard MSPs speak eloquently about the dangers on the road and what is possible.

I like the idea of this committee considering an inquiry if it is not possible to for another committee of the Parliament to do one. That could be investigated by the clerks, as you suggest. We should not lose sight of the fact that this committee has an opportunity to ensure that something is done on the matter. That would be my suggestion, as well as your own.

Fergus Ewing: If there is an appetite—I obviously have the appetite, as do others—for this committee to do the inquiry, we would be well placed to do it. I know that the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee is very busy, but because it is the lead committee on the matter it would be politic to have discussions.

I think that Alexander Stewart is right: we could do a good job and we would be assisted by visiting members, I am perfectly sure. I would be more than happy if the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee did the inquiry. Practically, it might be easier for us to play our part that way.

We should write to the chambers of commerce in Inverness and Perth, which have been very active on the matter, and to community councils. I can supply the clerks with information about who to write to in Badenoch and Strathspey, for example; I think that Sandy McCook chairs a group of the community councils there. We should also write to the Civil Engineering Contractors Association, which can provide expert evidence. It would be good to contact it.

I should apologise to my constituents that I am not able to attend the debate on the A9 this afternoon, because I will be in the dental chair having my teeth drilled. I hope that nobody connected with Transport Scotland is doing the drilling. It will be a bit like perhaps not Hamlet without the prince, but, given my age, Hamlet without Polonius, but Laertes will be there to fill the breach. I just thought that I should state that out of courtesy, because normally I participate in such debates, and it is a matter of disappointment that I am not able to do so today, because I could not get any other appointment. I state that for the record and as a courtesy to other members who might wonder why I am not making my views known.

The Deputy Convener: Thank you, Fergus Ewing. Is the committee happy with those recommendations?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Annexe C

Nethy Bridge and Vicinity Community Council submission of 4 April 2023

PE1992/C: Dual the A9 and improve road safety

First of all many thanks for the opportunity to address you with our concerns surrounding the A9, its importance, its safety and the timescale for its reconstruction.

While I am chairman of the Nethy Bridge and Vicinity Community Council I am replying here for, and on behalf of, all community councils and community associations in Badenoch and Strathspey. Our area, Badenoch and Strathspey with a population of circa 14,140 in June of 2021, encompasses the A9 from the summit of Slochd in the north to Drumochter summit in the south and comprises of 12 individual community councils. We have within Badenoch and Strathspey some 42 or 38% of the A9's total 112 miles between Inverness and Perth. Being locally based with all CC members having to live within their respective CC boundaries we feel we are closest to the population of our villages and towns and are becoming more and more aware of the growing anger and frustration within these communities at the lack of progress and to be quite honest the hollow words and promises made, and which are now being reneged upon regarding the upgrade of the A9.

The A9 is the main artery running from north to south through the heart of the country, it is the spine of Scotland from which, north of Perth, most other main roads radiate. It carries most of our goods and products north while being responsible for much of the exports from the Highlands and Islands south. It carries our whisky to the south along with all manner of Highland manufactured foodstuffs while bringing north everything required for daily life from new cars, oil platform components, to food, clothing and building materials. No wonder there are so many large lorries on the route. Through Badenoch and Strathspey we see an average of 8000 vehicles using the road per day.

In 2014 an experiment was started with HGV's being allowed to travel at 50mph on the road as opposed to the national limit of 40mph as a means of increasing the flow of traffic and reducing tailbacks. While this was welcome it did not resolve the issue. We now have the main route to

the north or south with a 50mph HGV speed limit. As it is a single carriageway with oncoming traffic it means that all vehicles following an HGV have to travel at their speed, it being unsafe most of the time to overtake, you are travelling at the speed of the slowest vehicle - 50mph. This in itself leads to frustration among following drivers and leads to 'miscalculations' and dangerous driving caused by frustration when long convoys form. We doubt if the central belt would accept their main road linking Glasgow with Edinburgh being restricted to 50mph.

