

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

1st Meeting, 2022 (Session 6), 19 January
2022

PE1916: Request a public inquiry into the
management of the rest and be thankful project

Note by the Clerk

Petitioner	Cllr Douglas Philand and Cllr Donald Kelly
Petition summary	Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to instigate a public inquiry regarding the political and financial management of the A83 rest and be thankful project which is to provide a permanent solution for the route.
Webpage	https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1916

Introduction

1. This is a new petition that was lodged on 2 December 2021.
2. A SPICe briefing has been prepared to inform the Committee's consideration of the petition and can be found at **Annexe A**.
3. The petitioners elected not to collect signatures.
4. The Committee seeks views from the Scottish Government on all new petitions before they are formally considered. A response has been received from Transport Scotland on behalf of the Scottish Government and is included at **Annexe B** of this paper.

Background

5. The Rest and Be Thankful is a 98-mile-long trunk road linking Tarbet and Campbeltown with the highest point on the A83, separating Glen Kinglas from Glen Croe. It is also one of the places in Scotland with the highest risk of

landslides and debris flow hazards which has worsened in recent years due to increased rainfall.

Transport Scotland submission

6. The submission explains that following a number of landslides across Scotland in 2004, Transport Scotland carried out a nationwide Scottish Road Network Landslides Study which concluded that the A83 Ardgartan to Rest and Be Thankful is one of the most highly ranked debris flow hazard sites in Scotland. As part of the £87 million invested in the maintenance of the full length of the A83 since 2007, over £15 million has been invested in landslide mitigation works at the Rest and Be Thankful.
7. The submission explains that given the A83's importance as the primary route into Argyll and Bute, a study was commissioned by Transport Scotland in 2012 to identify and appraise potential options for the A83 trunk road to identify and appraise potential options to minimise the effects of road closures with the objectives of:
 - Reducing the impact on journey times by reducing the frequency and duration of road closures caused by landslides; and
 - Reducing the economic impact to the A83 Study area by reducing the frequency and duration of road closures caused by landslides.
8. The final [A83 Route Study](#), published in February 2013, explains that the decision was made to progress with the 'Red Option' which:
 - maintained the existing alignment of the A83;
 - included a range of landslide mitigation measures such as: additional debris flow barriers at locations where the landslide hazard is considered highest;
 - improved hillside drainage adjacent to and under the road, and;
 - introduced vegetation and planting on the slope.
9. The Transport Scotland submission explains that the Red Option was taken forward following agreement by the A83 Taskforce which is chaired by the Minister for Transport and comprises a large number of stakeholders. The red option was considered to offer the best performance and most cost-effective way of meeting the Study's objectives. The suite of mitigation measures carried out over 2013 and 2014, helped keep the A83 open for an estimated 48 days when it would otherwise have closed.

10. The Transport Scotland submission provides a range of data which shows the number of days those various stretches of road in and around the A83 were closed due to landslides.
11. The data shows that the scale of the events which occurred in 2020 to 2021 were significantly larger than any of the previous events. Following this Transport Scotland explains that several new measures were introduced in order to make it quicker, easier and safer to open the road, should it be closed by a landslide. These include:
- a centre line barrier which was installed along the A83 to cover the areas most at risk;
 - 175 metre long and 6 metre high debris (HESCO) bund (earth-filled multi-cellular system manufactured from steel mesh and lined with geotextile) which was installed in January 2021 to improve the resilience of the Old Military Road;
 - a catchpit constructed and completed in 2021 and works on a further catchpit commenced in September 2021; and
 - an announcement from the then Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity on 23 September 2020 that Transport Scotland would be taking forward the development and assessment work required to deliver a long-term resilient infrastructure solution to the existing A83 in tandem with progressing substantial shorter-term investment in the existing A83.
12. As a result of the Cabinet Secretary announcement, the submission explains that a consultation exercise was published to [consider 11 route corridor options](#) to address issues at the Rest and Be Thankful route. Over 650 people provided feedback with the Glen Croe corridor being the [preferred route](#) due to it being the most cost effective and quickest to deliver and the fact that it had fewer environmental constraints.
13. Transport Scotland advises it launched a consultation to provide feedback on the chosen route, to get feedback on five possible alternative route options within the preferred route corridor and to ascertain if the public felt any other options should be considered. The submission advises that over 120 responses were received, and summaries of these were [published in April 2021](#). The submission advises that timescales for completion of a long-term solution to the issues at the Rest and Be Thankful range from 7 – 10 years depending on the option.
14. In the interim Transport Scotland advises in their submission that work is progressing to look at a medium-term resilient route through Glen Croe and, depending on the statutory consents required, that work will seek to develop a finalised proposal by Autumn 2022. In addition to this, Transport Scotland has

