

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

12th Meeting, 2023 (Session 6), Wednesday
6 September 2023

PE1974: Adopt the A890 as a trunk road

Lodged on 19 October 2022

Petitioner Derek Noble

Petition summary Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to adopt the A890 as a trunk road, and to resolve the safety problems associated with the Stromeferry Bypass.

Webpage <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1974>

PE1980: Adopt the A832 between Achnasheen and Gorstan as a trunk road

Lodged on 6 October 2022

Petitioner Derek Noble

Petition summary Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to adopt the A832 between Achnasheen and Gorstan as a trunk road, connecting this route into the existing trunk road network.

Webpage <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1980>

Introduction

1. The Committee jointly considered petitions PE1974 and PE1980 at its meeting on [18 January 2023](#). At that meeting, the Committee agreed to write to the Minister for Transport, Highland Council, Lochcarron Community Council, Stromeferry and Achmore Community, Plockton Community Council, Applecross Community Council, IAM Roadsmart, the Road Haulage Association, and Visit Scotland.

2. The petition summaries are included in **Annexe A** and the Official Report of the Committee's last consideration of these petitions is at **Annexe B**.
3. The Committee has received new responses from the Minister for Transport, Lochcarron Community Council, Plockton and District Community Council, Highland Council, and Visit Scotland, which are set out in **Annexe C**.
4. Written submissions received prior to the Committee's last consideration can be found on the respective petition webpages using the following links: [PE1974](#) and [PE1980](#).
5. Further background information about each petition can be found in the SPICe briefings for [PE1974](#) and [PE1980](#).
6. The Scottish Government's initial position on each petition can also be found on the relevant petition webpage: [PE1974](#) and [PE1980](#).
7. Every petition collects signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 137 signatures have been received on petition PE1974, with 2 signatures received on petition PE1980.

Action

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

Clerk to the Committee

Annexe A

PE1974: Adopt the A890 as a trunk road

Petitioner

Derek Noble

Date lodged

19 October 2022

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to adopt the A890 as a trunk road, and to resolve the safety problems associated with the Stromeferry Bypass.

Previous action

I have contacted Rhoda Grant MSP for advice.

Background information

As highlighted in the [Annual Slope Inspection Report](#) of 2021, "the A890 serves as the main link-road down the west coast of Scotland and is also a significant transit for east to west traffic travelling between the Isle of Skye and Inverness." The road is mainly single carriageway but frequently reduces to single track with passing places along the stretch between Attadale and Ardnarff. There has been a history of rock falls at the site since the road was opened, which continue to occur, posing a risk to the road and its users.

The Highland Council have undertaken feasibility studies into two alternatives to the Stromeferry Bypass. One is a bridge between North and South Strome and the other a new bypass route through Glen Udalain.

The existing road is the route taken daily by school buses, and there have been many days of education lost due to closures.

In 2012, the estimated cost of the Glen Udalain route was £23 million and that of the Bridge was £60 million. This level of funding can only

come at a government level. The A890 has to be adopted by the Scottish Government for improvements to happen.

PE1980: Adopt the A832 between Achnasheen and Gorstan as a trunk road

Petitioner

Derek Noble

Date lodged

6 October 2022

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to adopt the A832 between Achnasheen and Gorstan as a trunk road, connecting this route into the existing trunk road network.

Previous action

I have contacted Rhoda Grant MSP for advice on this matter, as well as in relation to petition PE1974, which calls for the adoption of the A890 as a trunk road.

Background information

The A832 links the A890 and the A835, completing the west to east road system.

If the A890 is trunked, as requested in petition PE1974, then the A832 between Achnasheen and Gorstan should also be adopted as a trunk road by the Scottish Government. Doing so would provide a trunk road connection between the A87 and the A835 trunk roads.

Adopting these routes as trunk roads could transform connectivity between the West and East coast, bringing social and economic benefits at both local community and national levels.

