

Annex E – Extracts from note to the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity from Transport Scotland for parliamentary question S5W-22460 – 17 April 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>

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 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 McDonald asked a further supplementary question on the back of Gilliam Martin MSP's oral question on what impact the AWPR is having on traffic flow and congestion on other roads in the north east - **S50-03108**:

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.

Background

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.

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). 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.

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 very difficult to achieve without potential diversion routes through Inverurie for long periods of time during the construction period.

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.

Online at Inverurie – Dualling Feasibility and Appraisal

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 including assessing the impact of a new grade separated junction at Blackhall Roundabout.

It concluded that an online dual carriageway upgrade of the A96 through Inverurie should be de-selected and not considered further as part of the route options assessment process (DMRB Stage 2 Assessment). This conclusion was approved by the A96 Programme Board in August 2018.

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 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 will also offer to meet with the A96 Action Group who have suggested that the on-line option at Inverurie is put back on the table.

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 A96 Action Group following a Freedom of Information request and Transport Scotland has now made it available to view on the A96 Dualling pages of its website.

Annex F – Minute to the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity from Transport Scotland regarding the Further Development and Assessment of Route Options and Public Exhibitions – 02 May 2019

From: [REDACTED]
Transport Scotland
02 May 2019

Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity

**A96 DUALLING EAST OF HUNTLY TO ABERDEEN
FURTHER DEVELOPMENT AND ASSESSMENT OF ROUTE OPTIONS AND
PUBLIC EXHIBITIONS**

Purpose

1. To seek agreement from the Cabinet Secretary to present the further development and assessment of route options for the A96 Dualling East of Huntly to Aberdeen scheme to the public at a series of public exhibitions from 28 May to 31 May 2019 to obtain vital feedback.

Priority

2. Routine. An early response would assist with event planning, as we intend to hold Public Exhibitions in Inverurie, Blackburn and Huntly from 28 May to 31 May 2018, with press adverts due to be published week commencing 13 May 2018.

Background

3. In July 2017 AmeyArup were appointed to carry out route options design and assessment work (Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (DMRB) Stage 2 assessment) for the East of Huntly to Aberdeen scheme (A96 Dualling Eastern Section). 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.

4. In October 2018 a series of public consultation events were held in Inverurie, Huntly and Blackburn. These exhibitions gave the public an opportunity to see the short listed route options and to be able to provide vital feedback on these options. Over 2,000 members of the public attended the three venues and we received approximately 1,500 separate pieces of feedback, a response to which will be issued in advance of the proposed public exhibitions.

5. The A96 Dualling Programme has attracted attention from a range of local stakeholder groups. Following the October 2018 exhibitions a new prominent “A96 Action Group” opposed to the northern routes has been formed. This is in addition to the Save Bennachie Alliance group which campaigned against routes in the vicinity of Bennachie (south of Inverurie). It is understood that the new group may have political support for its message.

6. Feedback on the A96 Dualling informs the design and assessment process. Within the feedback received following the October 2018 exhibitions there is support for an online dualling option of the existing A96 through Inverurie. The re-use/widening of the existing A96 has been investigated thoroughly as part of the early Stage 2 assessment work which determined that it is more appropriate to develop the new dual

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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. In acknowledgement of the feedback received, and following the meeting between the Cabinet Secretary and Lewis Macdonald MSP on 12 March 2019, the proposed public exhibitions will provide further detail on why the online dualling option of the existing A96 through Inverurie is not appropriate.

Further Development and Assessment of Route Options

7. Design Development work has continued since the October 2018 exhibitions, taking into account where possible feedback received.

8. Four pairing assessments were undertaken to deselect routes for taking through full DMRB Stage 2 Assessment. Engineering, environmental and transport appraisals were undertaken to verify the better performing route sections to be taken forward from each pairing assessment.

9. The pairing assessments concluded that a number of routes should be deselected. This leaves eight better performing route options. Further detail can be provided on these routes should the Cabinet Secretary request it.

10. Transport Scotland's A96 Dualling Programme Board have reviewed the output from the route options design and assessment update in accordance with internal governance procedures and are content with the route options to be taken forward for further assessment, and that they be presented to the public for feedback as part of our on-going rolling programme of engagement with local communities.