undertaken environmental, geotechnical, and topographic survey work since May 2021 to build its knowledge and understanding of the possible route options on the south-western sides of the valley.

15. Transport Scotland recognises that the timescales for solutions are frustrating for the local community but advise that this work is technically challenging with such a dynamic landscape to consider. The submission confirms that Transport Scotland is committed to progress short term solutions to reduce the risk of road closures and improve resilience of the route.
16. The submission ends by clarifying that, since the A83 Taskforce was set up in 2012, meetings have been held every 6 months and when that has not been possible written updates have been issued to the Taskforce. Transport Scotland advises it has committed to providing a substantial project update at the next Taskforce meeting in early 2022 and has also launched an [Access to Argyll and Bute \(A83\)](#) project specific webpage on the Transport Scotland website.

Action

The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take on this petition.

Clerk to the Committee

PE1916: Request a public inquiry into the management of the rest and be thankful project

Petitioner

Cllr Douglas Philand and Cllr Donald Kelly

Date Lodged:

02/12/21

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to instigate a public inquiry regarding the political and financial management of the A83 rest and be thankful project which is to provide a permanent solution for the route.

Previous action

We have raised 2 petitions at the Scottish Parliament calling for a permanent solution. We have the support of our local MSP Jenni Minto, our Local MP Brendon O'Hara and the previous cabinet secretary Michael Russell. We undertook a petition in 2012 and had more than 400 businesses and over 10 thousand signatories for a permanent solution. We advocated for an A83 Task force which is currently in process.

Background information

The 2 petitions raised with the committee are freely available to view with all the actions well documented at the Scottish Parliament. It is important to state that on the hillside presently there is 100.000 tonnes of unstable hillside which could fall at any time. If this were to fall it would be devastating for the connectivity of the area. This problem has been well documented over the years and how serious a problem this is. The work by the Scottish government to date whilst welcome has not and will not provide stability to the only lifeline road in and out of Argyll and it can be said confidently if the M8 between Glasgow and Edinburgh were to

constantly be blocked it would not take 19 years to find a permanent solution. Since the petitions were launched with the backing of 10,000 signatures the cost of the mitigation exercise has been in the region of £90 million since 2007 with no permanent solution in sight.

SPICe

The Information Centre
An t-Ionad Fiosrachaidh

Briefing for the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee on petition PE1916: Request a public inquiry into the management of the rest and be thankful project, lodged by Cllr Douglas Philand and Cllr Donald Kelly

Background

The A83 is a 98 mile long trunk road linking Tarbet and Campbeltown. Trunk roads are owned by Scottish Ministers and managed by [Transport Scotland](#).

The day to day maintenance of each trunk road is carried out by a Trunk Road Operating Company, in the case of the A83 this is [BEAR Scotland](#).

The Rest and be Thankful is the summit of the pass on the A83 trunk road between Arrochar and Inveraray, an area that is particularly prone to landslips. The A83 has been closed at the Rest and be Thankful due to landslips on a number of occasions since 2011.

The “Old Military Road”, previously upgraded by Transport Scotland to provide a diversionary route in such situations, has itself been subject to closures and limited operational hours for the same reasons. BEAR Scotland advises that the [alternative diversionary route](#) via Tarbet and Inveraray along the A82, A85 and A819 adds 58.8 miles to any trip.

Scottish Government Action

Scottish Ministers have committed to delivering a permanent engineering solution to the issue of land slips on the A83 at the Rest and be Thankful through the [Access to Argyll \(A83\) project](#).

