

Annex A - Extracts of correspondence between Transport Scotland officials and Scottish Ministers between 01 January 2021 and 18 September 2023 relating to dualling the A96 Aberdeen to East Huntly, including Inverurie and Keith bypass, Nairn to Inverness and the Colpy A96/A920 junction.

Extract from briefing to Cabinet Secretary for Transport Infrastructure and Connectivity dated 15 February 2021

A96 Dualling Inverness to Aberdeen

- The Scottish Government has given a commitment to completing the dualling of the A96 between Inverness and Aberdeen.
- Along with our commitment to dual the A9 between Perth and Inverness, dualling the A96 will ensure the road network between all Scottish cities is of dual carriageway standard and underlines our commitment to connecting Scotland's cities with a high quality transport system that will generate economic growth.
- This is a significant undertaking which requires careful, in-depth planning and design to ensure that we deliver the right schemes and keep impacts on the environment to the absolute minimum.
- Delivery of each section of the programme can only commence once approved under the relevant statutory procedures and thereafter a timetable for progress can be set.
- 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, improved journey time reliability, improved road safety and opportunities for active travel.

Extract from Background Note from Parliamentary Question S5W-35146 dated 23 February 2021

A96 Dualling Inverness to Aberdeen

The Scottish Government remains committed to completing the dualling of the A96 between Inverness and Aberdeen. This is an ambitious target but one that underlines the Scottish Government's commitment to connecting Scotland's cities with a high quality transport system that will generate economic growth.

At this early stage of development it is difficult to give an accurate estimate of the cost of dualling between Inverness and Aberdeen. However, it is estimated that the cost of dualling will be similar to the dualling of the A9 (in the region of £3 billion). As the design and preparation is progressed a more detailed estimate will be developed.

Design work is well underway. Where it is possible to do so, our consultants continue to advance design work at this time, whilst complying with the Government's physical distancing guidance.

While we continue to progress as much as we can during this time, the ability to undertake some preparatory work has been affected and made more challenging during this time, in particular public consultation and site surveys. As such it is likely that there will be some impact on programme on each of the schemes however it is too early to say what the impact will be.

Dualling the A96 between Scotland's two most northern cities is a significant undertaking which requires careful in-depth planning and design. This will ensure we deliver the right scheme to help tackle congestion while providing better journey time reliability and road safety for all users. Dualling the A96 will ensure the road network between all Scottish cities is of dual carriageway standard.

Construction of the various sections of the A96 Dualling programme can only commence if each scheme is approved under the relevant statutory procedures and thereafter a timetable for their progress can be set in accordance with the availability of funding.

A96 Dualling East of Huntly to Aberdeen

The eastern section of the A96 Dualling Programme is 42km in length and extends from the east of Huntly to Aberdeen. The route options and consultation work for the eastern section of the A96 Dualling Programme commenced in July 2017. Route option assessment work is now complete and the preferred option was announced at a virtual exhibition on 21 December 2020. The preferred option has been chosen following detailed assessment and design work and takes account of feedback received from local communities and other interested parties.

The feedback period traditionally runs for six weeks for each consultation event in our rolling programme of engagement. However, given the festive period and the COVID-19 restrictions, we initially extended the usual feedback period by two weeks

to eight weeks. This is a non-statutory engagement, aimed at providing greater transparency about the decision making process associated with project route selection. Consequently there is no minimum duration required.

Significant representation including that from local MSPs, the deputy leader of Aberdeenshire Council, and Community Councils was subsequently received requesting a further extension of the feedback period beyond the previously agreed date of 15 February 2021. Recognising the widespread interest in this scheme and in light of the ongoing restrictions and feedback received, we were happy to extend the consultation period for a further three weeks to 8 March 2021 to let the public have their say on the preferred option.

The next stage in the design process is to progress the detailed development and assessment of the preferred option. The vital feedback we receive through this public engagement will be taken into account as we further develop the proposed scheme. Further engagement events with the public will also be undertaken as part of the process.

Extract from Background Note from Parliamentary Question S5W-35147 dated 23 February 2021

A96 Dualling Inverness to Aberdeen

The Scottish Government remains committed to completing the dualling of the A96 between Inverness and Aberdeen. This is an ambitious target but one that underlines the Scottish Government's commitment to connecting Scotland's cities with a high quality transport system that will generate economic growth.