Public Exhibitions

11. It is proposed that Public Exhibitions, seeking vital feedback from the public on the route options being taken forward for further assessment, be held on the following dates (venue availability has dictated these dates):

- Tuesday 28 May – Wyness Hall, Inverurie, AB51 3QB
- Wednesday 29 May – Wyness Hall, Inverurie, AB51 3QB
- Thursday 30 May – Kinellar Community Hall, Blackburn, AB21 0JQ
- Friday 31 May – Gordon Arms Hotel, Huntly, AB54 8AF

12. The Public Exhibitions will be held from 12noon to 7pm each day. Press adverts advertising the exhibitions are due to be published week commencing 13 May 2019.

13. It is intended that Public Exhibition material will be made available on Transport Scotland's website, and members of the public and other stakeholders will have six and a half weeks from the date of the first exhibition to provide comment on the options under consideration.

Communications handling

14. Given recent media interest in this scheme, following comments from local MSP's and some members of the public living in proximity to the route options, there is likely to be a lot of interest in these update exhibitions. There will also be interest from key

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stakeholders such as Aberdeenshire Council, and groups including the A96 Action Group.

15. The deselection of a number of route options will be welcomed by those opposed to these routes. The A96 Action Group are opposed to all routes to the north and with the deselection of the “Green” and “Blue” routes this may reduce some of their local support. However the “Violet” route to the north of Inverurie remains and therefore continued challenge against the scheme is to be expected. A meeting is proposed with the Action Group to coincide with the public exhibitions.

16. The re-use/widening of the existing A96 was deselected at an earlier stage of the design process however the feedback received following the October 2018 exhibitions shows continued support for an online dualling option of the existing A96 through Inverurie. The proposed public exhibitions will provide further detail on why the online dualling option of the existing A96 through Inverurie is not appropriate and may engender more negative local reaction to this decision. We have already developed and deployed suitable media lines to cover this issue. .

17. A news release will be prepared for issue at the same time as the first press advertisements on week commencing 13 May 2019 to encourage attendance at the exhibitions. A further news release will be drafted for issue on 28 May to coincide with the updated route options going on public display. Given the local sensitivities set out above, and the fact that the recent offer for the Cabinet Secretary to meet with the A96 Action Group was not accepted, we would advise against the Cabinet Secretary attending a media event in person.

Conclusion

18. The Cabinet Secretary is invited to:
- **Note the outcome of the further development and assessment of route options to be taken forward as part of the DMRB Stage 2 assessment.**
 - **Note that we intend to hold public exhibitions from 28 May to 31 May 2019 to present the further development and what route options are to be taken forward as part of the DMRB Stage 2 assessment.**
 - **Note the proposed communications handling.**

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

02 May 2019

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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
██████████ TS, Major Projects					X
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Communication Economy					X
██████████ Special Adviser					X
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Press Transport Scotland					X
Transport Scotland Media					X
██████████ TS Major Projects Strategic Comms					X
██████████ TS Press Transport Scotland					X
██████████ TS Press Transport Scotland					X

Annex G – Email from the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity Private Office to Transport Scotland – 03 May 2019

[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED] on behalf of Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity
Sent: 03 May 2019 10:19
To: [REDACTED] Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity
Cc: [REDACTED] Chief Executive Transport Scotland; Communications Economy; DG Economy; [REDACTED] Press Transport Scotland; Transport Scotland Directors; Transport Scotland Media; Transport Scotland Secretariat; [REDACTED]
Subject: RE: Routine - A96 Dualling East of Huntly to Aberdeen - Further Development and Assessment of Route Options and Public Exhibitions
Categories: Save to ERDM, FOR ACTION

Hi [REDACTED]

Mr Matheson has noted.

