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Edward Mountain MSP
Convenor, NZET Committee

15 August 2023

Dear convenor,

A96 Dualling Inverness to Aberdeen

Following on from the NZET Committee meeting held on 27 June 2023 please see below written update on the A96 Dualling Inverness to Aberdeen as promised.

Firstly, I would like to take this opportunity to reassure the committee that the Scottish Government remains absolutely committed to improving the A96. We will take forward a transport enhancements programme on the corridor that improves connectivity between surrounding towns, tackles congestion and addresses safety and environmental issues.

As the Committee Members are aware, the current plan is to fully dual the route and, as part of this process, we are undertaking a transparent, evidence-based review of the programme. This is sensible good governance for major investment of this kind.

The review is being undertaken in accordance with the Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance (STAG) and in line with the methodology used in the published [second Strategic Transport Projects Review \(STPR2\)](#).

As with all transport infrastructure improvements, we are committed to placing public engagement and meaningful dialogue with directly affected communities and other stakeholders at the heart of the review. The public consultation undertaken received an unprecedented level of engagement with nearly 4,700 responses, generating more than 11,000 suggestions and potential opportunities for the route. Rightly, it has taken time to consider and to appraise all of those options. However, the first part of the review, a report on the [Public Consultation](#) and the [Initial Appraisal: Case for Change Report](#) was published in December 2022.

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Following publication of these reports we are pushing forward with the further detailed work to inform the remaining stages of the review. These include a robust appraisal of the retained options alongside a Climate Compatibility Assessment and statutory assessment, with outcomes from this expected to be ready following summer recess for final public consultation, before a final decision can be reached.

As part of our commitment to improving the A96, we also continue to progress the preparation stages of the A96 Dualling Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass) scheme with a view to completing the statutory process as soon as possible. This includes the significant ongoing and intensive work required to prepare for publication of Made Orders, including the Compulsory Purchase Order and includes careful consideration of complex land title information, a vital part of the procedural steps which need to be completed to finalise the acquisition of land and take the powers required to build the scheme.

I can confirm that the A96 Dualling Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass) scheme is separate from the wider A96 review process which is currently being undertaken as it has already received Ministerial consent following a Public Local Inquiry.

As with all our major projects, delivery of the scheme can only commence if approved under the relevant statutory authorisation procedures and thereafter a timetable for progress can be set in line with available budgets.

I trust this is of assistance to the Committee.

Yours sincerely

MAIRI MCALLAN

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