Annexe B

Extract from Official Report of last consideration of PE1974 and PE1980 on 18 January 2023

The Convener: We will consider together two new petitions that focus on upgrades to the road network in Highland Scotland. PE1974, which was lodged by Derek Noble, calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to adopt the A890 as a trunk road and to resolve the safety problems that are associated with the Stromeferry bypass. PE1980, which was also lodged by Derek Noble, calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to adopt the A832 between Achnasheen and Gorstan as a trunk road, connecting the route into the existing trunk road network.

I note again that we are joined by Rhoda Grant this morning. I will set out a little of the background before I invite her to speak to the issues that have been raised. On PE1974, Derek Noble tells us that the A890 is mainly single carriageway but that it frequently reduces to a single track with passing places along the stretch between Attadale and Ardnarff. He highlights a history of rock falls, which have occurred since the road was opened and which continue to pose a risk to the road and its users.

Derek informs us that Highland Council has undertaken feasibility studies into two alternatives to the Stromeferry bypass, with the cost of pursuing those alternatives being estimated at between £23 million and £60 million. He believes that that level of funding should come from central Government, and it is for that reason that he calls for the road to be adopted as a trunk road.

In relation to PE1980, Derek tells us that the A832 links the previously mentioned A890 to the A835, helping to complete the west-to-east road network. He highlights that, if the Scottish Government was to adopt the A890 as a trunk road, the A832 should also be adopted, because that would provide a trunk road connection between existing trunk roads the A87 and the A835. There is now a complicated map in our heads. Derek believes that that provision could transform connectivity between Scotland's east and west coasts and bring social and economic benefits at local and national levels.

In responding to both petitions, Transport Scotland indicates that

“the Scottish Government has no plans to trunk the A890”

or the A832. Its response also states that there are currently

“no plans to undertake a formal review of the trunk road network”

but that ministers

“keep the trunk road network under continual review with the issue last considered following publication of the Strategic Transport Projects Review”.

That was all quite complicated and technical. Before I ask members whether they would like to say anything, I invite Rhoda Grant to speak to both petitions.

Rhoda Grant: I am grateful to be able to speak to the petitions. I have been involved with the campaign to improve the Stromeferry bypass for many years—probably for much of the time since I was elected—and I am really pleased that Mr Noble has brought the petitions to the Parliament.

As you said, convener, parts of those roads, which link the current trunk roads on the route to Skye, are single track. However, the big issue is the Stromeferry bypass, which is subject to landslides. At that part of the road, the road and the rail line run side by side, so the landslides impact on both, and there is a risk to life. Children use that road daily to get to Plockton high school, which is also the National Centre of Excellence in Traditional Music, and ferry traffic for Uist and Harris uses the route that goes up to Uig on Skye.

When there is a landslide, the road can be closed for months, and it impacts badly on the community and commuters. I am concerned that the road is not recognised as a trunk road because it links the Highland Council mainland to the Western Isles via Skye.

The road is also essential for secondary education and medical cover. The local hospital that serves the whole area is in Broadford in Skye, but it can become cut off from the community, creating stress and disruption to care. You can imagine what it must be like for families who cannot get to a loved one who is in hospital. Closing the road also cuts children off from their high school, which is unacceptable. The only alternative route involves a 130-mile diversion, which is impossible to take on a daily basis.

The cost of improving the road is beyond the financial reach of Highland Council, which already has the greatest mileage of road to cover. Going by the mail from constituents, it would seem that most of it is falling into disrepair. It is pretty grim in places, and finding that amount of money for repairs is impossible.

I am disappointed by Transport Scotland’s response. It says that one of the ways in which it gauges whether a route should become a trunk road is that it must

“Provide the users with a coherent and continuous system of routes, which serve destinations of importance to industry, commerce, agriculture and tourism”.

The route is part of the north coast 500, which is an internationally recognised tourist route. Indeed, there has been a lot of concern about how busy that route is. It is the main route between the Highlands and the southern Hebrides and Western Isles. It

is the main route to the National Centre of Excellence in Traditional Music and it is critical to industry, farming, crofting and aquaculture, and also to the renewables and decommissioning industry because of the yard at Kishorn, which I hope is set to grow and provide a much-needed economic boost in that area.

