

**Annex A – Extracts from note to the Cabinet Secretary for Transport,  
Infrastructure and Connectivity from Transport Scotland following request for  
meeting from Lewis Macdonald MSP – 24 January 2019**

Lewis Macdonald MSP has requested a meeting to discuss the A96 Dualling East of Huntly to Aberdeen Scheme. In particular he is requesting that the online dualling option through Inverurie is reinstated for further consideration. His letter makes reference to many of his constituents also calling for this to happen. Furthermore, he suggests that the public were not aware that potential offline dualling options for dualling the A96 were under consideration.

Meeting Mr Macdonald would provide an opportunity for the Cabinet Secretary to reinforce the Scottish Government's commitment to dual the A96 and outline the rigorous assessment process that Transport Scotland follows 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).

The meeting would also provide an opportunity to reassure Mr Macdonald that Transport Scotland hasn't changed its approach to dualling the A96 as offline options for dualling have been under consideration for a number of years. In addition, the reasons for dropping the online dualling option through Inverurie can be explained.

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, which commenced in 2013, with local communities 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.

Transport Scotland has completed preliminary engineering (DMRB Stage 1) and strategic environmental assessment and presented the outcome of this to the public in May 2015. This was the first step in developing a robust plan to improve connectivity between Inverness and Aberdeen.

Transport Scotland is now taking forward route options assessment work on the section of the A96 between East of Huntly and Aberdeen.

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 initial route options under consideration for the section of the A96 between east of Huntly and Aberdeen were presented to the public at a series of exhibitions in October 2018.

**Annex B – 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**

The Cabinet Secretary has agreed to meet with Lewis Macdonald MSP on 13 March at 16:00 in Parliament.

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 8<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> 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.

The Scottish Government has given a commitment to completing the dualling of the A96 between Inverness and Aberdeen by 2030.

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**

Following the appointment of a Consultant in July 2017 route options assessment work (DMRB Stage 2 Assessment) is well underway on the section of the A96 between East of Huntly to Aberdeen. It is expected that the route options assessment process will take approximately 2 years to complete with a preferred option expected to be announced later this year.

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.

A series of 'Meet the Team' public engagement events were held in November 2017 to recap the DMRB stage 1 (strategic) assessment outcomes and explain the process that will be followed to progress the design and assessment of the scheme. The initial route options being considered for the scheme were presented at a series of public exhibition events held in Inverurie, Huntly and Blackburn between 8th and 11th October 2018 for vital feedback and comment.

Two campaigns established to provide comment on this scheme include The Save Bennachie Alliance and A96 Action Group, their feedback is vital to this process and will be considered in full along with the concerns expressed by other groups that we might receive. Mr Macdonald MSP attended The Save Bennachie Alliance meeting with then Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Jobs and Fair Work on 11th January 2018.