Scottish Parliament Action

The development of a permanent solution to landslips at the Rest and Be Thankful was the subject of a [Member's Debate on 6 October 2021](#).

It was also the subject of [petition PE01540](#), which was lodged in 2014 by petitioners including Cllr Kelly and Cllr Philand. The petition was closed by the Session 5 Public Petitions Committee at its [meeting of 8 October 2020](#), with the Convenor noting:

“The consensus is that we should close the petition. We recognise the progress that has been made by the petitioner and other campaigners on this important issue. The Scottish Government has made a serious commitment, and it will be held to account if it transpires that the work is not being progressed in a serious manner.

We agree to close the petition. We thank the petitioner for all their engagement with the committee and advise them that, if there is no progress in a year's time, the committee will be able to return to the issue.”

The issue of a solution to landslips at the Rest and be Thankful has also been the subject of many written and oral parliamentary questions and featured in questioning of Scottish Government Ministers by the Session 5 Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee, most recently at [its meeting of 10 March 2021](#).

Alan Rehfisch
Senior Researcher
13 January 2022

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Transport Scotland submission of 23 December 2021

PE1916/A - Request a public inquiry into the management of the rest and be thankful project

The Rest and Be Thankful is the highest point on the A83, separating Glen Kinglas from Glen Croe. It is also one of the places in Scotland with the highest risk of landslides and debris flow hazards. These have increased in recent years due to the frequency of heavy, intense and prolonged periods of rainfall.

Following a number of landslides across Scotland in 2004, Transport Scotland carried out a nationwide Scottish Road Network Landslides Study. As part of this study a hazard assessment and ranking exercise was carried out for debris flow. From this assessment the A83 Ardgartan to Rest and Be Thankful is one of the most highly ranked debris flow hazard sites in Scotland.

As part of the £87 million invested in the maintenance of the full length of the A83 since 2007, over £15 million has been invested in landslide mitigation works at the Rest and Be Thankful. This is helping keep Argyll and Bute open for business by reducing the impact of landslides on the A83.

The Scottish Government is aware of the A83's importance as the primary route into Argyll and Bute and in 2012 an A83 study was commissioned by Transport Scotland to identify and appraise potential options for the A83 trunk road to minimise the effects of road closure from landslides. The study included separate work to investigate the feasibility of removing pinch points and improve pedestrian safety in villages along the route.

The A83 Route Study was undertaken to identify and appraise potential options to minimise the effects of road closures with the objectives of:

- Reducing the impact on journey times by reducing the frequency and duration of road closures caused by landslides; and
- Reducing the economic impact to the A83 Study area by reducing the frequency and duration of road closures caused by landslides.

The final A83 Route Study and associated consultation feedback paper were published in February 2013, with the decision to progress with the Red Option which maintained the existing alignment of the A83 and included a range of landslide mitigation measures such as: additional debris flow barriers at locations where the landslide hazard is considered highest; improved hillside drainage adjacent to and under the road, and; introduction of vegetation and planting on the slope.

The Red Option was taken forward as it offered the best performance against the assessment criteria, providing a cost effective way of meeting the Study's objectives (i.e. reducing the impact on journey times and the subsequent economic impact of a road closure due to landslide). Since the installation of the Red Option suite of mitigation measures over 2013 and 2014, it is estimated that these measures have helped keep the A83 open for at least 48 days when it would otherwise have closed.

This decision to proceed with the Red Option was discussed and agreed with the A83 Taskforce on 25 February 2013. The Taskforce was set up in 2012 with its purpose being to provide leadership and direction and ensure the delivery of the A83 Rest and Be Thankful emergency diversion route and subsequently a wider study into the permanent solution to landslides at this area. The Taskforce is chaired by the Minister for Transport and is made up of a large number of stakeholders including Transport Scotland, Argyll and Bute Council members and officials, Local freight haulage industry representative, Loch Lomond & the Trossachs National Park, chamber of commerce and the Timber Transport Group to name but a few.

The original study and associated documents can be found on [Transport Scotland's website](#).

