

Annex D – Extracts from briefing document to the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity from Transport Scotland for meeting with Lewis Macdonald MSP on 13 March 2019

Summary

The meeting follows the recent Initial Route Option Public Exhibition events held for the A96 Dualling East of Huntly to Aberdeen scheme in Inverurie, Huntly and Blackburn between 8th and 11th October 2018. Significant feedback has been received from members of the public as a result of public exhibition events. This feedback includes comments on why Transport Scotland have chosen not to pursue the option of dualling the existing A96 at Inverurie, instead of the offline options being considered.

It is understood that Lewis Macdonald MSP wishes to discuss the scheme and the concerns being raised at a short meeting.

An opportunity for you to explain the Scottish Government's commitment to dualling the A96 by 2030 along with an opportunity for you to reassure Lewis Macdonald MSP that you are aware of the concerns raised following the exhibitions held in October 2018 and that online dualling of the A96 at Inverurie has been considered and ultimately discounted. It will also provide an opportunity to explain that all feedback received will be taken into account as we further develop and assess the options under consideration and look to identify a preferred option later this year.

Meaningful engagement with communities and other stakeholders forms a key part of our work to ensure that communities, businesses and individuals affected by the work are kept fully informed and their vital feedback taken into account.

The A96 Dualling is a significant undertaking which requires careful in-depth planning and design. Following the appointment of a Consultant in July 2017 route options assessment work is now well underway on the section of the A96 between East of Huntly to Aberdeen. The initial options under consideration for this section of the A96 Dualling were presented to the public at events held in Inverurie, Huntly and Blackburn between 8-11 October. 2,141 people attended the exhibitions over the 4 days.

Re-use of the existing route between East of Huntly and Aberdeen has been investigated thoroughly as part of the early assessment work undertaken. The outcomes of this work concluded that the existing single carriageway trunk road alignment, in combination with roadside properties and the density of junctions and accesses, constrains an online upgrade of the existing route through a number of sections, including the section at Inverurie. On this basis, the assessment determined that it would be more suitable to develop the new dual carriageway offline from the existing trunk road at Inverurie, with the existing A96 retained for use as part of the local road network.

The feedback received following the exhibitions will be taken into account as we further develop and assess the options under consideration and look to identify a preferred option later this year

Annex A

Meaningful engagement with communities forms a key part of our work as we develop our plans. The work we are progressing includes a rolling programme of regular engagement with local communities (e.g. the Initial Route Options Exhibitions held in October 2018 and the subsequent Community Council Forum meetings held in early November 2018) and other stakeholders to ensure that communities, businesses and individuals affected by the work are kept fully informed and their vital feedback taken into account.

We are aware of the concerns expressed by rural communities and landowners regarding the development of proposals for the A96 Dualling East of Huntly to Aberdeen scheme (Eastern Section) along with the concerns of others in relation to our ambitious programme to dual the A96.

The re-use/widening of the existing A96 has been investigated thoroughly as part of the early Stage 2 assessment work. The outcome of this work concluded that the existing A96 single carriageway is constrained at numerous locations by the standard of the existing road geometry, roadside properties, listed buildings and grounds, Aberdeen to Inverness railway line and by a high density of existing junctions and accesses. This limited the opportunity for an online upgrade of the existing route through a number of sections, including the section at Inverurie. The Stage 2 assessment has determined that it is more appropriate to develop the new dual carriageway offline from the existing road, either to the side or completely remote, with the existing A96 retained for use as part of the local road network. This also helps to meet one of the Scheme Objectives to reduce the potential conflicts between local and strategic traffic journeys.

Further public consultation will be held as part of our ongoing engagement to give the local community and road users the chance to comment on our developing plans for the route before we announce the preferred option later this year.

Background

Transport Scotland carries out a rigorous assessment process to establish the preferred line for a Trunk Road improvement, which is based on standards set by the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (DMRB) and requires appraisal from an environmental, engineering, traffic and economic perspective.

The early strategic assessment work (DMRB Stage 1 Assessment) carried out for the A96 Dualling Inverness to Aberdeen Programme identified broadly defined Improvement Strategies which met the A96 Programme Objectives to be further developed at the route options assessment stage (DMRB Stage 2 Assessment). The outcome of the strategic assessment along with the broadly defined Improvement Strategies were presented at a series of public exhibitions in May 2015, with strategies B, C and D relevant for the East of Huntly to Aberdeen Section. Improvement Strategy B is dualling within the existing road corridor with local bypasses of towns, such as Inverurie and Improvement Strategies C and D are off-line improvements to the south and north of the existing A96.

Transport Scotland is now taking forward route options assessment work (DMRB Stage 2 Assessment) with a view to identifying a preferred option later this year.