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Extract from Background Note from Parliamentary Question S5W-35148 dated 23 February 2021

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The next stage in the design process is to progress the detailed development and assessment of the preferred option. The vital feedback we receive through this public engagement will be taken into account as we further develop the proposed scheme. Further engagement events with the public will also be undertaken as part of the process.

Extract from Background Note from Parliamentary Question S5W-35149 dated 23 February 2021

A96 Dualling Inverness to Aberdeen

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At this early stage of development it is difficult to give an accurate estimate of the cost of dualling between Inverness and Aberdeen. However, it is estimated that the cost of dualling will be similar to the dualling of the A9 (in the region of £3 billion). As the design and preparation is progressed a more detailed estimate will be developed.

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The next stage in the design process is to progress the detailed development and assessment of the preferred option. The vital feedback we receive through this public engagement will be taken into account as we further develop the proposed scheme. Further engagement events with the public will also be undertaken as part of the process.

Extract from Ministerial Engagement sent to Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity dated 10 March 2021

A96 DUALLING INVERNESS TO ABERDEEN
Top Lines

We remain absolutely committed to completing the A96 Dualling programme.

Dualling the A96 between Inverness and Aberdeen underlines our commitment to connecting Scotland's cities with a high quality transport system that will generate economic growth.

This is a significant undertaking which requires careful in-depth planning and design. Delivery of each section of the programme can only commence if approved under the relevant statutory procedures and thereafter a timetable for progress can be set.

Our intention is that more detailed programme milestones will be provided once the outcome of the statutory consents process for each section is known. Design work is well underway on the dualling programme.

Where it is possible to do so, our consultants continue to advance design work during the COVID pandemic, whilst complying with current restrictions.

As we can't progress some preparatory work like site surveys, it is likely that there will be some impact on programme however although it is too early to say what the impact will be.

On the Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass) section, following consideration of the Public Local Inquiry Reporters' Report the Scottish Ministers have decided to make the Orders for the scheme with Decision letters issued on 19 February 2021.

Preparations are now underway to publish the made Orders for the scheme and we expect to be in a position to do this by this summer.

At the same time we continue to advance the detailed development and assessment of the preferred options for the Hardmuir to Fochabers and East of Huntly to Aberdeen sections.

Extract from Background Note from Parliamentary Question S5O-05112 dated 11 March 2021

A96 Dualling East of Huntly to Aberdeen

The eastern section of the A96 Dualling Programme is 42km in length and extends from the east of Huntly to Aberdeen. The route options and consultation work for the eastern section of the A96 Dualling Programme commenced in July 2017. Route option assessment work is now complete and the preferred option was announced at a virtual exhibition on 21 December 2020. The preferred option has been chosen following detailed assessment and design work and takes account of feedback received from local communities and other interested parties.

Nestrans and partners were informed of the upcoming announcement of the preferred option virtual exhibition for the A96 Dualling East of Huntly to Aberdeen scheme on 18 December 2020, in advance of the 21 December 2020 announcement. Officials from Nestrans have indicated disappointment that partners were not given earlier advance notice.

Recognising the widespread interest in this scheme and in light of the ongoing restrictions and feedback received, the consultation period was extended to end on 8 March 2021 to let the public have their say on the preferred option.

The next stage in the design process is to progress the detailed development and assessment of the preferred option. The vital feedback we receive through this public engagement will be taken into account as we further develop the proposed scheme. Further engagement with stakeholders including Nestrans and public engagement events will also be undertaken as part of the process.

A meeting between Transport Scotland officials and representatives of Nestrans was held on 3 February 2021 to discuss the preferred option for the A96 Dualling East of Huntly to Aberdeen scheme. Last year meetings were held with Nestrans on 31 January as part of the A96 LARTP Forum (Local Authority & Regional Transportation Partnership) and on 21 February to discuss a design update for the scheme.

A96 Dualling Inverness to Aberdeen

The Scottish Government remains committed to completing the dualling of the A96 between Inverness and Aberdeen. This is an ambitious target but one that underlines the Scottish Government's commitment to connecting Scotland's cities with a high quality transport system that will generate economic growth.