Thanks,
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] | Private Office of the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity and Minister for Energy, Connectivity and the Islands
The Scottish Government | Web: www.gov.scot
Tel: [REDACTED] | Email: MinisterECL@gov.scot

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From [REDACTED]
Sent: 02 May 2019 16:50
To: Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity <CabSecTIC@gov.scot>
Cc: [REDACTED] Chief Executive Transport Scotland <ceo@transport.gov.scot>; Communications Economy <CommunicationsEconomy@gov.scot>; DG Economy <DGEconomy@gov.scot>; [REDACTED] Press Transport Scotland <media@transport.gov.scot>; Transport Scotland Directors <DLECONPTSD@transport.gov.scot>; Transport Scotland Media <DLECONPTSM@transport.gov.scot>; Transport Scotland Secretariat <TSS@transport.gov.scot>; [REDACTED]
Subject: Routine - A96 Dualling East of Huntly to Aberdeen - Further Development and Assessment of Route Options and Public Exhibitions

Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity,

ROUTINE

Please find attached a minute in respect of the A96 Dualling East of Huntly to Aberdeen scheme.

Kind Regards,


Project Manager
Major Projects
T: 
transport.gov.scot

Transport Scotland, Buchanan House, 58 Port Dundas Road, Glasgow, G4 0HF



Transport Scotland, the national transport agency
Còmhail Alba, buidheann nàiseanta na còmhail

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Annex H – Extracts from briefing document to the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity from Transport Scotland for the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee on 15 May 2019

Route option assessment work on the section between east of Huntly and Aberdeen is also well underway with a preferred option due to be identified later this year.

We continue to progress the route option assessment process for the A96 East of Huntly to Aberdeen scheme

- The options under consideration for the East of Huntly to Aberdeen scheme were presented to the public for vital feedback in October 2018.
- Transport Scotland has given detailed consideration to the feasibility of progressing an online improvement of the existing A96 through Inverurie.
- 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 A96 through a number of sections of the route, including the section at Inverurie.
- All environmental matters, including air quality and CO₂ emissions are considered as part of the current design and assessment work to identify a preferred option.
- The outcome of environmental assessment will be reported in the Route Options Assessment Report.
- The A96 Action Group who issued a press release on CO₂ emissions recently do not oppose the dualling of the A96 in principle only the route options being assessed to the north of Inverurie.
- Transport Scotland will hold further public consultations in Inverurie, Blackburn and Huntly from 28 May to 31 May to provide an update on the route option design and assessment work.
- The reasons for deselecting the online option at Inverurie will be explained during the public consultation events.
- A preferred option for the scheme is due to be identified later this year.

Annex I – Extract from note to the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity from Transport Scotland for parliamentary question S5W-22992 – 15 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>

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Annex J – Extract from note to the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity from Transport Scotland for parliamentary question S5O-03282 – 22 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.

A96 Dualling East of Huntly to Aberdeen Background

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.

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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.

Drop in sessions 28-31 May 2019

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.

Route option assessment work on the section between east of Huntly and Aberdeen is also well underway with a preferred option due to be identified later this year.

Annex K – Extract from note to the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity from Transport Scotland for parliamentary question S5W-23300 – 29 May 2019.

All answers to written Parliamentary Questions are available on the Parliament's website, the search facility for which can be found at:-
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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.

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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.

On the 22 May 2019 Lewis Macdonald MSP asked the Scottish Government on what grounds Transport Scotland has failed to reveal which further option or options it has abandoned for dualling the A96. **(S5O-03282)**

Michael Matheson: As is the case for all major road projects, it is important that we maintain transparency throughout the route selection process and that we provide everyone with an interest with an equal opportunity to view our plans and discuss

them directly with the project team. The member is fully aware that public engagement events are due to be held from 28 to 31 May, which will give local communities and road users the opportunity to see and comment on the options being taken forward for further assessment. To ensure that as many people as possible are aware of the events in advance, they have been widely advertised, with approximately 3,500 invites having been issued to everyone who has expressed an interest in our proposals, including the member.

Lewis Macdonald: The cabinet secretary is well aware of the environmental impact and cost of building a modern dual carriageway where no such road exists at the moment, and that most of the options that Transport Scotland has been considering involve a whole new route for the A96 between Huntly and Kintore. Given his prediction that dualling the A96 will cost the taxpayer four times as much as the Aberdeen western peripheral route cost, is it not time for Transport Scotland to look for an alternative approach that would minimise the environmental impact and command public support?