Over the years we have seen an ever increasing, but varying, number of fatal and serious accidents. In the 13 year period between 2009 and October 2022 there have been 117 fatalities from a total of 805 serious (as classified by Police Scotland) accidents giving an average of nine deaths per year and 62 serious accidents. Last year alone in Badenoch and Strathspey there were 9 fatalities, tragically including two incidents where three people lost their lives in each. These included locals, tourists and lorry drivers. This is simply unacceptable. These are our families, our friends, our visitors and our service providers. While we fully accept that dualling the road would not stop all accidents it would certainly reduce the number of head on incidents. Of these accidents there was serious driver error with overtaking, confusion of junctions by foreign drivers and other forms of incident. As well as the enormous human impact on all the families and friends of victims of both fatal and non-fatal accidents there is also the large financial burden which each one causes, not only from the huge cost of the accident and its investigation but also from the huge delays to all other traffic on the road. While no delay is worth an injury or death it has to be remembered that for each road closure of 8 to 12 hours for investigation there is a huge knock-on effect to travel and delivery of goods. We must remember also that for many parts of the road, Slochd and Drumochter in particular, there are no viable alternatives other than travelling via Aberdeen which involves an additional eighty miles of driving, one hundred of it on the equally dangerous A96. The route via Spean Bridge and Fort William has been proven to be unsuitable with accidents occurring and large vehicles becoming stuck on verges on the route during diversions.

There is now a growing feeling of unease and reluctance among many local and highland people from even travelling on the road. Raigmore Hospital, Inverness is our nearest (and only major) hospital which covers as far south as Drumochter meaning that all patients, both inpatients and outpatients for their appointments have to travel this road, most by car due to the sparse public transport which in itself highlights the fact that in areas like this a car is not a luxury but a necessity. Fortunately, many patients

are able to make use of the community transport company based in Aviemore which relies heavily on volunteers using their own vehicles.

In all this we have not yet mentioned tourism. It can be argued that this is the Highlands most important industry but being so it involves thousands of tourists using the road annually, most from countries who drive on the other side of the road and therefore have different road junction layouts to Scotland and the rest of Britain. Many are driving motorhomes with which they are not familiar while many others are towing a caravan, again with a reduced legal speed. This all adds to anger and impatience from following drivers. Between Perth and Inverness there are no fewer than 20 changes of road layout from 4 to 2/3 lanes and vice versa etc. with respective changes in speed limits.

This all adds to driver confusion. On sections of the road which are currently dualled you cannot see the other carriageway due to the topography. While this certainly adds interest to the road it also causes a lot of confusion to drivers, particularly at night and to those unfamiliar with the road layout. It is quite easy to forget exactly where on the road you are and therefore whether you are on dual or single carriageway. It has been known for drivers to think they are still on dual carriageway only to meet oncoming traffic with disastrous and tragic results.

In recent years as a country, we have seen some major infrastructure developments namely the Borders Railway, the Queen Elizabeth Crossing, improved roads in both Edinburgh and the new Aberdeen peripheral road, Glasgow has had extensions to the M74 and other motorway and trunk road improvements. These improvements can be set against only two sections of the A9 being completed, and many years ago now, the full improvement of the Mallaig to Fort William road (A830). In 2007 the SNP made a commitment to dual the entirety of the A9 from Inverness to Perth and was followed up with a promise in 2011 by ministers to have the work complete by 2025. For many years now those of us in the Highlands have known that this has been unattainable and simply impossible but it has only recently been confirmed by the former Transport Minister, Jenny Gilruth, that this is now longer possible. We need clarity and a renewed assurance that the work will be carried out in the shortest possible timeframe while also allowing the work to be done to the correct standard.

The constant 'kicking down the road' of the proposals is fueling increased anger and resentment in the highlands that we are being ignored and are simply a backwater. Again would the central belt accept this? As a group we think not.

We fully and positively encourage your committee to hold an inquiry and I would be very happy to give oral evidence to a hearing.

Yours faithfully,

Sandy McCook
Chairman,
Nethy Bridge and Community Community Council
but representing all Community Councils in Badenoch and Strathspey.

Society of Chief Officers of Transportation in Scotland (SCOTS) submission of 6 April 2023

PE1992/D: Dual the A9 and improve road safety

The Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee considered the above petition at its meeting on 22 February 2023 and asked that The Society of Chief Officers of Transportation in Scotland (SCOTS) give our views on the following points;

- 1) publishing a revised timetable and detailed plan for dualling each section;
- 2) completing the dualling work by 2025; and
- 3) creating a memorial to those who have lost their lives in road traffic incidents on the A9.