The decision to proceed with the Red Option, as detailed in the A83 Route Study, was based on the data and evidence available at the time. The following tables provide data with regards to the magnitude of landslides over the years as well as the data regarding the number of road closures of both the A83 Rest and Be Thankful (RaBT) and the Old Military Road (OMR) as a result of landslides. When both the A83 and the OMR are closed or in exceptional circumstances, where hillside conditions are deemed to pose significant risk the Strategic Incident Diversion Route (SIDR) via the A82 / A85 is used.

Year	Material Deposited (tonnes)
2004	400
2007	300
2009	900
2011	100
2012	120
2014	1,200
2015	150
2020	21,300

Table 1 – Material Deposited from landslides over the previous years

Financial Year	No. of days both A83 RaBT & OMR Closed and SIDR in operation	No. of days A83 RaBT closed	No. of days OMR closed	No. of days OMR in operation	No. of nights OMR in operation
2010-2011	0	0	0	0	0
2011-2012	5	5	5	0	0
2012-2013	4.5	4.5	4.5	0	0
2013-2014	1	6	1	5	5
2014-2015	0	5	0	5	7
2015-2016	1.5	5	1.5	3.5	0
2016-2017	0	0	0	0	0
2017-2018	0	0	0	0	0
2018-2019	5.5	9	5.5	3.5	2
2019-2020	0.5	2.5	0.5	2	2
2020-2021	16.5 days 44.5 nights	130 days 193 nights	16.5 days 44.5 nights	113.5	148.5

Table 2 – Details of closures of the A83 and the Old Military Road diversion route.

As noted in the information provided in the above tables the scale of the events which occurred in 2020 to 2021 were significantly larger than any of the previous events.

Following the landslide events which occurred between August 2020 and February 2021, a centre line barrier was installed along the A83 and then extended in spring 2021 to cover the areas most at risk. This barrier makes current single lane operation of A83 more resilient.

Additionally, a 175 metre long 6 metre high debris (HESCO) bund (earth-filled multi-cellular system manufactured from steel mesh and lined with geotextile) was installed in January 2021 improving the resilience of the Old Military Road.

A new catchpit was constructed and completed in 2021 and works on a further catchpit commenced in September 2021. These ongoing mitigation works are important as they improve the resilience of the road and make it quicker, easier and safer to open the road, should it be closed by a landslide.

It is worth noting that since the last landslides in February 2021 access to Argyll and Bute has remained open via the A83 or Old Military Road on all but 8 days.

Following the landslide events in August 2020, one of which was the largest recorded in the area, the then Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity announced on 23 September 2020 that Transport Scotland would be taking forward the development and assessment work required to deliver a long term resilient infrastructure solution to the existing A83 in tandem with progressing substantial shorter term investment in the existing A83.

Eleven route corridor options were considered to address issues at the Rest and Be Thankful and develop long-term resilient access to Argyll and Bute. On 23 September 2020 the eleven route corridor options were published and we invited feedback on these options from stakeholders and the public via an online consultation launched on 23 September and running until 30 October 2020. Over 650 people provided feedback to the consultation. Please see [announcement and plan of the eleven route corridor options](#).

Following completion of a preliminary assessment of all 11 route corridor options for improving access to Argyll and Bute and identifying a long term solution to the ongoing problems at the Rest and Be Thankful a preferred route corridor was [announced on 18 March 2021](#).

The preferred route corridor was announced as the Glen Croe corridor. The preferred route corridor is more cost effective and quicker to deliver, having relatively less environmental constraints, although in absolute terms it remains technically challenging. On the same day a Preliminary Assessment Report was published providing a robust understanding of the existing conditions within each of the 11 route corridors options previously identified, and considerations on how feasible, affordable and publicly acceptable they would be to develop. The report can be found [here](#).

The announcement for the preferred route corridor in March 2021 also provided details of five possible route options within the preferred route corridor. These options range from traditional roads and localised structural protection, to full

tunnel options. The range of engineering structures reflects the challenge of building resilience into the route.