Michael Matheson: I do not know whether the member is tempting me to say that we should abandon the dualling of the A96; I am sure that that is not the case. The environmental impact assessments are a key part of the route assessment process that is being undertaken, and they will be taken into account before a final decision is made on the preferred route. With regard to the wider environmental agenda, as the First Minister has already indicated, we are looking at a range of policy areas across Government, including in my portfolio, in considering how we can address some of the wider issues that affect our climate change challenge. I assure the member that the environmental impact assessments are a key part of the decision making that will inform the decision on the preferred route option.

Route option assessment work on the section between east of Huntly and Aberdeen is also well underway with a preferred option due to be identified later this year.

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Annex L – Extract from note to the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity from Transport Scotland for parliamentary question S5W-23374 – 29 May 2019.

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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.

On the 22 May 2019 Lewis Macdonald MSP asked the Scottish Government on what grounds Transport Scotland has failed to reveal which further option or options it has abandoned for dualling the A96. **(S5O-03282)**

Michael Matheson: As is the case for all major road projects, it is important that we maintain transparency throughout the route selection process and that we provide everyone with an interest with an equal opportunity to view our plans and discuss

them directly with the project team. The member is fully aware that public engagement events are due to be held from 28 to 31 May, which will give local communities and road users the opportunity to see and comment on the options being taken forward for further assessment. To ensure that as many people as possible are aware of the events in advance, they have been widely advertised, with approximately 3,500 invites having been issued to everyone who has expressed an interest in our proposals, including the member.

Lewis Macdonald: The cabinet secretary is well aware of the environmental impact and cost of building a modern dual carriageway where no such road exists at the moment, and that most of the options that Transport Scotland has been considering involve a whole new route for the A96 between Huntly and Kintore. Given his prediction that dualling the A96 will cost the taxpayer four times as much as the Aberdeen western peripheral route cost, is it not time for Transport Scotland to look for an alternative approach that would minimise the environmental impact and command public support?

Michael Matheson: I do not know whether the member is tempting me to say that we should abandon the dualling of the A96; I am sure that that is not the case. The environmental impact assessments are a key part of the route assessment process that is being undertaken, and they will be taken into account before a final decision is made on the preferred route. With regard to the wider environmental agenda, as the First Minister has already indicated, we are looking at a range of policy areas across Government, including in my portfolio, in considering how we can address some of the wider issues that affect our climate change challenge. I assure the member that the environmental impact assessments are a key part of the decision making that will inform the decision on the preferred route option.

Route option assessment work on the section between east of Huntly and Aberdeen is also well underway with a preferred option due to be identified later this year.

**Annex M – Extracts from note to the Cabinet Secretary for Transport,
Infrastructure and Connectivity from Transport Scotland following request for
meeting from Peter Chapman MSP – 31 May 2019**

Peter Chapman MSP has requested a meeting to discuss the A96 Dualling Inverness to Aberdeen and in particular representations he has received from constituents in relation to the route options for the East of Huntly to Aberdeen section.

Mr Chapman made reference to his request for a meeting at the Rural Economy Committee (REC) meeting on 15 May 2019 with the Cabinet Secretary to discuss matters relating to route options for the A96 East of Huntly to Aberdeen scheme, specifically on the Inverurie Bypass section of the A96.

Meeting Mr Chapman 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 Chapman that Transport Scotland has not 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 was explained in response to a letter from Mr Chapman dated 21 January 2019 (MACCS 2019/0003153). The Cabinet Secretary also briefly explained to Mr Chapman the reasons behind the decision to deselect an on-line option at Inverurie at the REC Committee meeting on 15 May 2019.

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 outcome 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 route options being taken forward will be subject to further design development as part of the route options assessment process, and will take into account engineering aspects, environmental impacts, traffic operation and economic performance.

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. Public consultations held 28 – 31 May 2019 provided an opportunity to update local communities on the route option design and assessment work. This included providing the reasons for deselecting the online option at Inverurie. Feedback received will be taken into account during the assessment process.

Engaging with communities and other stakeholder has been on-going since 2013 and continues to be key part of our work with a consistent message that dualling the A96 may include offline route options, for example bypassing Inverurie.

