

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

9th Meeting, 2023 (Session 6), Wednesday
31 May 2023

PE1906: Investigate options for removing and reducing the impact of the central Glasgow section of the M8

Lodged on 25 October 2021

Petitioner Peter Kelly on behalf of @ReplacetheM8

Petition summary Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to commission an independent feasibility study to investigate scenarios for reducing the impact of the M8 between the M74 and Glasgow Cathedral including, specifically, complete removal and repurposing of the land.

Webpage <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1906>

Introduction

1. The Committee last considered this petition at its meeting on [23 November 2022](#). At that meeting, the Committee agreed to write to the Scottish Government.
2. A petition summary briefing can be found at **Annexe A** and the Official Report of the Committee's last consideration of this petition is at **Annexe B**.
3. The Committee has received a written submission from the Scottish Government which is set out at **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, 1,720 signatures have been received on this petition.

Action

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

Clerk to the Committee

Annexe A

PE1906: Investigate options for removing and reducing the impact of the central Glasgow section of the M8

Petitioner

Peter Kelly of @ReplacetheM8

Date Lodged

25/10/21

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to commission an independent feasibility study to investigate scenarios for reducing the impact of the M8 between the M74 and Glasgow Cathedral including, specifically, complete removal and repurposing of the land.

Previous action

We have contacted Paul Sweeney MSP and he has suggested that the petition should go ahead.

Background information

It is not clear whether the commitment to ongoing maintenance of the elevated M8 has been evaluated in light of the new cooperation agreement between the SNP and Green Party which states "we will not build road infrastructure to cater for unconstrained increases in traffic".

It is not clear if full removal of the central section has been considered by Glasgow Council or Scottish Government or Scottish Highways as a way of addressing GCC's Regeneration Framework Objectives which states:

- Reinforce the city centre's economic competitiveness;
- Re-populate the city centre;
- Reconnect the City centre with surrounding communities and its riverside;
- Reduce traffic dominance and car dependency;
- Green the city centre and make it climate resilient;
- Repair, restore and enhance the urban fabric.

Evidence is plentiful showing removal of similar roads around the world does not have anticipated negative impacts and brings economic, social and environmental benefits (<https://www.cnu.org/our-projects/highways-boulevards>)

Annexe B

Extract from the Official Report of last consideration of PE1906 on 23rd February 2022

The Convener: PE1906, which has been lodged by Peter Kelly on behalf of @ReplacetheM8, calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to commission an independent feasibility study to investigate scenarios for reducing the impact of the M8 between the M74 and Glasgow cathedral, including, specifically, the complete removal and repurposing of the land.

When we previously considered the petition on 23 February, we agreed to write to stakeholders seeking their views on the action that the petition calls for. Glasgow City Council has highlighted its commitment to address the aims of the petition as part of its “Strategic Plan 2022 to 2027”. It has committed to

“Commission research on and explore options to reduce the impact of the M8 on the city centre, and review opportunities to re-engineer other roads infrastructure to become more people-friendly including options for long-term replacement.”

It also states that funding and collaboration with stakeholders such as Transport Scotland is required to take forward the research.

We have also had submissions from Professor Richard Williams, who provided information on a recent project in São Paulo, and from Dr Wood, who supports the petition. Dr Wood’s submission highlights relevant traffic reduction projects in other parts of the UK, and the related economic development opportunities.

Do members have any comments or suggestions for action? I recall that Mr Sweeney has a particular interest in the petition.

Paul Sweeney: Yes, convener. That is certainly a positive indication from Glasgow City Council that it is seriously investigating the matter, not least as it has submitted a levelling-up fund application worth £50 million to the UK Government to finance the capping of the M8 at the Mitchell library at Charing Cross. However, the asset itself is owned by the Scottish Government, and Transport Scotland as the agency.

It would be good if the committee could establish the exact nature of the co-operation that is required from all levels of Government, from the council to Transport Scotland, to deliver the best outcome for the city. We have not fully established that. It is one thing for Glasgow City Council to have a position, which, although it is positive, is not necessarily specific in its actions. The council has put in one levelling-up fund bid, but there is no indication from the Scottish Government, via its agency Transport Scotland, of what its intentions are, at either a strategic or an operational level, to effect the proposed changes or to co-operate with the council.

Furthermore, the points that Dr Wood makes about the international dimension, given some of the work that that chap has done, are really important. Perhaps there

is some merit in requesting a response from Transport Scotland or from the minister in relation to the matter. We can then assess what the Scottish Government's position is in the light of the evidence that we receive.

The Convener: We could write to the Scottish Government to ask it to facilitate a collaborative approach between Transport Scotland and Glasgow City Council to see what progress could be made, and to clarify what the funding mechanism for the proposed outcomes might be. Does that seem sensible?

Paul Sweeney: Yes, I think that that would be helpful.

Fergus Ewing: Convener, what other evidence have we obtained? The petitioners have plainly expressed their view, as have a few others. However, as someone who is not unfamiliar with the M8, I am a bit unsure as to how it could be removed, which is what the petition calls for.