Dualling the A96 between Scotland's two most northern cities is a significant undertaking which requires careful in-depth planning and design. This will ensure we deliver the right scheme to help tackle congestion while providing better journey time reliability and road safety for all users. Dualling the A96 will ensure the road network between all Scottish cities is of dual carriageway standard.

Delivery of each section of the A96 Dualling can only commence if approved under the statutory procedures and thereafter a timetable for progress can be set.

Extract from briefing to Cabinet Secretary for Transport Infrastructure and Connectivity dated 2 September 2021

ISSUE: The Scottish National Party and Scottish Green Party have and will maintain distinct positions on the dualling of the A96. However, as part of this agreement, we will take forward a transport enhancements programme on the A96 corridor that improves connectivity between surrounding towns, tackles congestion and addresses safety and environmental issues.

ISSUE: The current plan is to fully dual the A96 route between Inverness and Aberdeen, however we agree to conduct a transparent, evidence-based review to include a climate compatibility assessment to assess direct and indirect impacts on the climate and the environment. This will report by the end of 2022

ISSUE: Work on other trunk roads projects and programmes under construction, procurement or design and development will continue and be subject to the statutory assessment and business case processes.

ISSUE: The Infrastructure Investment Plan commits to prioritising maintenance over new build, and doubling investment in bridge and roads maintenance in order to boost structural repairs and strengthen the network.

- The trunk road maintenance backlog is £1.67 billion (May 2021), of which £442 million is carriageways, £1,116 million is structures and £114 million is ancillary assets.
- The percentage of trunk road carriageways in poor condition is 13%. In particular, the percentage of motorways in poor condition is currently 18%.
- A summary of the 2019 road user survey findings shows that general satisfaction with the condition of trunk road surfaces is 46%.

Top Lines

- The trunk road network is one of the largest and most visible community assets for which the Scottish Government is responsible. It is fundamental to the economic, social and environmental well-being of Scotland.
- We need to balance the extensive changes required to meet a target of net-zero greenhouse gas emissions with our duty to ensure that Scotland has high quality infrastructure to meet the needs of all our residents, businesses and visitors.
- That is why we are continuing work on our programme of trunk road improvement scheme to improve resilience, safety and deliver sustainable inclusive growth for the people of Scotland.
- The current plan is to fully dual the A96 route between Inverness and Aberdeen, however we agree to conduct a transparent, evidence-based review to include a climate compatibility assessment to assess direct and indirect impacts on the climate and the environment.
- During this parliamentary session, new roads projects will normally only be taken forward where they reduce the maintenance backlog; address road safety concerns or adapt the network to deal with the impacts of climate change or benefit communities such as bypassing settlements.

- Future investment in our transport network will be set out in the second Strategic Transport Projects Review and will align with the sustainable mode and investment hierarchies.
- We will not build road infrastructure to cater for forecast unconstrained increases in traffic volumes.
- We are investing in essential road maintenance schemes, our bridge strengthening programme and ancillary assets and increasing the resilience of the network to unplanned events such as flooding and high winds.
- In 2020-21 we invested £470 million in managing, maintaining, and safely operating the Scottish trunk road and motorway network.
- The Scottish Government expects to invest £566 million in managing, maintaining and safely operating the Scottish trunk road network in 2021/22, as set out in the Budget.

We are not stepping away from our commitment to the north and east of Scotland to improve the A96 corridor

- The current plan is to fully dual the A96 route between Inverness and Aberdeen, however we agree to conduct a transparent evidence-based review to include a climate compatibility assessment to assess direct and indirect impacts on the climate and the environment.
- We have undertaken substantial development work on this important programme which has been vital to inform our understanding of the significant undertaking of improving this key corridor.
- We now know that dualling the entire A96 will involve substantial offline “new” roads and in light of a range of changing policies including a focus on making better use of our assets and climate change we are undertaking this review.
- This is sensible good governance for major investment of this kind.
- All projects, including the A96 Programme, are subject to detailed review and assessment work to ensure we deliver the right schemes and keep impacts on the environment to the absolute minimum.
- To be clear we are not cancelling improvements to A96 and the substantial development work undertaken will be vital in informing the evidence-based review.
- We are still committed to improving the A96 and will take forward a transport enhancements programme that improves connectivity between surrounding towns, tackles congestion and addresses safety and environmental issues.

