

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

19th Meeting, 2022 (Session 6), Wednesday
20 December 2023

PE1610: Upgrade the A75 and PE1657: A77 upgrade

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 [19 April 2023](#). At that meeting, the Committee agreed to write to the Minister for 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 the Minister for Transport, the Petitioner for PE1657, 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

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 19 April 2023

The Convener: We will now consider further continued petitions with PE1610, on upgrading the A75, and PE1657, on upgrading the A77.

PE1610, which was lodged by Matt Halliday, 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, which was lodged by Donald McHarrie on behalf of A77 Action Group, calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to dual the A77 from Ayr Whitletts roundabout south to the two ferry ports located at Cairnryan, including the point at which the A77 connects with the A75.

We previously considered the petitions at our meeting on 28 September, when we agreed to write to the Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport. The committee has received a response from Jenny Gilruth, who was the minister at the time, that acknowledges the need for improvements to both roads and highlights that the strategic transport projects review 2 “recommends that safety, resilience and reliability improvements” be made. The minister notes that the south-west Scotland transport study “does not recommend ... full dualling” of either road, but recommends “targeted ... improvements” instead. The submission also states that a delivery plan to prioritise STPR2 will be released later this year.

We have received written submissions from both petitioners, drawing our attention to a newly published A75 and A77 economic impacts report, which was commissioned by Dumfries and Galloway Council, South Ayrshire Council and Mid and East Antrim Council and was undertaken by independent transport consultancy Sweco UK. The study found that dualling would bring £5 billion of “positive benefits” to the UK economy, such as reduced journey times and vehicle operating costs.

Finlay Carson is unable to join us this morning, but he, too, has provided us with a written submission. He has also highlighted the report, noting its finding that dualling would bring “environmental gains, including CO2 emissions reduction.”

I have also received—and I hope that colleagues, too, have received it—a submission from Emma Harper MSP in which she reiterates her support for the petition and draws attention to objectives, recommendations that have been made and her work with the representative action groups.

Colleagues, on the basis of the submissions that we have received, what recommendations would you like to make?

Fergus Ewing: We should keep the petition open. Quite obviously, these are very important matters to the petitioners and to people in this part of Scotland. I represent the Highlands and have been known to mention other roads—

The Convener: To which we might come.

Fergus Ewing: —to which I expect we will come, but, in the interests of equity, we should say that many parts of rural Scotland have roads that are not up to scratch or not fit for purpose. Emma Harper has made the point that one reason for keeping the petition open is that we do not have timescales for the implementation of the proposed works, which is an issue that we could perhaps press.

On a wider note, I am struck by the substantial costs of upgrading or doing anything to roads, especially dualling them. We are certainly talking about hundreds of millions of pounds for relatively short sections. However, I am also conscious of the safety issues, particularly the number of deaths, on roads in the Highlands and on many trunk roads around the country.

We should keep the petition open. We need to ask more questions; I have identified only one, but colleagues might well have others.

Alexander Stewart: I concur with Fergus Ewing that we should continue to seek clarity. We now have a new transport minister in the form of Kevin Stewart, and it would be useful to highlight the key findings of the economic impact report and the issues that our colleagues Emma Harper and Finlay Carson have identified in their submissions and seek a response from the Government on how things should be managed. That is something that we could do to get clarity and move things forward.

The Convener: The recommendation that we write to the minister is sensible, particularly given that we have this new economic impact report, with its projection of billions of pounds from which the economy could benefit. Are we agreed?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Annexe C

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 to 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

Petitioner submission of 22 October 2023

PE1657/QQ: A77 upgrade and PE1610/TT: Upgrade the A75

Given previous Transport Minister Kevin Stewart's response seemed to disregard SWECO's Economic Impact Assessment which would have provided £5bn of local benefit which he diluted down in his statement. I would like the Committee to give note that the Maybole area has now had a lot of inward investment since the completion of the £29m bypass. More housing developments, a new supermarket, and a new campus covering primary to secondary education as well as leisure facilities. Together with regeneration projects on the High Street. It highlights how

forgotten, ignored, neglected and deprived the South West of Scotland actually is, particularly when compared to other parts of the country.

While Mr. Stewart wanted to talk about delivering STPR2 Recommendation 40 which is, in the opinion of the A77 Campaign Team, merely yet another watered-down sticky plaster approach to the South West transport infrastructure like what has gone before. It does not fully address most of the problems that both the A77 and A75 roads suffer from. Given that the Scottish Government has set a target for a reduction of road fatalities to zero by 2050, are we not going to be using our roads in the South West by this time?