It occurs to me that that would have a huge impact, in a number of respects, on the flow of traffic and therefore on the conduct of business and the conveyance of emergency vehicles to and from hospitals. In general, the system of transport that we have in Scotland depends, whether we like it or not, substantially on roads. I wonder, therefore, whether we should seek evidence more widely in order to get a rounded view. I am thinking in particular of bodies such as the Glasgow Chamber of Commerce, motoring organisations such as the RAC and the police and emergency services. I appreciate that there is a huge range of possibilities, some of which are relatively modest, and some that may involve complete removal of the road, shutting it at weekends or whatever.

I am struck by the fact that we do not appear to have sought that evidence—as far as I know; I am sorry if I have not picked that up from the papers by the clerks, although I have raised the matter with the clerks in correspondence. Perhaps we should cast our net a bit more widely to get a more rounded view of the proposals.

The Convener: That is a perfectly reasonable point. There are two issues. First, Mr Sweeney referred to the capping of the M8. Those who are familiar with the Charing Cross end of the motorway will know that it is really a valley through civilisation when you get to the top end of Glasgow.

The points that Mr Ewing makes are perfectly fair. Perhaps the various organisations that you have identified could be included in our approach to the Scottish Government in terms of any collaborative approach that is being undertaken between Transport Scotland and Glasgow City Council. Could we do it that way?

Fergus Ewing: Yes—I am happy to do that.

The Convener: We can see if that works. Ultimately, the project would have to be taken forward by others, but I take the point that it would have to include a much wider range of views to be certain that it was viable, in addition to any capping proposal that might proceed.

Paul Sweeney: I agree, and the point that Mr Ewing makes is important. Perhaps the removal of the road in a broad sense is a bit of a provocation, but the petitioner

goes into that question in more nuanced detail in his comments; he talks about specific interventions that would reduce the road's impact such as capping or constructing buildings above the road. There are areas where it is overengineered—for example, the Townhead interchange was built for a flank of the motorway that was never built. That is a massively overengineered solution that could largely be deconstructed without having any material effect on traffic. There are ways in which that could be done.

The point that the petitioner is perhaps trying to drive at—pardon the pun—is that the issue has never been seriously reflected on by Transport Scotland, and it is only recently that the city council has started thinking about it. It feels like there is an opportunity for the committee to be a catalyst.

The Convener: I have resolved not to reach for any other metaphors. I take the point, and we can proceed on the basis that we have described with that understanding.

Members *indicated agreement*

Annexe C

Scottish Government submission of 19 May 2023

PE1906/E: Investigate options for removing and reducing the impact of the central Glasgow section of the M8

Further to your letter of the 25 November 2022, regarding Petition PE1906, which is before the Committee, I have noted the Committee's specific questions and I have responded to these in this response.

Firstly, I would like to apologise for the delay in responding. I would note that much of Transport Scotland's original submission still remains valid in the context of the Committee's deliberations and the further written submissions from other stakeholders. Scottish Ministers responsibilities for the motorway and trunk road network remains unchanged and, as the roads authority, Transport Scotland have a legal responsibility for the safety, operation, and maintenance of the network. However, Glasgow City Council as the planning authority would be the most appropriate lead to bring forward their aspirations for any work in this space, given that there will be significant impacts for land-use and for the local road network around the city centre that will need to be considered.

If I can now turn to responding to the Committee's specific points raised in your letter:

Query 1

Facilitate a collaborative approach between Transport Scotland, Glasgow City Council and other key stakeholders (including those using and impacted by the M8) to progress the Council's commitment to reduce the impact of the M8 on Glasgow City Centre, exploring all potential options, including a full cost-benefit assessment of the options;

I note the response from Glasgow City Council and their aspirations outlined in the Glasgow Strategic Plan. These aspirations certainly align with Scottish Government aims stated in our route map to achieving 20% reduction in car km, which acknowledges the harms to communities though air pollution, road safety and community severance. The route

map also recognises that local interventions will play a key role in supporting this transformation.

Any future consideration of the role and use of the road network would of course require significant consideration of the land-use and planning aspects for which Glasgow City Council are responsible for. The Minister for Transport recently wrote to Councillor Angus Millar to offer discussions between officials of Transport Scotland and Glasgow City Council on the measures they are considering to reduce the impact of the M8 on Glasgow city centre.

Query 2

Confirm the proposed approach to engagement with those who use the M8 such as emergency services, police and members of the public, as part of any assessment;

The engagement of stakeholders at the appropriate point within any study of this type is critically important. As I noted above, given that the scope of any study which would need to extend well beyond the bounds of Transport Scotland's remit, we are happy to work with Council colleagues in making sure that all the necessary stakeholders are included within their assessment.

Query 3

Clarify the funding mechanisms available to support this work.

There is currently no funding allocated by the Scottish Government, towards a study to reduce the impact of the M8 on Glasgow city centre, as proposed by Glasgow City Council. As mentioned above, we are willing to discuss with officials for the local authority the scope of any work. As they have not taken place yet, it would not be appropriate to discuss funding at this time.

In conclusion, Transport Scotland are willing to work with Glasgow City Council on taking forward work on measures they are considering to reduce the impact of the M8 on Glasgow city centre.

I hope that the Committee will find this response helpful in their further consideration of the Petition.