

# Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

8th Meeting, 2023 (Session 6), Wednesday  
17 May 2023

## PE1916: Request a public inquiry into the management of the Rest and Be Thankful project

**Lodged on** 2 December 2021

**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. The Committee last considered this petition at its meeting on [9 November 2022](#). At that meeting, the Committee agreed to write to the Scottish Government.
2. The petition summary is included in **Annexe A** and the Official Report of the Committee's last consideration of this petition is at **Annexe B**.
3. The Committee has received new responses from Transport Scotland and the Petitioner which are set out in **Annexe C**.
4. Written submissions received prior to the Committee's last consideration can be found on the [petition's webpage](#).
5. Further background information about this petition can be found in the [SPICe briefing](#) for this petition.

6. The Scottish Government's initial position on this petition can be found on the [petition's webpage](#).
7. Every petition collects signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 2 signatures have been received on this petition.
8. Members may wish to note that, following the appointment of a new Minister for Transport, a number of written questions have been lodged in relation to the Rest and Be Thankful project. The questions and the Minister's responses are available on the following links: [S6W-17200](#) (lodged by Rhoda Grant MSP), [S6W-16882](#) (lodged by Donald Cameron MSP), and [S6W-16881](#) (lodged by Donald Cameron MSP).

## Action

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

**Clerk to the Committee**

## Annexe A

### 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

2 December 2021

#### 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.

## Annexe B

### Extract from Official Report of last consideration of PE1916 on 9 November 2022

**The Convener:** PE1916, which was lodged by Councillor Douglas Philand and Councillor Donald Kelly, calls 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 seeks to provide a permanent solution for the route.

When we last considered the petition—which was quite some time ago, on 20 April—we agreed to write to Transport Scotland. We have received a response from the Minister for Transport that indicates that five possible route options are currently being assessed, with Transport Scotland expected to make an announcement on a preferred option for a permanent solution by spring 2023. We have also received a response from the petitioners, who have restated their call for a public inquiry and highlighted their concerns around the costs of finding a permanent solution for the Rest and Be Thankful.

Obviously, there are huge issues attendant upon a public inquiry, not all of which are necessarily going to see us make the progress that we might wish. Do colleagues have any suggestions to make on the petition?

**Alexander Stewart:** You have summarised where we are with the petition, which as you have said has been going for some time now. However, in light of the petitioners' concerns, we should write to the Scottish Government and seek information on what impact the capital spending review will have on the funding of the A83 Rest and Be Thankful project and whether the slowdown in funding for the road improvement project is likely to have an impact on the seven to 10-year timescale for the solution for the route to be put in place.

The community still wants a public inquiry to investigate the financial management of the project and to seek a permanent solution for the route, but that is a bigger issue for us to deal with at this stage.

Those are my recommendations, but I am open to other members' views on the topic.

**Fergus Ewing:** I agree with Alexander Stewart. I note that in its response Transport Scotland has stated that delivering a permanent and resilient solution is a priority, which is welcome, but I think that the seven to 10-year timescale will cause concern and consternation in the parts of Scotland that are reliant on the link. When the road is closed, the detour is very substantial indeed and far longer than any other detours that I know of that affect such a large group of people. I know that these things are

complex, but I am concerned about the length of time that all of this will take and the fact that the preferred route and solution has not yet been identified in order to provide reasonable transport links for people in those parts of Scotland.

**The Convener:** I echo those comments. The committee seems to have been discussing the issue one way or another for seven to 10 years, and the idea that we are seven to 10 years away from achieving something that has not yet been agreed is a concern.

**Paul Sweeney:** I am mindful of the points that colleagues have made, but I do not think that it is necessarily helpful to have the sort of ruminating and backwards-looking inquiry that is often quite expensive and tends not to improve operational performance. The petitioners have highlighted a broader strategic issue, which is that in Scotland—and perhaps across the UK—we are incredibly inefficient at delivering major infrastructure programmes. This is yet another dog of a project that has gone on for far too long, and the huge administrative costs associated with the constant procrastination over it are completely unacceptable.

I would contrast that with the approach to the emerging structural problems that were identified on the M8 in central Glasgow at the Woodside viaduct. In the past year, Transport Scotland has introduced an emergency structural repair programme that has ridden roughshod over local public opinion in delivering the maintenance of the trunk road network, which is not necessarily what people in Glasgow want. In contrast, the A83, which is a vital artery and critical for access to the west Highlands at any time, has been stagnating on the back burner for a long time.