In response to the first point, the Society would always advise the Local Roads Authorities and Regional Transport Partnerships who make up our membership, that providing up to date plans and timetables for the delivery of major transport infrastructure is best practice. Asking that Scottish Government should do so seems an appropriate and reasonable request and one that can only aid the understanding of the complexities of delivering a project of the scale of dualling the A9. We are aware that the Transport Scotland leads for the A9 Dualling Project have worked closely with the Local Roads Authorities and Regional Transport Partnerships and given the closeness of the relationship, it is felt that this would allow for an updated set of plans and timetables to be put in place in as collaborative manner as possible.

On the second point, I can confirm that as a Society we are not party to the detailed work to bring forward the multiple sections of the A9 that

are still due to be dualled. However, based on the scale of the work to be taken forward, completing the dualling of the A9 between Perth and Inverness by 2025 (some 20 months) would not, in our professional view be achievable given the legal, procurement, design, consultation, funding, staffing and programming requirements.

On the third point, our members have worked collaboratively with multiple agencies to reduce the level of death and injury across all roads in Scotland for many decades. We have seen real progress in moving towards a vision of zero fatalities and that is the collective goal for all of us.

Every family who have lost someone in a road collision will keep the memory of their loved one with them forever and in our work with colleagues in emergency services through national working groups, we know that for some people a physical memorial can be a positive thing whilst for others it could trigger negative emotions. Therefore, any proposal for a memorial that focusses on the lives lost whilst using the A9 would have to respect all those people impacted and may also lead to similar requests for other routes to be similarly recognised.

Rhoda Grant MSP submission of 8 June 2023

PE1992/E: Dual the A9 and improve road safety

I would like to thank the Committee for allowing my submission to be heard today. I am very sorry I cannot attend in person as I now sit on another committee that meets at the same time.

I would however reiterate what I have said previously on this subject - that the A9 is an issue that impacts on my constituents well beyond Inverness; the A9 is the gateway to the Highlands and beyond.

Many people say there are no dangerous roads, only dangerous drivers, but roads play a huge part in mitigating driver error and keeping people safe.

I drive this road regularly and have seen very strange driver behaviour but most of it would have been mitigated had it been a dual carriageway.

The SNP made a manifesto commitment to dual this road at the 2007 election. They have repeated that commitment and the Scottish Government promised, in 2011, full dualling to Inverness by 2025.

Sadly progress has been slow. Of the 11 stretches to be dualled we have only seen 2 delivered, and one delayed.

Our new First Minister gave a commitment at the SNP Leadership Debate in Inverness in March of this year that the A9 will be ‘the priority’ for the new leader. Mr Yousaf admitted not making more progress was “a failure” and said “If I am First Minister, the first thing I will do is sit down with my Finance Secretary who I will appoint and say this is the priority and the budget has to reflect this.” He continued “This is not just about connectivity, it is about lives and safety, the A9 and A96.”

Last year, there were 8 deaths on a 25-mile stretch near Slochd in just 3 months. Total deaths between Perth and Inverness in 2022 was 13.

A previous Transport Minister, Jenny Gilruth, has blamed the war in Ukraine, Brexit, Covid and inflation for the delay.

However, in truth had the work been carried out with the 2025 goal as a clear target, contracts would have already been issued, land would have been purchased and designs would have been signed off long before any of these issues became an impact.

A construction industry source said recently: “If the Scottish Government chooses to build the remaining 9 sections just one at a time [as has happened so far], you need to factor in that it will take roughly one year to procure and 2 years to build each section. If they do not run elements of the process concurrently then you are approaching 2050 for the completion of the dualling.

The average cost of a fatal road traffic accident investigation is £2million – that’s £26million last year just on the A9 south from Inverness.

I would suggest the Committee asks the First Minister how he will make good his promise to the people of the Highlands and provide a timescale for doing that.

We also need an inquiry to see what has gone wrong, to examine what progress has been made and to bring forward realistic timeframes within which this promise can be delivered. I unequivocally support petition PE1992.