Given the data on fatal accidents for Dumfries and Galloway and Ayrshire (2017- 2021 Average number of reported road casualties by Police Force division South Ayrshire with 148 Casualties and Dumfries and Galloway 256 Casualties), how will this target be achieved without massive investment? There are currently no planned investments in the whole of the South West of Scotland road network - A75/A76/A77. When this is compared with other parts of Scotland, we cannot find any justification for this situation.

It was suggested by a previous Citizens Participation and Public Petitions Committee to come and experience the problems A77 after a visit to the A75, which covers the better sections to see the two routes, at peak times to engage with the wide community and haulage companies using the two corridors. Also, by coming to the area the Committee would also see the effects of the recent statistics from the SIMD (Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation-2020), includes the shocking figures relating to the South West of Scotland (South Ayrshire, North Ayrshire and Dumfries and Galloway)

If Westminster does give additional financial help to fund improvements on the A75, then since all of that traffic accesses the ports at Cairnryan on the A77, monies that would have been otherwise spent on the A75 by the Scottish Government are needed to be spent on the A77.

Finlay Carson MSP submission of 12 December 2023

PE1657/RR: A77 upgrade and PE1610/UU: Upgrade the A75

Unfortunately I am unable to attend the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee in person as it clashes with the Rural and Islands Committee which I convene.

I would, however, voice my strong support for the continuation of petitions PE1610: Upgrade the A75 and PE1657 A77 upgrade, having spent years campaigning actively to see these key routes improved to an acceptable standard.

As you are aware both roads contribute enormously to both the local, Scottish and national economies yet, they have been starved of any significant investment despite repeated commitments by the Scottish Government. Promises have been made but failed to be delivered, leaving motorists and hauliers who use this road that serves the ports at Cairnryan, both frustrated by its reliability and safety record.

In the past five full calendar years there have been seven fatal collisions on the A75, the most recent being only a few weeks ago. At the same time there have been countless accidents that have resulted in serious injuries.

The road has been closed 18 times in 2023 for unplanned incidents, road traffic collisions, other incidents and flooding. It has also been closed 13 times for planned road maintenance works which adds further to the poor unreliability record.

Various economic reports have highlighted the growing need to improve the A75, in particular, that transports £17 billion worth of goods every year.

Commissioned by Dumfries and Galloway, South Ayrshire and Mid and East Antrim Councils and undertaken by independent transport consultancy Sweco, the [Strategic and Economic Impacts Report](#)

looks at seven options - from bypasses of key towns and rail improvements to full dualling It outline how dualling the A75/A77 trunk roads linking Scotland and England with Northern Ireland would bring £5bn of "positive benefits" to the UK economy. Other benefits range from reduced journey times and vehicle operating costs (£700 million) to combined CO₂e (carbon dioxide equivalent) savings of around £95 million. (<https://www.dumgal.gov.uk/A75-A77>)

The economic significance of the A75 was also recognised in Sir Peter Hendy's Union Connectivity Review who singled out the need for investment given the key role it plays in transporting goods from the UK and Europe and vice-versa. Initially the Scottish Government refused to get involved in the review, although now, thankfully, they are now reported to be working alongside the UK Government.

The UK Government has committed to providing £8m to the Scottish Government to develop options to improve the A75 and committing further funding to deliver targeted improvements, such as alleviating pinch points, following the Scottish Government's identification of a preferred option – bypassing the villages of Springholm and Crocketford. This is a welcome move it remains imperative that the Scottish Government works collaboratively with its UK counterparts to ensure progress is, at last, made in improving a road that is often described as a goat track.

This should be seen as the green light for kick-starting work by Transport Scotland to finalise plans for the identified improvements.

The UK Government funding commitments in relation to the A75, which strictly speaking is a devolved funding responsibility, will have the knock on effect of reducing the STPR2 budget commitments made by the Scottish Government. This budget saving should be redirected to accelerate improvements on the A77, with the Scottish Government at least matching the A75 funding from the UKG.

I would urge the committee to request that a stakeholder meeting is held in Holyrood or preferably in Dumfries and Galloway to hear first hand from the Transport Minister and Finance Minister, their timescales for implementation of the improvements. It is my understanding that this was a previous request made from the committee.

It is time for the petition committee to press the Scottish Government for committed timescales for delivery of STPR2 commitments on the A75 and A77 particularly now that the economic and social arguments have been made so clearly and undeniably in favour of urgent upgrade to the A75 and A77.