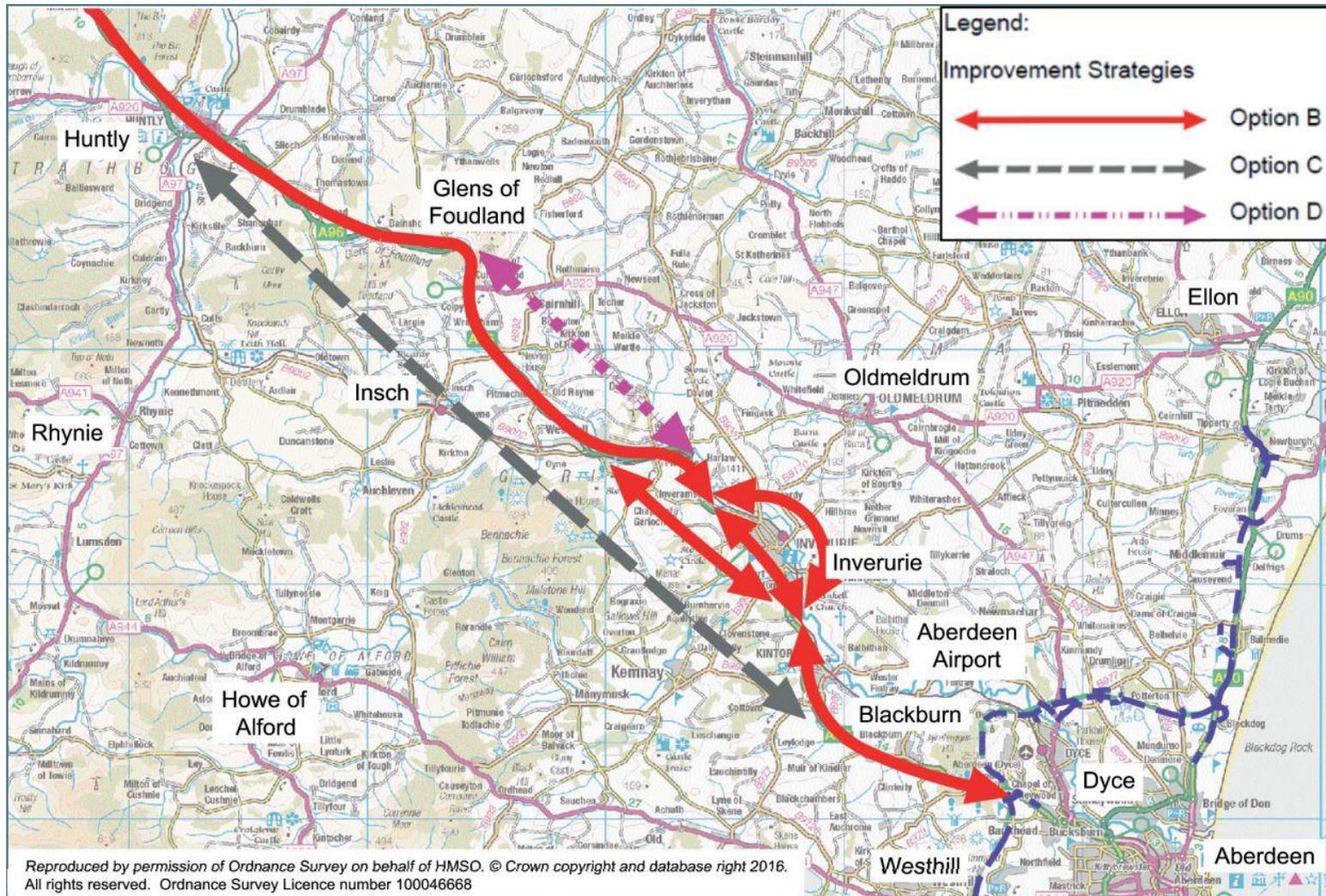
Annex C contains the broadly defined improvement strategies as presented to the public in May 2015 with the route options under consideration presented to the public in October 2018 shown in Annex D.

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 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.

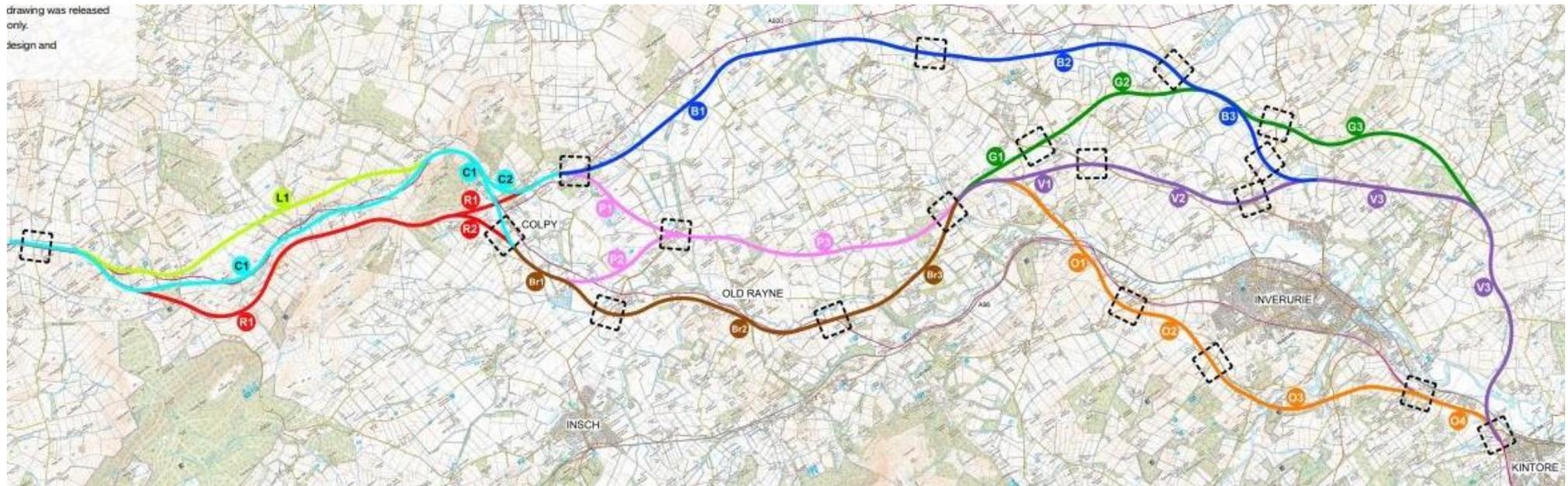
Re-use of the existing route between East of Huntly and Aberdeen for example has been investigated thoroughly as part of the early assessment work undertaken. The outcomes of this work concluded that the existing single carriageway trunk road alignment, in combination with roadside properties and the 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



