

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

14th Meeting, 2023 (Session 6), Wednesday
4 October 2023

Inquiry into A9 Dualling Project

Introduction

1. The Committee agreed at its meeting on [6 September 2023](#) to elevate its scrutiny of petition PE1992: Dual the A9 and improve road safety to the level of an inquiry.
2. At its meeting today, the Committee will take evidence from Alex Neil, who served as the Scottish Government's Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment between 2011 and 2012.
3. During this evidence session, the Committee will explore the Scottish Government's decision in 2011 to commit to a 2025 target for dualling the A9 between Perth and Inverness.
4. A SPICe briefing paper to support this evidence session is available in **Annexe A**.

Background

5. The Committee considered [Petition PE1992: Dual the A9 and improve road safety](#) at its meetings on 22 February 2023, 14 June 2023, and 28 June 2023.
6. Full details of Committee's consideration of this petition are available on the [petition's webpage](#).
7. The Committee recognises that the subject of this petition falls within the remit of the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, which was invited to nominate a reporter to attend and contribute to Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee considerations of PE1992. The Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee nominated its Convener, Edward Mountain MSP, to this role.

Evidence gathered to date

8. The Committee agreed to gather views on issues relating to methods for dualling the A9, road safety measures, and the proposal for a national memorial. This call for views ran from 9 August to 15 September 2023.
9. A summary of the responses received through this consultation will be published on the [inquiry webpage](#) in due course.
10. The Committee has also received written submissions from the transport and civil engineering industries, community councils, and road safety organisations. This evidence is available on the [petition's webpage](#).
11. Further background information about petition PE1992 can be found in the [SPICe briefing](#) for the petition.

Clerk to the Committee

Annexe A



The Information Centre
An t-Ionad Fiosrachaidh

Inquiry into A9 dualling project

Introduction

This paper provides background on the A9 dualling project to support the evidence session with former MSP and Cabinet Secretary Alex Neil taking place on Wednesday 4 October 2023.

Background

The A9 dualling project: On 6 December 2011, [the Scottish Government committed](#) to dualling the 134 kilometres of single carriageway road on the A9 between Perth and Inverness. The project had an expected completion date of 2025 and an estimated total cost of £3bn (at 2008 prices). The project is due to be delivered in 11 sections, as outlined in the table below:

Section	Length	Current status
A9 Luncarty to Pass of Birnam:	9.5km	Completed August 2021.
A9 Pass of Birnam to Tay Crossing:	8.4km	Design stage.
A9 Tay Crossing to Ballinluig:	8.2km	Orders made.
A9 Pitlochry to Killiecrankie:	6.4km	Orders made.
A9 Killiecrankie to Glen Garry:	22km	Orders made.
A9 Glen Garry to Dalwhinnie:	9.5km	Orders made.
A9 Dalwhinnie to Crubenmore:	11km	Orders made.
A9 Crubenmore to Kincaig:	16.5km	Orders made.
A9 Kincaig to Dalraddy:	7.5km	Completed September 2017.
A9 Dalraddy to Slochd:	25km	Orders made.
A9 Tomatin to Moy:	9.6km	Orders made, first procurement exercise unsuccessful and is being re-run.

“Orders made” means that the various Road Orders required to authorise the construction of a new road or road widening project, made under the provisions of the Secretary of State’s Traffic Orders (Procedure) (Scotland) Regulations 1987, have been approved by Scottish Ministers.

Jenny Gilruth MSP, then Minister for Transport, made [a statement to Parliament](#) about the A9 dualling project on 8 February 2023 confirming that the procurement exercise for the Tomatin to Moy section had been unsuccessful, and that the 2025 completion date would not be met. She advised that an updated timetable would be provided to the Parliament in autumn of this year.

Alex Neil: Alex Neil (Scottish National Party) was an MSP for the Central Scotland region from 1999 until 2011 and MSP for the Airdrie and Shotts constituency from 2011 until 2021.

He was appointed Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment in May 2011. He was moved to the post of Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing in September 2012.

During his time as Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment, the Scottish Government published the [Infrastructure Investment Plan 2011](#) (December 2011). This was the first document to include a commitment by the Scottish Government to dual the A9 between Perth and Inverness. The foreword to this document, signed by Alex Neil, included the following statement:

“Amongst the many important investments set out within this document, I draw your attention to the following long term commitments that are particularly significant:

- On **transport** - by 2025, we will have dualled the A9 between Perth and Inverness, with a view to completing the dualled road network between all our cities by 2030;”

Annex B to the infrastructure Investment Plan 2011 gave an estimated cost of the A9 dualling project of between £1.5 billion and £3 billion, based on an estimate included in the [first Strategic Transport Projects Review](#), and stated that the funding mechanism was “To be decided”.

