

Extract from briefing for Cabinet Secretary for Transport Infrastructure and Connectivity for appearance before Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee, dated 18 March 2019

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A9/A96 DUALLING Q&A

QUESTION

The A9 dualling between Perth and Inverness is due to be completed in less than five years. Do you still anticipate the project being complete by this date? If not, is there a revised deadline?

SUGGESTED ANSWER

Work is continuing across the route, with road users already benefiting from the dualled stretch between Kincaig and Dalraddy (operational September 2017). Construction is well underway on the second section to be dualled between Luncarty and Birnam which is expected to be open to traffic in spring 2021, subject to weather conditions. Design work for the remaining nine sections is well advanced with the statutory process underway for eight of them. Through negotiation, six Public Local Inquiry sessions have been avoided and the scope of the remaining Inquiries have been reduced.

Transport Scotland remains committed to securing a strong delivery model which delivers the A9 dualling programme within budget and at the earliest opportunity, and one which maximises the many benefits for road users, communities and businesses who live along or use this vital route. We have appointed commercial and financial advisors to help drive our plans to deliver the programme. Looking ahead, Transport Scotland is continuing discussions with key agencies, stakeholders and the construction industry to help finalise a procurement strategy that will allow the procurement process to begin on the remaining sections upon completion of the statutory process.

A9 DUALLING PERTH TO INVERNESS

ISSUE: The £3 billion investment set out by this Government to dual the A9 between Perth and Inverness is one of the biggest transport infrastructure projects in Scotland's history.

Top Lines

- This Government remains committed to completing the dualling of the A9 between Perth and Inverness.
- The £3 billion investment to dual the A9 between Perth and Inverness is one of the biggest transport infrastructure projects in Scotland's history.
- Good progress is being made in the delivery of the dualling programme which represents £3bn of investment to upgrade 129km of road from single to dual carriageway between Perth and Inverness
- Design work is well underway, construction is progressing and we are currently reviewing procurement options to bring forward the remainder of the programme.
- This ambitious programme will bring many benefits for road users, communities and businesses who live along or use this vital route to the Highlands and Islands.

We are the first administration to commit to dualling the A9

- We are the first administration to commit to dualling the A9, bringing benefits to business and local communities throughout Scotland.
- We have already invested over £294.6 million to date delivering the dualling programme, with contracts supporting 1,200 engineering related jobs in Scotland.

We are working hard to meet our ambitious timetable to bring the benefits of the A9 to Scotland

- Work is continuing across the route, with road users already benefiting from the dualled stretch between Kincairdie and Dalraddy (operational September 2017).
- Construction is well underway on the second section to be dualled between Luncarty and Birnam. The construction contract was awarded to Balfour Beatty in September 2018 and is expected to be open to traffic in spring 2021, subject to weather conditions.
- Design work is also progressing well with the statutory process well underway for eight of the remaining nine schemes.
- The remaining scheme that has not published draft Orders is the section between Pass of Birnam and the Tay Crossing which was subject to a co-creative process. An assessment of all viable options, including the Community's option, is currently being undertaken with the preferred route expected to be announced in the coming months.
- Looking ahead, Transport Scotland is continuing discussions with key agencies, stakeholders and the construction industry to help finalise a procurement strategy that will allow the procurement process to begin on the remaining sections upon completion of the statutory process.
- Transport Scotland remains committed to securing a strong delivery model which delivers the A9 dualling programme within budget and at the earliest opportunity, and one which maximises the many benefits for road users, communities and businesses who live along or use this vital route.
- We have appointed commercial and financial advisors to help drive our plans to deliver the programme.

Inquiry into A9 Dualling Programme – documents provided by Transport Scotland

- Legal advisors are also expected to be appointed shortly.

The statutory right for individuals to have their say on proposals cannot be set aside

- The dualling involves the compulsory acquisition of land and rights and the individual has the right to protect their property.
- We are working with objectors to try and resolve objections as far as possible without recourse to lengthy inquiries.
- To date six public local inquiry sessions have been avoided with the Reporters considering written evidence only. The scope of the remaining inquiries have all been reduced.

The A9 Dualling programme impact upon the climate environment is being minimised

- The Scottish Government undertakes significant environmental assessment work and consultation to consider environmental impacts for every major road scheme.
- We value the environment we are working in and place emphasis on striking a balance between delivering projects and respecting the sensitivities of the area.
- The in-depth planning and design work includes an environmental assessment to ensure that we keep impacts on the climate and environment to the absolute minimum.