There is a broader issue. We need to use the petition as a device to keep pressure on the Government and Transport Scotland to ensure that the project is delivered in a timeous fashion. Although the Government has indicated that there is a timeline that runs into next year, which, on the face of it, sounds satisfactory, the petition may be a useful way of keeping a check on that and allowing the petitioners to continue to ensure that the project moves forward at a satisfactory pace.

**The Convener:** As a committee, we might be ready to agree that we will keep the petition open until, at the very least, we have a preferred route identified and some understanding of the timetable and financial underpinning of the recommended solution. Are members content to do that, and to follow up on Mr Stewart's suggestion?

**Members** *indicated agreement.*

## Annexe C

### Transport Scotland submission of 25 January 2023

#### PE1916/E: Request a public inquiry into the management of the Rest and Be Thankful project

Thank you for your letter of 14 November 2022 in which you ask for information about what impact the Capital Spending Review has had on the funding for the A83 Rest and Be Thankful project.

The Scottish Government remains absolutely committed to an infrastructure solution to address the A83 Rest and Be Thankful landslip risks, recognising the impacts that this has had on the local community and businesses. The situation is being treated with the seriousness and urgency it deserves, with measures to maintain connectivity on a short, medium and long term basis being implemented.

In terms of a permanent solution, potential route designs are being progressed and these range from traditional roads and localised structural protection to full tunnel options. As previously advised we are working towards announcing a preferred route option for a permanent solution by Spring 2023.

Further, in August 2022, the Scottish Government announced the appointment of new technical consultants, Atkins WSP Joint Venture, to take forward the next stages of design and assessment work. The contract represents approximately £25m of Scottish Government investment, an estimate of the overall contract value for undertaking the design and assessment, promotion, procurement and construction supervision of the medium and long-term solutions. This investment represents a significant milestone because it will allow the vital design work needed to continue to be taken forward at pace.

In recognition of the urgent need to secure a long term solution for local communities in and around the A83, the Scottish Government has now arranged for more frequent meetings of the A83 Taskforce, which is chaired by the Minister for Transport, with the next meeting planned for 25 January 2023 in Argyll.

At the same time we are progressing a medium term solution to improve the resilience of the diversion route when the A83 is closed. On 23 December 2022 the Minister for Transport announced improvements to the existing Old Military Road (OMR) through the Glen Croe corridor as the preferred medium term solution to make it a more resilient diversion route until the long term solution to the problems at the Rest and Be Thankful is in place.

The improvements to the OMR will improve the resilience of the diversion route, reduce journey times, are the quickest to implement, of relatively lower cost and would have the least impacts overall across the range of criteria assessed.

A detailed programme for the proposed improvements will now be developed. These include debris catch fences, temporary bunds, drainage improvements and widening and discrete realignment to improve bends and avoid flooding. It is expected that these works will be carried out on a phased basis starting later this year.

As the Committee will be aware, there are significant financial challenges across the Scottish Government. Budgets are confirmed as part of the annual budget setting process, with the 2023-24 budget laid before the Scottish Parliament on 15 December 2022. The Capital Spending Review differs from a detailed annual budget, in that it does not represent confirmed budget allocation, rather sets out indicative allocations over the review period.

The Scottish Government remains committed to investing in Scotland's future, including the A83, and we regularly assess future funding and financing opportunities to deliver strategic assets in the right places, that is good Governance.

I hope this is of assistance.

## Petitioner submission of 14 March 2023

### PE1916/F: Request a public inquiry into the management of the Rest and Be Thankful project

#### Concerns voiced to me

If the old military road improvements work well will this kick the permanent solution into the long grass?



The selection criteria for improving resilience considered the environment, topography alignment, structures, drainage, flooding, safety, operational considerations, and finance. The selection criteria for the Medium-Term Solution did not consider ensuring we have a two way road which stays open when it rains and is free from traffic lights, road closures, and convoys - a fundamental requirement of the people who actually use the road, and we would have assumed is the role for which Transport Scotland exists - why was this the case?

What is Transport Scotland's timetable for a permanent solution?