Annex N – Extracts from note to the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity from Transport Scotland following request for meeting from Alexander Burnett MSP and Peter Chapman MSP – 7 August 2019

Alexander Burnett MSP and Peter Chapman MSP have requested a meeting with the Cabinet Secretary to discuss the A96 East of Huntly to Aberdeen project following receipt of representations from their constituents in the area who consider that the environmental impacts of the project have not been properly assessed. Mr Chapman has made previous representations regarding proposals to reconsider the decision to drop online dualling of the A96 at Inverurie as an option. The members have also indicated that they are keen to set up a public meeting with constituents with the Cabinet Secretary in attendance.

Meeting Mr Burnett and Mr Chapman 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). Environmental impacts are considered alongside engineering, traffic and economic requirements.

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 is currently 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. The options under consideration were further reduced following public consultation events held in May. All representations received following these events will be fully considered as we progress the design and assessment process.

Annex O – Extracts from briefing document to the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity from Transport Scotland for the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee on 11 September 2019

Peter Chapman MSP and Alexander MSP have written to the Cabinet Secretary requesting a meeting to discuss the East of Huntly to Aberdeen scheme (MACCS Case 2019/0021786). The Cabinet Secretary has agreed to meet with Mr Chapman and representatives from the A96 Action Group in Parliament on 18 September 2019.

Route option assessment work on the section between east of Huntly and Aberdeen is also well underway.

We continue to take on board feedback during the route option assessment process for the A96 East of Huntly to Aberdeen scheme (Eastern Section)

- Effective engagement with local communities is at the heart of what we do. We have been engaging right across the dualling programme since 2013.
- The options under consideration for the East of Huntly to Aberdeen scheme were presented to the public for vital feedback in October 2018 and again in May 2019.
- It is critical that we take time to consider all the feedback received from local communities as we take forward the option assessment process. We want to ensure that we are delivering a scheme for all our citizens.
- Approximately 800 consultation responses were received following the May engagement events.
- Transport Scotland is currently giving consideration to all feedback received, including that from the A96 Action Group whom Transport Scotland met with on 21 June.
- The level of engagement from local communities has been very high, reflecting the importance of this project across the region.
- Due to the level of feedback received Transport Scotland is now working towards identifying a preferred option in 2020 (rather than by the end of 2019).
- It is currently expected that Transport Scotland will be in a position to provide a further update on the assessment work later this year, including the feedback received from the A96 Action Group in relation to on-line dualling at Inverurie.
- My office have already written to Peter Chapman MSP indicating I am more than happy to meet to discuss the scheme and I am due to meet him along with representatives from the A96 Action Group in Parliament on 18 September.

Annex P – Extracts from briefing document to the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity from Transport Scotland for meeting with Peter Chapman MSP and the A96 Action Group on 17 September 2019

The Cabinet Secretary has agreed to meet Peter Chapman MSP along with representatives from the A96 Action Group on Wednesday 18th September 2019.

The meeting follows recent public engagement events held between 28-31 May 2019 which provided an opportunity to update local communities on the route option design and assessment work on the A96 Dualling East of Huntly to Aberdeen scheme. This included providing the reasons for deselecting the online dualling option through Inverurie. Feedback received following the engagement events will be taken into account during the assessment process as we look to identify a preferred option. Transport Scotland met with the A96 Action Group on 21 June to discuss their concerns.

The A96 Action Group is made up of local residents who oppose the proposed violet route option (north of Inverurie) for the A96 Dualling East of Huntly to Aberdeen scheme mainly due to environmental and monetary concerns. Their preference is for online dualling through Inverurie. Members of the A96 Action Group, including [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] have submitted numerous FoI requests and MACCS correspondence to Transport Scotland in relation to the 'online' route option through Inverurie despite this option being assessed and de-selected.

[REDACTED] has submitted 3 Fols which are due by 24 September. The Fols relate to the deselection of option Q, environmental studies on the and violet and orange route option and communication between the Cabinet Secretary and Transport Scotland on online dualling at Inverurie. Responses are in preparation and will be issued by 24 September.

The A96 Action Group have active social media accounts as well as their own website to which they continually raise their concerns on. Additionally, the group have issued a number of press releases against the decision to go offline.

It is understood that the A96 Action Group wish to raise their concerns directly with the Cabinet Secretary to reaffirm their campaign for 'online' dualling through Inverurie to be reconsidered.

