
CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

FOR DECISION

Title: A9 Dualling Project: Dalraddy to Slochd

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Purpose:

This paper provides information on the proposals from Transport Scotland for the section of the A9 Dualling Project from Dalraddy to Slochd and a proposed response by CNPA.

Recommendation:

That the Board:

- a) Note the overall programme of works
- b) Agree to object to the proposals between Aviemore and the junction to the north of Carrbridge due to the inadequate provision for non-motorised users and inconsistency with the overall Scheme objectives for the A9 dualling programme all as set out in paragraph 10.

Strategic Context

1. The dualling of the A9 between Perth and Inverness is one of Scotland's largest infrastructure projects. The A9 dualling programme will upgrade 80 miles (129 kilometres) of road from single to dual carriageway. Transport Scotland's £3 billion programme is designed to deliver economic growth through improved road safety and reliable and quicker journey times, as well as better links to pedestrian, cycling and public transport facilities. The Scottish Government has committed to completing the work by 2025. This is an ambitious deadline for a project of this size and complexity.
2. The scheme objectives for the A9 dualling programme are:
 - a) To improve the operational performance of the A9 by:
 - i) Reducing journey times; and
 - ii) Improving journey time reliability.
 - b) To improve safety for motorised and Non-Motorised Users (NMUs) by:
 - i) Reducing accident severity; and
 - ii) Reducing driver stress.
 - c) To facilitate active travel within the corridor; and
 - d) To improve integration with Public Transport facilities
3. Transport Scotland have followed the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (DMRB) with its three stage process as shown at **Annex I**. CNPA Board have been updated at each stage of the process and staff have fed back to Transport Scotland about specific issues to take into account. For this specific stage CNPA feedback to TS was given at Stage 2 on 18 November 2016, and along with detailed comments on issues to consider along the route, recommended that a parallel-to-carriageway traffic-free cycle path be considered along with alternatives to deliver improvements to National Cycle Route 7 (NCN7) as part of the DMRB Stage3 proposals and assessment.
4. In 2016 Transport Scotland produced a Non-Motorised User Access Strategy to develop Transport Scotland's position in relation to non-motorised users (NMUs) and to lay out an appropriate plan of action towards securing the best outcomes. CNPA contributed to this process along with wide range of interest groups involved in an NMU Group that was chaired by Transport Scotland. NMUs are considered to be all non-motorized traffic, including pedestrians, cyclists and equestrians – as such, they are generally afforded access rights under the terms of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003. The Strategy is available here https://www.transport.gov.scot/media/6457/a9-non-motorised-users-access-strategy-0516_0.pdf
5. The Strategy specifically notes as a Design Principle (on page 25) the need to “*Retain, and where possible enhance, overall connectivity between NMU routes along and across the corridor*”. It also highlights the specific opportunities “*to provide more direct NMU*

routes between Aviemore and Carrbridge” and “to improve NMU links between the A9 corridor, train station and village centre at Carrbridge” (page 37).

6. In general terms, facilitating active travel within the A9 corridor would help deliver the following national, regional and local strategies:
 - a) National Transport Strategy
 - b) Third National Planning Framework
 - c) Scottish Government Active Travel Vision
 - d) Cycling Action Plan (CAPS)
 - e) Active Scotland Strategy
 - f) National Walking Strategy
 - g) Transport Scotland Roads for All: Good Practice Guide
 - h) Transport Scotland – Cycling by Design
 - i) British Horse Society Scotland Guidance
 - j) HITRANS Regional Transport Strategy
 - k) Cairngorms National Park Partnership Plan and LDP
 - l) Highland Wide Local Development Plan
 - m) Active Cairngorms Strategy
 - n) Active Aviemore
7. The Trunk Road Cycling Initiative aims to ensure that Scotland’s major roads projects give careful consideration to suitable provision for all road users, including non-motorised users, including cyclists and pedestrians. The Cycling Action Plan Delivery Forum required a review of the Trunk Road Cycling Initiative with a commitment within that to improve cycling and walking infrastructure around Trunk roads when the opportunity presents. The Trunk Road Walking and Cycling Strategy, which is due to be published in September 2018, will replace the Trunk Road Cycling Initiative and will focus on engaging with key stakeholders through the delivery of active travel commitments on the trunk road network.
8. It is notable that Transform Scotland (an alliance of active and sustainable travel organisations) very published in June 2018 a new report, “Routes to Growth”, on the benefits of new segregated cycle routes for tourism and local rural economies. The report specifically recommends that we should “*Build fully segregated cycle paths along the length of selected key tourist routes*” and “*Further develop and maintain the National Cycle Network (NCN)*”. Report is here <http://transformscotland.org.uk/wp/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Routes-to-Growth-Transform-Scotland-report-version-2018-06-22.pdf>
9. The significance of the A9 Dualling project is highlighted in the National Park Partnership Plan. The Plan notes that new developments in and around Aviemore, including the A9 dualling project, offer the opportunity to improve access infrastructure and promotion to encourage more active travel by both residents and visitors. The Plan also sets out a clear Agenda for Action in the Park around active travel and a specific Target to increase percentage of visitors using active travel from 16% to 19% by 2022.
10. The first section of the A9 dualling project, between Kincaig and Dalraddy, was delivered in summer 2017. This included an NMU route parallel to the carriageway, which delivered the active travel scheme objective.

