

**Annex J – Extracts from note to the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity from Transport Scotland regarding Parliamentary Questions S5O-03282 – 20 May 2019**

All answers to written Parliamentary Questions are available on the Parliament's website, the search facility for which can be found at:- <http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/28877.aspx>

Lewis Macdonald MSP is a Labour list member for the North East of Scotland. Mr Macdonald has shown repeated interest in the route options for the A96 Dualling East of Huntly to Aberdeen scheme particularly around Inverurie. The member opposes the options currently under consideration to the north of Inverurie on the basis it will result in the acquisition of agricultural land and would prefer an online option through Inverurie be pursued.

On 12 March 2019 the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity, Michael Matheson MSP, met with Lewis Macdonald MSP to discuss the A96 Dualling East of Huntly to Aberdeen scheme and why the option of dualling the existing A96 at Inverurie was not being taken forward.

Following the meeting a letter was issued to Mr Macdonald by the Cabinet Secretary on 1 April 2019, covering the points of the meeting and confirming that early assessment work established it would be more suitable to develop a new dual carriageway remote from the existing Trunk Road at Inverurie, with the existing A96 being retained for use as part of the local road network.

On the 4 April 2019, Lewis Macdonald MSP asked a further supplementary question on the back of Gillian Martin MSP's oral question on what impact the AWPR is having on traffic flow and congestion on other roads in the north east - **S5O-03108**:

**Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab):** The cabinet secretary will know that Transport Scotland's decision last year to rule out dualling the A96 at Inverurie was based on data from 2017. Given what he just said about the need to use up-to-date data, will he instruct Transport Scotland to revisit that decision on the basis of new data following completion of the AWPR?

**Michael Matheson:** From the meeting that I had with Lewis Macdonald and the subsequent letter that I wrote to him, he is well aware of the reasons for Transport Scotland taking the options for routes that it has set down. My letter to him sets out in detail the approach that Transport Scotland has taken, and it explains the data that was used to inform the approach. Lewis Macdonald will be aware that there are specific constraint issues about the online upgrading option. Undertaking a project of the nature of dualling the A96 results in significant disruption and challenges. Those issues have been given due consideration, and

we will continue to consult on that, as we go forward with the routes that have been proposed by Transport Scotland.

On 5 April 2019 Lewis Macdonald MSP subsequently wrote to the Cabinet Secretary, citing the meeting of 12 March 2019 and his supplementary question of 5 April 2019. A response was issued on 29 April alongside a technical note explaining the rationale behind deselecting the online option through Inverurie.

Route options deselected at this stage of the assessment process included those that pass through the Bennachie Special Landscape Area, and those using the existing A96 single carriageway corridor through Inverurie which identified that from an engineering and environmental perspective that an online dualling option would have significant/ adverse effects on people and communities due to the proximity of properties, businesses and community facilities in that area.

Traffic survey data also highlighted that a significant volume of A96 traffic is generated from areas to the north of Inverurie and routes through the town to access the A96 at Blackhall and Port Elphinstone roundabouts. To maintain adequate access to and from Inverurie, these junctions would require to be replaced by grade separated junctions. However, due to the existing development constraints at Blackhall Roundabout a grade separated junction along with associated slip roads at the current location would have further major impacts on surrounding properties.

It was also identified that construction of this alignment on the existing A96 would be challenging, and may also require lengthy diversions of the trunk road traffic through the town with the associated impacts this will have on the community.

Other construction issues also included the Upperboat Bridge where the replacement of this structure would require the closure of St. James's Place which could not occur at the same time as Blackhall Road was closed.

As confirmed at the meeting with Mr Macdonald MSP on 12 March 2019 and in the Cabinet Secretary's subsequent letter of 1 April 2019, Transport Scotland will hold further public consultations in Spring 2019 (now confirmed as 28 – 31 May) to provide an update on the route option design and assessment work. This will include providing the reasons for deselecting the online option at Inverurie. Transport

Scotland has also approached the A96 Action Group to arrange a meeting to discuss their concerns with a meeting likely to be held to coincide with the exhibitions.

The A96 Dualling East of Huntly to Aberdeen: Online at Inverurie – Dualling Feasibility and Appraisal report has already been issued to a member of the public following a Freedom of Information request and Transport Scotland has now made it available to view on the project web page.

A series of drop-in sessions will take place later this month (28 – 31 May) in Inverurie, Blackburn and Huntly to give members of the public an update on progress of the DMRB Stage 2 design process. The drop-in sessions have been advertised online as well as via adverts in local and national newspapers and posters issued to 225 locations covered by the scheme. In addition, approximately 3,500 invitation letters have been issued to interested parties and stakeholders. The material shown at the drop-in sessions will be available on the Transport Scotland website from 28 May at noon.

The drop-in sessions provide an opportunity for the local communities to see and comment on the options being taken forward for further assessment (including those not being taken forward) and discuss them directly with the Transport Scotland project team and their consultants who are designing the route.

As is the case for all our major road projects, these public engagement events provide the best opportunity for everyone with an interest an equal opportunity to view our plans and discuss them directly with the project team.

The vital feedback received from these engagement events will be taken into account during the on-going option assessment process as we look to identify a preferred option later this year.