I therefore believe that the route fulfils Transport Scotland's criterion. I ask the committee to raise that directly with the Scottish Government to persuade ministers of the merits of the route becoming a trunk road. It would serve well an area of Scotland that has largely been ignored in the past. We really need to create jobs and repopulate the area, which is under a lot of pressure from tourism and holiday homes. We need get people back to the area to make sure that it grows.

The Convener: The petitions raise important issues. Colleagues, do you have any suggestions or comments?

Fergus Ewing: We should write to Highland Council to seek its views on the issues that are raised in the petitions and to ask for further information on its plans to develop alternative routes to the Stromeferry bypass.

Rhoda Grant has pursued the issue doggedly for a number of years, and rightly so. In doing that, she has raised a conundrum. If my memory serves me correctly, Highland Council has a geographical area of more than 25,000 square miles, which is nearly a third of the landmass of Scotland. Its area is 20 per cent bigger than Wales and is bigger than Belgium, and its budget has to cater for the area's huge network of roads.

Convener, you alluded to the figures and the petitioner's point that the cost of the repairs that are required is in the tens of millions. When writing to Highland Council, therefore, could we specifically ask whether, given that it has such a disproportionate responsibility for roads maintenance in Scotland as it covers a third of the land mass, its budgetary allocation is fair? As a Highland MSP, albeit one who represents a constituency, I absolutely share the sense of grievance that the petitioner has, which underlies the petition, so I want to add that to our particular request.

I would also be interested to formally ask for the views of local communities via their community councils. I think that that includes Lochcarron as well as Stromeferry and Achmore, Plockton and Applecross. I do not know whether there is anything else that Rhoda Grant thinks we might usefully do, but if there is, I would be most interested in giving that sympathetic consideration as well.

Alexander Stewart: I very much concur with Mr Ewing's comments. It is vital that we engage with local communities, and Rhoda Grant made an articulate case. In her representations, she talked about us contacting the minister. That may well be another route that we should consider in order to find out exactly what is happening. It appears that the roads meet the criteria that should be considered, so let us get some more clarity on the process from the minister.

It is important that we deal with Highland Council but, as Mr Ewing said, its resource is limited in relation to the expanse that it has to manage across its large geographical area. I therefore think that we should take forward Rhoda Grant's suggestion about contacting the minister.

The Convener: Colleagues, are we agreed? We also want to contact Highland Council in relation to PE1980, as well as contacting IAM Roadsmart, the Road Haulage Association and VisitScotland to seek their views on the Achnasheen and Gorstan petition. Along with acting on the suggestions that have been made, are we collectively content to keep the petitions open and begin our investigation by pursuing our inquiries with those bodies?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Annexe C

Lochcarron Community Council submission of 19 February 2023

PE1974/B: Adopt the A890 as a trunk road

Lochcarron Community Council wholeheartedly supports the petition.

The A890 serves as the main link-road down the west coast of Scotland and is also a significant transit for east to west traffic travelling between the Isle of Skye and Inverness. It is mainly single carriageway but frequently reduces to single track with passing places along the stretch between Attadale and Ardnarff.

The road has seen an increase in traffic as visitors have returned to the area post COVID. With the current closure of Uig pier for redevelopment, ferry traffic between Skye and the islands have to use the route to get to and from Ullapool. The growth in activity at Kishorn Yard has also seen a significant rise in heavy goods traffic.

The Stromeferry Bypass section of the road between Attadale and Ardnarff has steep rock slopes with exposed rock mass susceptible to weathering, frost and root action. There has been a history of rock falls at the site since the road was opened in 1970. The existing road is the route taken daily by school buses, and there have been many days of education lost due to closures. The shortest detour adds approximately 140 miles to a journey.

Annual inspections and remedial works are necessary to bring the slopes into manageable condition. An alternative route was recommended following feasibility studies into two alternatives. Without intervention from Scottish Government there is no possibility of funding being sourced to build a safer reliable route.