Please be aware that Gillian Martin MSP previously asked to be kept informed of any proposed meeting between the Cabinet Secretary and the A96 Action Group. She has now been informed of the meeting and will be in attendance. Transport Scotland officials met with Gillian Martin MSP on 14 June to discuss the scheme and the concerns expressed by her constituents.

On Monday 16 September we became aware that the A96 Action Group issued a press release advising they intend to hold a MSPs and Media Briefing event on Friday 20 September to present evidence to show that the A96 can be dualled online at Inverurie. It is expected the evidence will also be presented at the meeting on 18 September. The press release can be found at **Annex B**.

The A96 Action Group have also asked to meet the First Minister. A response is in preparation.

An opportunity for you to explain the Scottish Government's commitment to dualling the A96 along with an opportunity for you to reassure the group that you are aware of the concerns raised by them and others following our engagement events and that online dualling of the existing A96 though Inverurie had been considered and discounted. It will also provide an opportunity to explain that all feedback received will be taken into account, including the concerns they raised with Transport Scotland at the meeting on 21 June, as we further develop and assess the options under consideration and look to identify a preferred option.

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

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. 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 and then again in May 2019. Transport Scotland also met with the A96 Action Group on 21 June to discuss their concerns.

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 May engagement events will be taken into account as we further develop and assess the options under consideration and look to identify a preferred option. It is critical we take time to consider all the feedback received during our design work from local communities right along the length of the A96. Due to the high level of feedback received (approximately 800 consultation response have been received following the May events) Transport Scotland is now working towards identifying a preferred option as soon as possible, but that may mean 2020.

Annex A

- Effective engagement with local communities is at the heart of what we do. We have been engaging right across the dualling programme since 2013. To date more than **16,500 people** have

visited the public engagement events across the dualling programme from Inverness to Aberdeen.

- We absolutely remain committed to delivering this ambitious programme as soon as possible however, it is critical we take time to consider all the feedback received during our design work from local communities right along the length of the A96.
- It is only right that we do this and if the high level of interest along the route results in extending the programme then this is something that we all have to accept. We have a duty to ensure our citizens have a say as we develop our plans.
- Approximately **800 consultation responses** were received following our May route options engagement events. Due to the high level of feedback received **Transport Scotland is now working towards identifying a preferred option as soon as possible, but that may mean 2020.**
- It is currently expected that Transport Scotland will be in a position to provide a further update on the assessment work later this year. This will include responding to the concerns raised by the A96 Action Group at the meeting with Transport Scotland on 21 June 2019.

Background

Transport Scotland is now taking forward route options assessment work (DMRB Stage 2 Assessment) on the East of Huntly to Aberdeen section with a view to identifying a preferred option.

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 16,500 people have visited the public engagement events.

The options under consideration for the East of Huntly to Aberdeen scheme were presented to the public for vital feedback in October 2018 and again in May 2019 with approximately **800 consultation**

responses received following the May engagement events. Transport Scotland also met with the A96 Action Group on 21 June 2019 to discuss their concerns.

The level of engagement from local communities has been very high, reflecting the importance of this project across the region.

Transport Scotland is currently giving consideration to all feedback received, including that from the A96 Action Group. Due to the level of feedback received **Transport Scotland is now working towards identifying a preferred option as soon as possible however, this may mean 2020.**

You confirmed at the REC committee on 11 September that Transport Scotland is giving consideration to all feedback which may result in the identification of a preferred option in 2020. Peter Chapman MSP said he was pleased to hear that all feedback was being considered.

It is currently expected that Transport Scotland will be in a position to provide a further update on the assessment work later this year, including the feedback received from the A96 Action Group in relation to on-line dualling at Inverurie.

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 A96 Action Group do not agree with the early sifting assessment, particularly the decision to deselect the on-line at Inverurie route option and are critical of the justification used. They have provided feedback on the potential of the existing route in contrast with their comments on the route option to the north of Inverurie being taken forward as part of the options assessment process. Their feedback also includes detail on how they believe an on-line option through Inverurie can be achieved, which includes retention of an at-grade roundabout at Blackhall (rather than a grade separated junction).