Alex Neil [announced in June 2012](#) that work to dual the A9 would begin earlier than had first been anticipated – starting in 2015-16 rather than 2017-18, beginning with the Kincaig to Dalraddy section. Transport Scotland published a “programme document” to accompany this announcement, but SPICe has been unable to locate an online or hard copy.

Call for views

The Committee launched a [call for views](#) about the A9 dualling project on 9 August 2023, which was open for comments until 15 September 2023. This asked for views on four key issues:

- The strategy for dualling the A9, with options being to complete the dualling work as quickly as possible, regardless of possible disruption to traffic; to minimise disruption, even if dualling takes longer; a compromise between the two, or another approach.
- The proposal to create a monument to those killed in traffic collisions on the A9.
- Transport Scotland’s proposed interim road safety improvements.
- The impact of road closures and delays on the A9 on businesses and the local economy.

In total, 339 people offered views on at least one of these issues. It is worth noting that respondents were self-selecting. Generally, only people and organisations with an existing interest in the A9 dualling project will have responded. This means that the views expressed may not match those of the population as a whole and should not be read as such.

Key themes emerging from the responses are outlined below. Given that the call for views only ended a few days ago, this summary is very high level – a more detailed analysis will be produced in due course. It is also worth noting that this analysis aims to highlight key issues and concerns raised by respondents. It is not a comprehensive summary of every issue raised.

A9 Strategy: 306 respondents answered this question, 66% of which favoured dualling the A9 as quickly as possible regardless of disruption, 17% favoured a compromise between speed of dualling and minimising disruption, 2.3% favoured an approach that minimised disruption and 13% some other approach. The remaining 1.7% of respondents left comments but did not specify which approach they favoured.

Key themes emerging from the comments left by those supporting each category are briefly explored below:

- **Dual as quickly as possible:** If the purpose of dualling is to improve road safety then the quicker it happens, the sooner these road safety benefits will be realised - meaning more people and families will be spared the trauma of road deaths and injuries. Linked to this, a reduction in collisions would also reduce the time the road is closed by the police. Some felt that it would be easier to deal with planned disruption of road works, as opposed to the random closures resulting from collisions.

Comments also focused on what many saw as a “broken promise” by the Scottish Government, which should be made good as soon as possible. There were also broader concerns that the lack of progress was symptomatic of the poor management of public sector capital projects in Scotland.

Compromise: Concerns focused on the impact that significant disruption along large sections of the road would have on those who regularly travel the full length of the route, which would be far greater than those who only use shorter sections. There were also calls to focus on dualling accident black spots and the busiest single carriageway sections of the route as a matter of

urgency, before moving on to other sections. There were also more general concerns about the impact of significant disruption on business, tourism, and a general desire to simply keep things moving.

Minimise disruption: The key concern from this group was that lengthy road work sites would lead to significant disruption and longer journey times, which could increase collisions due to greater driver frustration and confusion while travelling through unfamiliar and constrained development sites.

Other: Most of these comments argued that the A9 dualling project should not go ahead. Many stated that road safety could be improved by targeted investment along the route and that the funds saved would be better invested in supporting active and sustainable travel, particularly in the light of the climate emergency and the Scottish Government's target to reduce the distance driven by 20% from 2019 levels by 2030.

- **A9 Memorial:** 138 respondents answered this question, of which 67% were opposed to the idea of creating an A9 memorial while 33% were in favour. Many of those who were opposed to the idea thought that dualling the A9 as quickly as possible would be the best memorial, with others concerned about where such a memorial would be placed, why such a memorial should focus on those killed on the A9 rather than all roads, and the potential costs involved.

Many of those in favour of the memorial left comments about unrelated issues, with most others saying any decision on a memorial should be a matter for the bereaved families.

- **Interim road safety measures:** Respondents were asked to rate the extent to which they thought Transport Scotland's proposed interim A9 road safety measures would improve road safety until the route was dualled on a scale of 1 (least) to 5 (most). 86 respondents answered this question, giving a final rating of three out of five to the proposed measures.

Comments left in support of the proposed measures generally thought they would be helpful, particularly improved speed limit signage, cats eyes and lighting of junctions. Suggestions for improvements were wide ranging, including 24hr services, improved road policing, multi-lingual signs near tourist hotspots, and direction arrows at the entry to single carriageway sections.

- **Impact on business:** Nine businesses responded to this question. All were in favour of the dualling project, as it would help reduce journey times, improve journey reliability and consistency, and improve road safety.

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