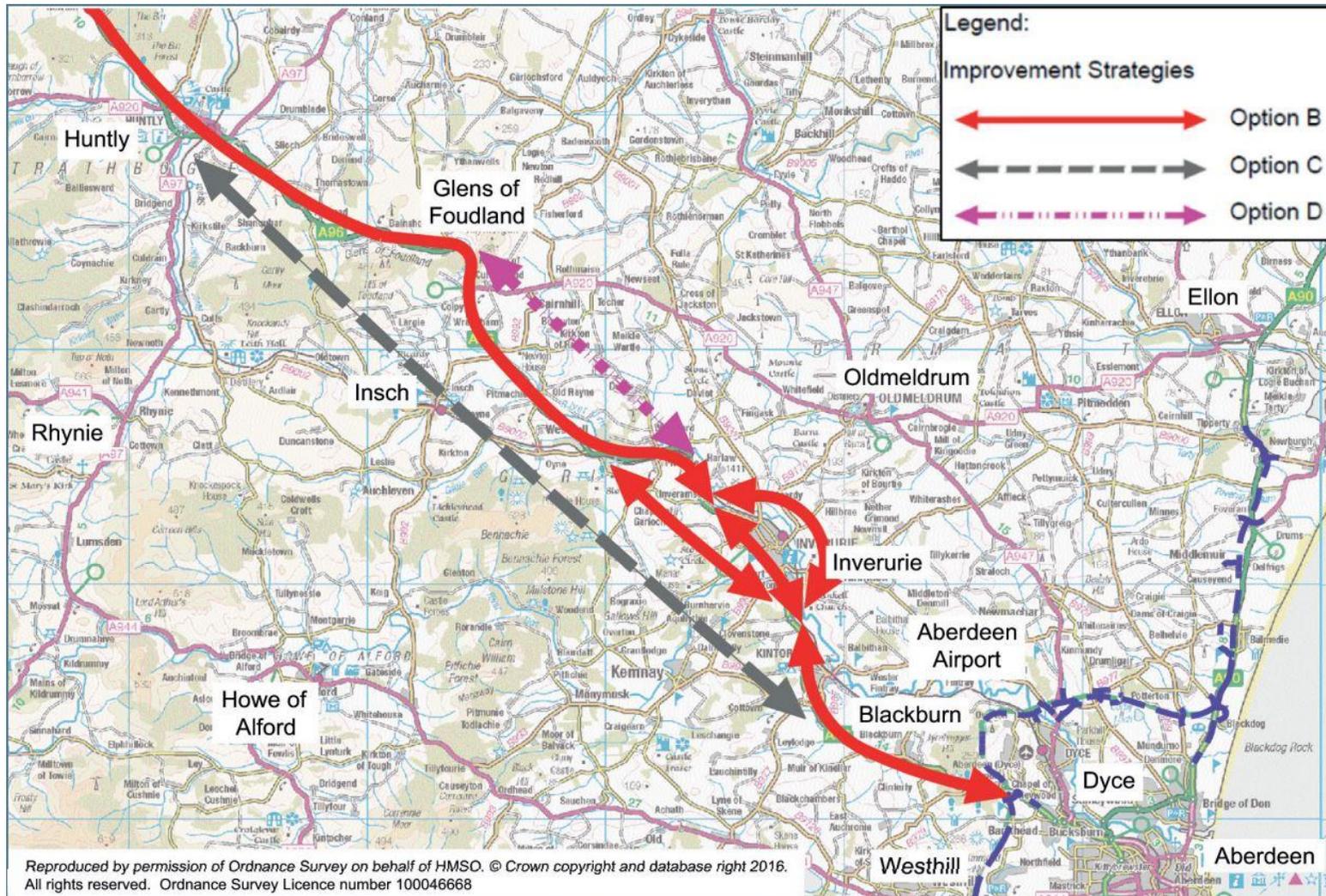
The work Transport Scotland is progressing on the Dualling programme also includes a rolling programme of regular engagement with local communities and other stakeholders to ensure businesses and individuals affected by the work over the next decade and beyond are kept fully informed. More importantly, this will ensure important feedback is taken into account as the project is designed, procured and constructed. To date more than 15,000 people have visited the public engagement events.

Annex C contains the broadly defined improvement strategies as presented to the public in May 2015 with the route options under consideration presented to the public in October 2018 shown in Annex D.

Some landowners have written to the Cabinet Secretary seeking clarification on whether there is a “ministerial directive” to discount any potential routes that would require the demolition of homes. The Cabinet Secretary and Transport Scotland have reassured those who have queried this that no such directive is in place. As with all trunk road improvement schemes a key consideration in the design and assessment of route options is however to avoid or minimise property demolition as far as possible.

Re-use of the existing route between East of Huntly and Aberdeen for example has been investigated thoroughly as part of the early assessment work undertaken. The outcomes of this work concluded that the existing single carriageway trunk road alignment, in combination with roadside properties and the density of junctions and accesses, constrains an online upgrade of the existing route through a number of sections, including the section at Inverurie. On this basis, the assessment determined that it would be more suitable to develop the new dual carriageway offline from the existing trunk road at Inverurie, with the existing A96 retained for use as part of the local road network.

A96 Dualling Inverness to Aberdeen DMRB Stage 1 assessment published in May 2015



Initial route options for A96 Dualling East of Huntly to Aberdeen presented at exhibitions between 8-11 October