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.

The Scottish Government has a duty to ensure that Scotland is equipped with the appropriate infrastructure to meet the needs of all our population. The Scottish Government needs to balance the extensive changes required to meet our climate change targets with our duty to ensure that Scotland has high quality infrastructure to meet the needs of all our residents, businesses and visitors.

When complete this ambitious programme will bring many benefits to local communities, businesses and road users living, travelling and working along the route. These include reduced journey times (saving approximately 35mins between Inverness and Aberdeen), improved journey time reliability and, crucially, improve road safety for all users.

Annex B

We will meet with Michael Matheson, Transport Secretary, on Wednesday 18 September to present our cause against the proposed Violet route and for reinstating Online Dualling as a live option. We will present the outcomes from this, and our new research, at an MSPs and Media Briefing on Friday 20 September. We will reveal our experts’ drawings proving that Online Dualling along the route of Inverurie’s existing A96 is entirely and cost-effectively possible, without demolition or the creation of unnecessary greenhouse gases.

Timing

Presentation and Q&A session 10:30-11:30, followed by a site visit to see how the proposed Violet route and its additional working space would affect a local business, in this case Hogholm as a working livery yard. This will be highly visual, and a good opportunity for footage and interviews. The site visit will involve a short walk through fields, so please wear suitable footwear.

Venue

Indoor Riding School, Hogholm Farm Stables, Kintore, Inverurie AB51 0UQ. From Inverurie, satnav will take you past Hogholm to Greenlands, so be aware that, as you come downhill after Craigforthie, Hogholm is on your right. From Aberdeen, continue

past Greenlands towards Inverurie; Hogholm will be on your left after the sharp right and left bends.

Who are A96 Action

We are a collection of deeply concerned residents from the Garioch area, vehemently opposed to Transport Scotland's proposed Violet A96 route to the north of Inverurie. Our 400+ membership includes business owners, company directors, managers, academics and professionals. We have in-depth experience in the fields of research, analysis, engineering, cost accountancy, leading £XXXM projects, agriculture, medicine, telecommunications, oilfield and heavy engineering, management training, PR and marketing. Our policy advisors are specialists and university lecturers in environmental issues, climate change, traffic analysis and agriculture.

Whilst the A96 Action Group fully supports measures to improve road safety, address peak-time congestion in and around Inverurie, and reduce journey times, it opposes the possible selection of the Violet route on the grounds of:

- The complete disregard for the Climate Emergency and environmental protection.
- Dualling "on-line" is completely possible through Inverurie, Cat 7A compliant (urban profile) with minimal impact on garden ground only.
- The wholly unnecessary and exponential cost of dualling "off-line".
- Failure to follow due process (DMRB and contractual).
- The catastrophic effects on businesses/farms.
- The bisection and in some cases complete destruction of small rural communities.
- Increased flood risk at Port Elphinstone, Kintore and Inverurie, as a result of traversing the flood plain with a 600+m structure.

I hope you will be able to attend; please let me know if you would like any particular equipment or access to experts in the fields of environmental challenges, road routing and capabilities, policy and procedures, or interviews with local business owners, farmers or residents.

Annex Q – Extract from note to the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity from Transport Scotland for parliamentary questions S5W-25003/04/05/06/07 – 18 September 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 particularly to the north of Inverurie on the basis it will result in greater agricultural and environmental impact and believes an online option through Inverurie should be included in the current DMRB Stage 2 route option assessment.

Mr Macdonald lodged five questions on 29 August 2019 all relating to the A96 Dualling East of Huntly to Aberdeen scheme (PQs S5W-25003, S5W-25004, S5W-25005, S5W-25006 and S5W-25007).

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 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 5 April 2019 Lewis McDonald MSP subsequently wrote to the Cabinet Secretary, citing the meeting of 12 March 2019 and his supplementary question of 5 April 2019. This letter is on the MACCS system under reference 2019/0010831.

Mr Macdonald has also tabled a number of previous questions with regard to the A96 Dualling East of Huntly to Aberdeen scheme including:

Question S5O-03282: Lewis Macdonald, North East Scotland, Scottish Labour, Date Lodged: 15/05/2019

To ask the Scottish Government on what grounds Transport Scotland has failed to reveal which further option or options it has abandoned for dualling the A96.