The section from Coulags to Achnashellach which has already had approval for a new bypass route has not been completed due to lack of funding. Completion of this section would reduce the single track element of the entire road and improve the route to Achnasheen.

Transport Scotland's Scottish Trunk Road Network Asset Management Policy states "An effective transport system is crucial to supporting the Scottish Government's purpose to create a more successful country,

with opportunities for all of Scotland to flourish, through increasing sustainable economic growth, as stated in Transport Scotland's Corporate Plan 2017 - 2020."

Adoption of the route as a trunk road would link the existing A87 Invergarry/Uig and A835/A893 Tore - Ullapool routes, completing the loop between these west coast communities.

Plockton and District Community Council submission of 24 February 2023

PE1974/C: Adopt the A890 as a trunk road

Plockton and District Community Council is 100% in favour of supporting any action which would improve not only the quality but the safety of the journey EAST/WEST/EAST on the A890.

Over the past 30 years, the closures of the Stromeferry bypass have caused enormous inconvenience to the Plockton and Lochalsh communities.

Closures are normally because of rock landslides, and it is obvious to all the residents of this area that enormous amounts of money have been spent on Landslide prevention and mitigation.

When this road is closed it means a 130 mile diversion.

At present the road surface is an embarrassment, potholes that look like World War 1 shell craters especially at the tarmac edge which are axle and/or wheel destroyers.

The sheer volume of traffic especially April-October tourist traffic is probably 10, 20 or even 30 fold over the estimate of traffic volume when the bypass and landslide shelter were built.

The North Coast 500, camper van increase, school buses, heavy lorries etc as well as the residential day to day users all contribute to essentially tearing this inadequate road up when water pours down from the overhanging cliffs.

The Stromeferry bypass is in continual atrocious condition and from a Health and Safety perspective it can be argued that to continually allow traffic to use the road is in conscious knowledge that the road is inherently unsafe.

Minister for Transport submission of 27 February 2023

PE1974/D: Adopt the A890 as a trunk road

Thank you for your further correspondence on Petition PE1974. As previously discussed, Ministers do keep the trunk road network under continual review with the issue last considered by Scottish Ministers following publication of the Strategic Transport Projects Review (STPR).

For your awareness, the STPR defines the key functions of a strategic road network as follows:

- Linking major urban centres and areas of population change;
- Providing links to international gateways, airports, ports and borders;
- Linking remoter communities;
- Linking key tourist areas;
- Facilitating freight routes; and
- Linking areas of economic activity and regeneration areas of national significance.

Although there is linkage in relation to the A890 with some of these criteria, it is our assessment that the A890 does not sufficiently meet the criteria to be incorporated into the strategic motorway and trunk road network and is currently appropriately classified in the hierarchy of Scotland's roads as a principal "A" class road. Principal A Class roads are best managed locally rather than centrally and function as main roads which distribute traffic to and from the strategic trunk road network.

The routes to the Hebrides and the Western Isles from the north, east and south are currently well served with several trunk routes linking to the main ferry ports including the A835, A82/A87, A830 and A85 to

Ullapool, Uig, Mallaig and Oban respectively. Several principal A class distributor roads including the A890 link to these routes.

I note also that the main driver for the proposal is stated to be one of funding which is not in itself a justifiable criteria in respect of the hierarchy of Scotland's roads. I appreciate the challenges in managing the A890 but transferring the route to the trunk road network would not solve the investment challenges as it would require to compete with a wide range of existing commitments and pressures on the hard pressed Motorways and Trunk Roads budget.

I trust this is of assistance and clarifies the Government's position on this matter.

Jenny Gilruth MSP
Minister for Transport

Visit Scotland submission of 24 February 2023

PE1980/B: Adopt the A832 between Achnasheen and Gorstan as a trunk road

With thanks to the Committee for the opportunity to respond to the abovementioned petition.