**Annex C – Minute to Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity regarding deselection of online route option through Inverurie – 29 March 2019**

From: [REDACTED]  
Transport Scotland  
29 March 2019

Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity

## **A96 DUALLING EAST OF HUNTLY TO ABERDEEN DESELECTION OF ONLINE ROUTE OPTION THROUGH INVERURIE**

### **Purpose**

1. Following the Cabinet Secretary's meeting with Lewis Macdonald MSP, to provide briefing on the assessment and justification for deselecting online dualling of the A96 at Inverurie along with a draft letter for issue to Mr Macdonald.

### **Priority**

2. Routine.

### **Background**

3. The Cabinet Secretary met with Lewis Macdonald MSP on 12 March 2019 to discuss the A96 Dualling East of Huntly to Aberdeen scheme. The meeting followed the Initial Route Option Public Exhibition events held for the scheme in October 2018. Some of the feedback received following the exhibitions includes comments on why Transport Scotland has chosen not to pursue the option of dualling the existing A96 at Inverurie, instead of the offline options being considered.

4. Transport Scotland completed the first phase of design (Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (DMRB) Stage 1 strategic assessment) for the dualling of the A96 between east of Nairn and Aberdeen in 2015, with the outcome presented at a series of exhibitions along the A96 in May 2015.

5. In July 2017 AmeyArup was appointed to carry out route options design and assessment work (DMRB Stage 2 assessment) for the East of Huntly to Aberdeen scheme (A96 Dualling Eastern Section), drawing upon the DMRB Stage 1 assessment outcomes shown in **Annex A**. The scheme measures approximately 42 km (26 miles) from the existing A96 east of Huntly to the Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route (AWPR). The main settlements within the scheme extents are Inch, Inverurie, Kintore and Blackburn.

6. The DMRB Stage 1 strategic assessment highlighted that the existing A96 Inverurie Bypass is constrained on both sides of the road by residential properties, which may require geotechnical solutions to minimise impacts on properties and accommodate a dual carriageway between the existing road boundaries. It was acknowledged during the assessment that this would require careful consideration of traffic management during construction. In addition, the available cross section under the Upperboat Overbridge on Inverurie Bypass is insufficient to accommodate a rural dual carriageway cross section. The strategic assessment work published in 2015

concluded that both issues warrant further investigation as part of the route options assessment process (DMRB Stage 2 Assessment).

## **DMRB Stage 2 - Initial Options Assessment**

7. To facilitate the development of route options, key scheme study area constraints and route corridors generally 2km wide were initially established. Within these corridors, route options were designed with the better performing options carried forward for further assessment.

8. A total of 80 routes within corridors were appraised at a design First Fix, with 52 viable end to end route options identified for the East of Huntly to Aberdeen scheme. The route options considered as part of the initial assessment process are shown in **Annex B**.

9. 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.

10. Only the better performing options that have the potential to become the preferred option, were recommended for more detailed DMRB Stage 2 assessment. These route options are shown in **Annex C**.

11. Transport Scotland's A96 Dualling Programme Board reviewed the output from the initial route options assessment in accordance with internal governance procedures and were content with the route options to be taken forward for further assessment.

## **Assessment of Online Option at Inverurie**

12. An online improvement of the existing A96 from Inveramsay to Port Elphinstone through Inverurie was considered during the initial First Fix Alignment Assessment work in early 2018. The assessment followed the methodology adopted for all alignment assessments and included an assessment of Engineering, Environment and Traffic/Transportation.

13. The main Engineering challenge associated with online dualling at Inverurie is the existing development and property constraints within Inverurie. Immediately east of the existing A96 Blackhall Roundabout residential property is adjacent to the existing A96 boundary fence, giving an available width between fence lines of approximately 21m. The minimum required cross section for a dual carriageway is 26.1m, resulting in major adverse impact on the properties adjacent to the existing A96. A significant structure would be required to cross the River Don as well as replacement of the Upperboat Bridge which crosses over the A96 to the north of the River Don.

14. From an Environmental perspective an online option has significant effects on people and communities due to the proximity to properties, businesses and community facilities. The option has a major adverse impact upon properties bordering the existing A96. The online option would widen the existing carriageway through Inverurie and is expected to have significant visual impacts on many receptors within proximity to the existing A96. The option is also considered to have major adverse impacts on noise and

air quality due to the proximity of the widened road to many receptors. Land allocated in the Local Development Plan would adversely be affected where the option passes through the settlements of Inverurie and Port Elphinstone and the proposed Crichton development.