Answered by Michael Matheson (22/05/2019):

As is the case for all our major road projects, it is important that we maintain transparency throughout the route selection process and that we provide everyone with an interest an equal opportunity to view our plans and discuss them directly with the project team.

The member is fully aware public engagement events are due to be held from 28 – 31 May which will give local communities and road users the opportunity to see and comment on the options being taken forward for further assessment.

To ensure that as many people as possible are aware of the events in advance they have been widely advertised with approximately 3,500 invites also issued

to everyone who has expressed an interest in our proposals, which includes the member.

SCHEME 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.

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.

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).

The options under consideration for the East of Huntly to Aberdeen scheme were presented to the public for vital feedback in October 2018 and again in May 2019.

Transport Scotland has given detailed consideration to the feasibility of progressing an online improvement of the existing A96 through Inverurie. 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 A96 through a number of sections of the route, including the section at Inverurie.

The work we are progressing on the A96 Dualling programme includes a rolling programme of regular engagement with local communities and other stakeholders and to date more than 16,500 people have visited the public engagement events held across the dualling programme.

As part of our engagement programme we also regularly consult with statutory bodies including Scottish Natural Heritage, Scottish Environment Protection Agency, Historic Environment Scotland, Aberdeenshire Council. We are also consulting with Scottish Forestry as part of the development and assessment of the scheme. As well as one-to-one meetings with stakeholders we have also set up an Environmental Steering Group which Scottish Natural Heritage, Scottish Environment Protection Agency and Historic Environment Scotland sit on.

Approximately 800 consultation responses were received following our May route options engagement events. It is critical that we take time to consider all the feedback received as we take forward the options assessment process. Due to the high level of feedback received Transport Scotland is now working towards identifying a preferred option as soon as possible, but that may mean 2020.

Annex R – Extract from note to the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity from Transport Scotland for parliamentary question S5W-25839 – 30 October 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>

Route options assessment work is also ongoing on the section between east of Huntly and Aberdeen.

**Annex S – Extract from note to the Cabinet Secretary for Transport,
Infrastructure and Connectivity from Transport Scotland for a discussion
with Holyrood magazine – 7 November 2019**

Route options assessment work is also ongoing on the section between east of Huntly and Aberdeen.

Annex T – Extract from note to the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity from Transport Scotland for parliamentary question S5O-03738 – 13 November 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>

Route option assessment work on the section between East of Huntly and Aberdeen is also well underway with a preferred option due to be identified next year.

Annex U – Extract from note to the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity from Transport Scotland for parliamentary question S5W-27276 – 26 February 2020.

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>

Route option assessment work on the section between East of Huntly and Aberdeen is also well underway. Due to the high level of feedback received on this section of the dualling programme Transport Scotland are now working towards identifying a preferred option later this year.

Annex V – Extract from note to the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity from Transport Scotland for parliamentary question S5O-04253 – 12 March 2020.

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>

Route option assessment work on the section between east of Huntly and Aberdeen is also well underway. Due to the high level of feedback received on this section of the dualling programme Transport Scotland is working towards identifying a preferred option later this year. It's important that we take time to consider all the feedback received as we take forward the options assessment process.

Annex W – Extract from note to the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity from Transport Scotland for parliamentary question S5W-28996 – 26 May 2020.

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>

Alexander Burnett MSP is the Scottish Conservative member for Aberdeenshire West and has submitted no previous parliamentary questions on the A96 Dualling Programme.

Mr Burnett has shown interest in the A96 Dualling East of Huntly to Aberdeen scheme through correspondence on behalf of constituents, but has not expressed an opinion on the route options currently under consideration or the need for the scheme. Mr Burnett was joint signatory with Peter Chapman MSP for the meeting you agreed to hold with the A96 Action Group in Parliament on 18 September 2019, but he did not attend.

Route option assessment work on the section between East of Huntly and Aberdeen is also well underway. Due to the high level of feedback received on this section of the dualling programme Transport Scotland is now working towards identifying a preferred option later this year. However, due to restrictions in undertaking public engagement events at this time this may no longer be achievable.