Transport Scotland invited the public to provide feedback on five possible alternative route options within the preferred route corridor, including tunnel options, viaduct options and debris shelter options.

The purpose of this consultation was threefold:

- to provide feedback on the selection of the preferred route corridor;
- to seek feedback on the five possible route options presented, to fully understand the views of those who feel they may be impacted, how they are impacted and whether there are any environmental/cultural/heritage features which should be considered in future decision making with respect to the selection of a preferred route option within Glen Croe; and
- to understand if there were any other route options which members of the public felt should be considered within Glen Croe.

The information would help inform further assessment and design work. It is worth noting that this consultation exercise ran in parallel with the ongoing data gathering and design work on the project and in no way caused any delay to the ongoing work.

We received over 120 responses to this consultation, a report summarising the feedback can be found [here](#).

In April 2021 a [Strategic Environmental Assessment Environmental Report](#) was published alongside the [Preliminary Engineering Services Design Manual for Roads and Bridges \(DMRB\) Stage 1 Assessment](#). These reports follow on from the Preliminary Assessment and describes the more detailed assessment of the preferred route corridor as well as the five possible options which were published. These reports can be found using the links below:

As noted in the above Preliminary Assessment Report timescales for completion of a long term solution to the issues at the Rest and Be Thankful range from 7 – 10 years depending on the option.

These timescales allow for surveys and data gathering, design and assessment work, and as with other projects to improve the trunk road network, there will be a need to complete the necessary environmental assessments and statutory process to allow land to be acquired and the project constructed.

The assessment and design work is being undertaken in accordance with the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges which sets a UK-wide standard of good practice that has been developed principally for trunk roads and is accepted within

the industry. The DMRB supports the implementation of the statutory process for all new roads as set out in the Roads (Scotland) Act 1984.

In recognition of the urgency to find a solution the announcement in March also confirmed Transport Scotland is progressing work to look at a medium term resilient route through Glen Croe to include consideration of the Forestry Track, improvements to the Old Military Road and other options on land already owned by Scottish Ministers. Depending on the statutory consents required, that work will seek to develop a finalised proposal by Autumn 2022.

Options being considered include providing a new diversion route on the south-western side of Glen Croe, examining whether the existing forestry track could be upgraded and making improvements to the Old Military Road to deliver a safer and more resilient diversion route for use if the A83 is closed.

Environmental, geotechnical, and topographic survey work has been underway since May 2021 to build our knowledge and understanding of the possible route options on the south-western sides of the valley and this work is ongoing.

We recognise that the timescales for developing an alternative to the current route and finding a long-term solution to the challenges created by the Rest and Be Thankful section of the A83 are frustrating for the local community. However, this scheme is technically challenging and the landscape is dynamic so it is vital we understand the terrain we are working in, in order to develop a suitable solution of the correct standard in the correct place. This is a data driven process.

At the same time, we remain committed to progressing substantial shorter term investment in the existing A83 in tandem with the work to identify a permanent solution. This work reduces the risk of road closures and improves the resilience of the route. While the catchpits and mitigation works cannot guarantee the road will not be closed due to a landslide, these important works make it safer, easier and quicker to clear the road and reopen to traffic.

Since the A83 Taskforce was set up in 2012, meetings have been held every 6 months and when that has not been possible written updates have been issued to the Taskforce. These meetings allow updates and discussion regarding the A83 Rest and Be Thankful and the ongoing works.

Since work began looking at a long term resilient solution, as well as a proportionate and resilient medium term solution, these items have been added to the Taskforce agenda for discussion. The most recent Taskforce meeting was held in September 2021. At that meeting the project team informed Taskforce members of the current position of the project, including all the information and assessments which are required. In addition, Transport Scotland committed to providing a substantial project update at the next Taskforce meeting in early 2022,

as well as an open and transparent approach by sharing data, including results of surveys, ground investigation works etc.

In September 2020 Transport Scotland launched an Access to Argyll and Bute (A83) project specific webpage on the Transport Scotland website. A project specific [Storymap website](#) was also launched in March 2021 which provides information on the project as well as updates and 'latest news'.

I hope this is of assistance.