A9 Dualling Perth to Inverness Hot Topics

A9 Dualling Pass of Birnam to Tay Crossing - Progress

- The remaining scheme that has not published draft Orders is the section between Pass of Birnam and the Tay Crossing which was subject to a co-creative process.
- An assessment of options, including the Community's option, is currently being undertaken with the preferred route option expected to be announced in the coming months.
- We welcome the co-creative process and that process has broadened the vision for the dualling through Dunkeld and Birnam.
- We are duty bound to consider alternative options as well as the Community's preferred route option as identified by the co-creative process, in order to ensure the Scottish Government's preferred route option decision is sufficiently robust to withstand scrutiny as part of the subsequent statutory process which may include a Public Local Inquiry.
- The work we are undertaking is to make sure that the Scottish Government's preferred option is the best overall performing option for the local community, road users and other stakeholders.
- Feedback from community consultation events is helping to inform the on-going Stage 2 route options assessment process (DMRB Stage 2 Assessment).
- Transport Scotland is working hard to complete the route option assessment process (DMRB Stage 2 Assessment) and I hope to be able to announce a preferred route option for this section of the dualling in the coming months.
- Transport Scotland is committed to maintaining the working relationship with the group during the next stages of scheme development and has appointed dedicated stakeholder managers from Transport Scotland and from Jacobs to work with the group.

A9 Dalraddy to Slochd - Carrbridge NMU Route

- Suitable provision for all users, including cyclists, is an important part of the A9 Dualling programme. However, there is no new Perth to Inverness cycleway planned as part of the dualling.

Inquiry into A9 Dualling Programme – documents provided by Transport Scotland

- The approach to provision is to connect to the recognised National Cycle Network where possible. The A9 Dalraddy to Solchd scheme achieves that.
- A number of objections were received regarding a lack of a non-motorised user (NMU) facility between Aviemore and Carrbridge. Notable objectors included the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) and The Highland Council (THC).
- Transport Scotland made a proposal to CNPA to support a separate collaborative project to deliver the facility. This was accepted by CNPA who withdrew their objection on 6 March 2020.
- The Public Local Inquiry that was due to start on 9 March was cancelled following the withdrawal of CNPA's objection.
- We welcome the decision of Cairngorms National Park Authority to withdraw their objection to the A9 Dualling Dalraddy to Slochd scheme.
- We look forward to working with them and other partners to progress the separate plans for a shared-use Non-motorised user (NMU) facility between Aviemore and Carrbridge.

A9 Killiecrankie to Glen Garry - Killiecrankie battlefield

- The Scottish Government is aware of the sensitivities around what is an important battlefield, and site of historical and cultural significance, and have been engaging extensively with the local community and key stakeholders since 2012.
- Following publication of draft Orders for the Killiecrankie to Glen Garry scheme in November 2017, a large number of objections were received concerning the impact on the battlefield. Design refinements were undertaken to reduce land take on the battlefield site taking account of feedback from Historic Environment Scotland and the local community.
- A Public Local Inquiry was held in January. As for all our road schemes, this is the appropriate forum for considering objections received but not withdrawn.
- The Reporter is currently considering the evidence that was presented and has indicated he will provide his report to Scottish Ministers later this year.
- Scottish Ministers are the decision makers in this process and will ultimately make a decision whether or not to proceed with a scheme after they have considered the recommendations made by the Reporter as part of the Inquiry process.

Use of Hard Plastics in the construction of the A9 Dualling

- Transport Scotland has recently received a Freedom of Information request on behalf of Edward Mountain MSP relating to the use of hard plastics in drainage ditches.
- It relates to the Kincaig to Dalraddy Scheme which opened September 2017 and on which approximately 2,100m (1.3 miles) of liner was installed as part of the project. The liner used is expected to last for 120 years.
- The purpose of ditches on the scheme is to prevent runoff from the adjacent land from running down the earthwork slopes.
- These ditches are required lined with a continuous impermeable liner to prevent the ingress of water from the ditch into the earthworks slopes.
- The overall aim of the lined ditches is to prevent water entering the slopes, which could lead to destabilisation of the earthworks.
- The requirement for ditching is dictated by design standards. The lining material used is not specified but was selected by the Contractor to meet the requirements of the design standards and the Contract.
- The extent of lined ditches is not available for those schemes that are in preparation as the designs have not been finalised.

Inquiry into A9 Dualling Programme – documents provided by Transport Scotland

- For the section between Luncarty and the Pass of Birnam, which is currently under construction, it is the Contractor's responsibility to undertake an appropriate assessment and design to determine if a ditch requires to be lined.
- Transport Scotland will continue to work with our contractors to examine the use of suitable and sustainable materials for all aspects of our construction works where they are of demonstrable functionality.

It has been suggested that the recent successful Heathrow appeal may prompt legal challenges to the road building programme in England

- Although the decision appears to turn primarily on provisions contained in the Planning Act 2008, which do not apply in Scotland, we will of course consider the detail of the decision and any wider issues it may raise in relation to the assessment of infrastructure projects against climate change policies.
- We are currently considering the judgement as it relates to Scottish Roads Law.
- All our major projects are subject to ongoing review and compliance with policy including climate change forms part of that review process.
- Our recently published National Transport Strategy has set out the future direction for transport in Scotland and identifies tackling climate action as a priority.
- It is also one of the key outcomes being sought in the second Strategic Transport Projects Review, which will identify our strategic transport investments for the next twenty years.