Connectivity is an important part of the visitor experience. Without it, the visitor economy in remote regions of Scotland may not be able to function effectively. Accessible locations allow for tourism and events to be inclusive and accessible to all, including to a mobile workforce as well as visitors. This is why it is important that infrastructure is maintained to the highest possible standard.

VisitScotland therefore welcomes investment in critical tourism infrastructure. We consider that road infrastructure remains an important part of the visitor experience, and that when road infrastructure is not in the best condition, that does lead to complaints from visitors which could detract from our reputation and reduce levels of repeat visits.

With our focus on developing responsible tourism, a key priority is to ensure that tourism and events can contribute to thriving communities. Adequate infrastructure can play its part in delivering this by improving access for residents, visitors and workforce.

We also consider it important to ensure that the possibility of alternative modes of travel other than the car, such as bus travel and active travel, are fully explored wherever possible. VisitScotland is committed to working with partners across the country to encourage this approach.

In its response to the Petition to adopt the A832 between Achnasheen and Gorstan as a trunk road, the Scottish Government can consider this in line with its powers and duties to manage and maintain trunk roads according to the Roads (Scotland) Act 1984, and whether or not adopting the road will improve outcomes for residents and visitors to the area.

Highland Council submission of 22 May 2023

PE1974/E: Adopt the A890 as a trunk road &
PE1980/C: Adopt the A832 between Achnasheen
and Gorstan as a trunk road

Thank you for your e-mail. Please accept my apologies for the delay in the Council's response.

In respect of PE1974, I can comment as follows:

There has been no further work undertaken by Highland Council on the Stromeferry Options Appraisal since December 2019. The project has no capital programme support and Transport Scotland had said that it was a 'local road' and would not be supported in STPR2. I have attached the Council's response to the STPR2 consultation¹. At this time there is no preferred option for the scheme. The STAG had narrowed down the options, but Council had not yet selected a preferred route.

¹Copy of STPR2 consultation response: https://consult.gov.scot/transport-scotland/strategic-transport-projects-review/consultation/view_respondent?show_all_questions=0&sort=submitted&order=ascending&q_text=highland+council&uuld=793068747

The enclosed documents show the three routes which had emerged². The Council did receive representation from Scottish Water in 2019/20 regarding the southern route S4. This valley is the drinking water supply catchment area for a significant population and Scottish Water had said that they may be minded to object if mitigation could not be provided. That said no decision had been taken.

In respect of PE1980:

The A832 Achnasheen to Gorstan is a single carriageway road and, although some of it may not meet today’s design standards, the issues of the A890 Stromeferry section outweigh those significantly. The A832 is known for high-speed traffic due to its openness and some long straight sections.

The Highland Council has undertaken the following work along the A890 and A832 in 2021/22 and 2022/23, with further works programmed for 2023/24:

Financial Year	Works	Cost	Status
20/21	A890 W of Achnasheen Major patching	£185k	Completed
20/21	A890 Strathcarron Hotel – Attadale Surface Dressing	£130k	Completed
21/22	A890 Achnasheen Major patching	£96.2k	Completed
21/22	A890 Avalanche Shelter – Hotel Surface dressing (tbc)	£116.5k	Completed
	A890 Stromeferry Viewpoint Prep works for SD in 22/23	£4.1k	Completed
22/23	A890 Auchtertyre Jct to Dam Surface dressing 2.9km	£126.7k	Completed
22/23	A890 Stromeferry Viewpoint East 884m surface dressing	£59.2k	Completed

² Page 16 of Stromeferry Working Group Presentation 20/03/2019: https://www.highland.gov.uk/downloads/file/20702/stromeferry_working_group_presentation_200319 and https://www.highland.gov.uk/downloads/file/22382/route_option_plan_sk1003

22/23	A832 Lochluichart 883m surfacing	£138,300	Completed
22/23	A890 W of Achnasheen Section 1 1.524km Section 2 1.178	£378,280	Completed
23/24	A832 Lochluichart Surfacing 1.1km	£192,500	To be discussed at W5BM
23/24	A890 Various Sites	£1.38m	Sites nearly identified, works planned for autumn onwards