

# **PE1916/J: Request a public inquiry into the management of the rest and be thankful project**

## **Petitioner written submission, 12 November 2024**

Note – submission provided by the Petitioner, Cllr Douglas Philand, on behalf of the Rest and Be Thankful (RABT) Campaign Group.

### **The RABT campaign group views on the current proposals to fix the RABT**

We have not seen 2-way access into Argyll at the RABT for the past 4 years, when the A83 is open, its only one lane, often with a convoy and is still regularly diverted onto the Old Military Road (OMR). This abnormal situation has become normalised, but this is still causing disruption, business closures, increasing cost, and adding to the stress of living and working in Argyll.

We have seen traffic management in place on the A83 since the beginning of the year, consisting of a trailer loaded with fencing, which is supposed to protect road users from falling rocks. Transport Scotland confirmed at the A83 Task Force meeting in May that a permanent fence will be constructed, and the road returned to two-way use the Autumn. As we approach the winter we neglected to ask if they meant Autumn 2024!

Our group have had discussions with Transport Scotland to try to find a compromise to the current OMR medium-term solution so that it will deliver a two-way road in the medium term. Unfortunately, Transport Scotland has confirmed the provision of a two-way road was not considered “proportionate” for anything other than a permanent solution. This will mean the OMR will be in use as a single road under convoy throughout the build well into the 2030s.

We are not convinced that the best solution is being progressed in the short, medium or longer term, money is still being wasted on activity that has not and will not open the road to two-way traffic, and we are presented with a permanent solution that is unaffordable.

We have identified the following issues:

1. The impact of this road not being open to two-way traffic for the past 4 years and under convoy until sometime in the 2030's was not even a consideration in the decision process for the short and medium term solutions. We believe businesses and people of Argyll will continue to suffer from the effects poor connectivity and population decline for another decade at least.
2. We are amazed that anyone would try to build a road on the existing route under constant threat of landslides from 200,000 tonnes of unstable material. Work will constantly be stopped every time there is movement on the hillside, increasing building costs, and delay delivery of a solution. Even if this gets built there will be the cost of the constant clear up operation every time there is a landslide, and we do not think this has been fully considered in the evaluation process.

3. We believe the costing for other alternatives are inflated compared to other tunnelling and viaduct projects which are currently being delivered at lower cost elsewhere in the UK. Whatever the actual cost, we are concerned that any of the current permanent solutions will be unaffordable when they are finally presented for approval. At the last Task Force meeting, the Cabinet Secretary said the Government was committed to funding this project but that funding decisions are being made on an annual basis, which we take to mean there is no guarantee the project will have the finance in place to go ahead when it is finally presented for funding.
4. Despite everything that has been done in the past 12 years, and all the money spent on mitigation, catch pits and studies, the hillside is still susceptible to significant landslide activity with Transport Scotland's own estimates of 200,000 tonnes of unstable material above the road, yet nothing constructed there can be called a success if the road is continually diverted. The cost estimates we have from Transport Scotland are that when the improvement to the OMR is complete, £60m will have been spent on this section of road since 2015, which has not delivered a reliable two-way road.
5. The medium-term green route option could be a cheaper £100m alternative on the opposite side of the glen, which could be delivered within 2 years according to Transport Scotland. This side of the glen has not had landslides, already has a mature forest above binding the soil, and the slopes are less steep.

Given the cost constraints all governments are facing, we have tried to engage with Transport Scotland and the Transport Secretary to ask them to review an alternative approach, to see if there is a more affordable proportionate solution, but have been told quite clearly that no other solution will be considered.

We feel the past 4 years have been wasted in analysing the wrong solutions, on mitigation that does not deliver a two-way road and a long-term solution that may be unaffordable in future. It is time to get a consensus from all parties as to what is affordable, to deliver a two-way road more quickly. The issues at the RABT have been well known for decades, the A83 Task Force was set up in 2012 to help the Government deliver a permanent solution, but all that has been approved are solutions along the existing route which fail to keep up with the increasingly unstable hillside. We believe the only solutions worth considering are those which move away from the existing route.