Current proposals

11. The draft Orders and Environmental Statement for the A9 Dualling Dalraddy to Slochd project were published on 28 August 2018. The Statutory Consultation Period closes on 9 October 2018. Details are available here <https://www.transport.gov.scot/projects/a9-dualling-perth-to-inverness/a9-dalraddy-to-slochd/>
12. The proposed NMU provision is shown on map at **Annex 2**. To the south of Aviemore the provision is on segregated path/cycle-way with tarmac surface, at low gradients and all signposted. To the north of Aviemore the paths are of a completely different character being disjointed, at significant gradients (well in excess of normal use for such routes), on gravel roads that are to be shared with estate traffic and will not be signposted. The current proposals north of Aviemore, to the Carrbridge junction, rely on an approach that caters for accommodating crossing points and allowing use of existing and modified tracks. The consultants for the project have advised CNPA that the tracks in question are not suitable for promotion as a cycling route. The route is so indirect, complicated and hilly that it is unlikely to be attractive to many users.

Assessment of the Current Proposals

13. Having reviewed the proposals, staff are generally content with many elements. Landscape and ecology issues have been satisfactorily considered with appropriate mitigation.
14. The southbound widening near Aviemore remains contentious with the community and there is some loss of woodland and impact on path that are well used by people in Aviemore. Given the route choice that was made at the end of Stage 2 (Route Options assessment) it is challenging to see how this can be avoided.
15. However, the proposals for the provision of Non-Motorised Users between north Aviemore and the junction to the North of Carrbridge are considered to be extremely disappointing and completely inadequate. Staff met with Transport Scotland (TS) in July to discuss the emerging proposals. In summary, TS were not willing to modify the proposals and suggested CNPA had options to object to Roads Orders. As a concession, TS did offer to fund a feasibility study to develop a line for the NMU route between Aviemore and Carrbridge, undertake the necessary survey and appraisal, undertake consultation and define the land boundary required. The value of this work is around £50-75k. However, no commitment was made to build any NMU route identified.
16. Within the last few month the local development trust Carrbridge Ahead has written to Ministers expressing concern about the continued presence of the highly promoted National Cycle Route on the very busy B9135 south of Carrbridge and seeking a commitment to a better segregated path to Boat of Garten and to Aviemore. There are differing opinions as to whether an NMU route next to the A9 or alongside the B9135 is the best option.

17. Following appraisal work by officers of the current Transport Scotland proposals it is our view that the NMU routes proposed between north Aviemore to the junction to the north of Carrbridge:
- a) Do not meet the A9 Scheme objectives (see para 4 above).
 - b) Are not in line with the national policy framework in support of active travel and active lifestyles despite Aviemore and Carrbridge being a commutable distance apart and with populations that have expressed direct willingness to commute in this way. This section has the greatest potential to provide new functional NMU opportunities to the greatest numbers of residents and visitors within the National Park. Both settlements have relatively active populations and people willing to commute actively.
 - c) Will not promote the economic and tourism benefits of cycling and walking close to Aviemore, the largest settlement in the Park and a hub for all forms of tourism activity. Carrbridge is located only 10 miles to the north and has significant tourist attractions including Landmark.
 - d) Is markedly different from the section between Kingussie to Aviemore where a purpose-built segregated carriageway has already been partially built and will be completed between the two settlements. This Kingussie to Aviemore section is also mentioned in the NMU Access Strategy but the rationale for why the segregated tarmac carriageway stops at Aviemore, travelling north, is not at all clear other than that a Ministerial commitment was made at an earlier stage of the process to provide a segregated cycle route.
18. To the north of the Carrbridge junction the proposals for NMUs are reasonable, making use of the old A9 which is a quiet tarmac road. Therefore the critical gap is the section from Aviemore to just north of Carrbridge.

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Annex I: Design development stages for the A9

Stage 1 (Strategic Assessment)

Stage 2 (Route Options Assessment)

Stage 3 (Detailed Design and Assessment)

- Detailed assessment and definition of the preferred dualling option
- An Environmental Statement is prepared and the land required for the dualling is also identified

Statutory Process (Publication of Environmental Statement and Orders)

- The draft Compulsory Purchase Order (defining the extent of the proposed land required to deliver the scheme), the draft Roads Orders (defining the line of the proposed infrastructure) and the Environmental Statement (ES) are published
- Any statutory objections, which are lodged during the defined period but remain unresolved, are then considered at a Public Local Inquiry (PLI)
- If the objections are upheld following the PLI, the scheme may have to be amended and taken through the statutory process again
- If the objections are resolved or dismissed, then the draft orders are finalised and made
- Following the publication of the made orders, there is a legal challenge period. After this point the legal permissions have been obtained and the preferred option can proceed with the necessary acquisition of land