15. Traffic survey data highlights 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. This traffic joins the A96 at Blackhall and Port Elphinstone roundabouts and generates peak period congestion and delay. 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 at the current location would have further major impacts on surrounding properties.

16. In April 2018 additional work was undertaken to determine the feasibility of progressing an online improvement of the existing A96 through Inverurie prior to the design Second Fix Alignment development.

### **Online at Inverurie – Dualling Feasibility and Appraisal**

17. Further work was carried out to confirm the feasibility or otherwise of dualling the existing A96 through Inverurie, including assessing the impact of a new grade separated junction at Blackhall Roundabout. The dualling of this route impacts on several areas between Inveramsay and Port Elphinstone, which includes the potential loss of mature landscaping and the potential introduction of retaining structures. There is however a pinch point east of the existing A96 Blackhall Roundabout at Inverurie where housing developments have been built close to the trunk road boundary on both sides of the trunk road. Also, in this vicinity the grade separation of the Blackhall Roundabout is necessary to accommodate the high level of traffic joining the A96 at this location. An added complication in this area is a road underpass providing access to the golf club and the new housing on the south side of the existing A96 and a pedestrian/cycle underpass provided to the west of Blackhall Roundabout.

18. The existing width between trunk road fence lines at the pinch point east of Blackhall Roundabout is 21m, with an access road to new housing (Davah Wood) immediately to the south of this and the rear gardens of older properties (Aquorthies Circle) to the north. The required cross section to accommodate a new dual carriageway without earthworks is 26.1m however with retaining structures is likely to increase to approximately 30m. Even if a full grade separated junction was not provided at Blackhall Roundabout the A96 would need to go over the side roads at Blackhall to maintain local access. The result of raising the existing A96 introduces varying height retaining walls and where the section is taken these will be over 5m high on the south side and over 9m high on the north side. Depending on which side the new dual carriageway is widened this will result in the demolition of at least nine properties with others being adversely affected by the visual intrusion of the retaining walls. Refer to **Annex D**.

19. However, as the traffic assessment recommends, the introduction of slip roads is required for the grade separated junction at Blackhall Roundabout. This would increase the required road width to 51.1m with the A96 dual carriageway raised up to cross over the side roads at Blackhall and the slip roads remaining at the level of the

existing trunk road. This introduces four retaining walls across the proposed section increasing the overall width to approximately 55m. These will vary in height from 0-8m for the inner retaining walls supporting the A96 dual carriageway with smaller retaining walls at the back of the slip roads. In this situation the new dual carriageway would be best centred on the existing A96 to minimise impacts on properties, however this option will require the demolition of at least 19 residential properties to both sides of the existing A96 with the slip road retaining walls encroaching into the titles of at least a further 22 residential properties. There is also potential for impacts on both the Police Scotland offices and Morrisons Supermarket at Inverurie. Refer to **Annex E**.

20. Construction of this alignment on the existing A96 would be very difficult to achieve without potential diversion routes through Inverurie for long periods of time with the associated impact this would have on the town. Without space to divert traffic past the construction works the cross section shown in Annex D would require the closure of the existing Inverurie Bypass for a considerable period to allow the raising of the route over the Blackhall Roundabout. There would also be associated impacts on local traffic using the Blackhall Roundabout to cross the existing A96 during this period. The cross section shown in Annex E is wider and does give some opportunity to construct slip roads first and then divert traffic on to these before raising the dual carriageway over the Blackhall Roundabout. Other construction issues will be at the Upperboat Bridge where the replacement of this structure will require the closure of St. James's Place which cannot occur at the same time as Blackhall Road is closed.

21. For all the above reasons it was considered that there were better performing alignments with less impact to the north and south of Inverurie rather than dualling online and therefore this route was deselected from further consideration. This conclusion was approved by the A96 Programme Board in August 2018.

## **Conclusion**

22. **The Cabinet Secretary is invited to:**

- **Note the outcome of the assessment work undertaken for an online improvement of the existing A96 through Inverurie which resulted in the deselection of this route.**
- **Issue the attached draft letter to Mr Lewis Macdonald MSP which explains the reasons for not progressing with an online option at Inverurie.**

██████████  
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Major Projects  
Planning & Design – Design Team 3  
Ext ██████████

29 March 2019

Copy List:	For Action	For Comments	For Information		
			Portfolio Interest	Constit Interest	General Awareness

DG Economy					X
Chief Executive Transport Scotland					X
Transport Scotland Secretariat					X
Transport Scotland Directors					X
[REDACTED]					X
[REDACTED]					X
[REDACTED]					X
[REDACTED]					X
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Communication Economy					X
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Press Transport Scotland					X
Transport Scotland Media					X
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