Extract from briefing sent to the Minister of Transport dated 7 September 2021

Top Lines

- We need to balance the extensive changes required to meet a target of net-zero greenhouse gas emissions with our duty to ensure that Scotland has high quality infrastructure to meet the needs of all our residents, businesses and visitors.
- That is why we are continuing work on our programme of trunk road improvement scheme to improve resilience, safety and deliver sustainable inclusive growth for the people of Scotland.
- The Scottish National Party and Scottish Green Party have and will maintain distinct positions on the dualling of the A96.
- However, as part of this agreement, we will take forward a transport enhancements programme on the A96 corridor that improves connectivity between surrounding towns, tackles congestion and addresses safety and environmental issues.
- The current plan is to fully dual the A96 route between Inverness and Aberdeen, however we agree to conduct a transparent, evidence-based review to include a climate compatibility assessment to assess direct and indirect impacts on the climate and the environment. We are not stepping away from our commitment to the north and east of Scotland to improve A96 corridor
- We have undertaken substantial development work on this important programme which has been vital to inform our understanding of the significant undertaking of improving this key corridor.
- We are still committed to improving the A96 and will take forward a transport enhancements programme that improves connectivity between surrounding towns, tackles congestion and addresses safety and environmental issues. Extract from briefing for a meeting with Nestrans which was sent to the Minister of Transport on 7th of September 2021
- We now know that dualling the entire A96 will involve substantial offline “new” roads and in light of a range of changing policies including a focus on making better use of our assets and climate change we are undertaking this review.
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- This is sensible good governance for major investment of this kind.
- To be clear we are not cancelling improvements to A96 and the substantial development work undertaken will not go to waste rather be vital to inform the evidence-based review.
- All projects, including the A96 Programme, are subject to detailed review and assessment work to ensure we deliver the right schemes and keep impacts on the environment to the absolute minimum.

Extract from briefing sent to Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport dated 10 September 2021

We are not stepping away from our commitment to the north and east of Scotland to improve the A96 corridor.

The current plan is to fully dual the A96 route between Inverness and Aberdeen, however we agree to conduct a transparent evidence-based review to include a climate compatibility assessment to assess direct and indirect impacts on the climate and the environment.

- We have undertaken substantial development work on this important programme which has been vital to inform our understanding of the significant undertaking of improving this key corridor.
- We now know that dualling the entire A96 will involve substantial offline “new” roads and in light of a range of changing policies including a focus on making better use of our assets and climate change we are undertaking this review.
- This is sensible good governance for major investment of this kind.
- All projects, including the A96 Programme, are subject to detailed review and assessment work to ensure we deliver the right schemes and keep impacts on the environment to the absolute minimum.
- To be clear we are not cancelling improvements to A96 and the substantial development work undertaken will be vital in informing the evidence-based review.
- We are still committed to improving the A96 and will take forward a transport enhancements programme that improves connectivity between surrounding towns, tackles congestion and addresses safety and environmental issues.

Extract from Background Note from Parliamentary Question S6W-02548 dated 27 September 2021

A96 Dualling Inverness to Aberdeen

The commitment to dualling the A96 between Inverness and Aberdeen has formed part of the Scottish Government roads investment programme since 2011, through the 2011 Infrastructure Investment Plan. This commitment along with the commitment to dual the A9 between Perth and Inverness was part of a policy to strengthen connectivity between Scotland's cities.

Design work is well underway on three sections that make up the A96 Dualling Programme. The substantial development work undertaken to date on the programme is demonstrating that the constraints on the existing A96 corridor, including the proximity of residential property and the number of accesses, means that to achieve full dualling means that nearly all of the route will need to be "offline".

The Cooperation Agreement confirms that the Scottish National Party and Scottish Green Party have and will maintain distinct positions on the dualling of the A96.

The current plan is to fully dual the A96 route between Inverness and Aberdeen, however, as part of the Cooperation Agreement with the Scottish Green Party, it has been agreed to conduct a transparent evidence-based review of the programme which will include a climate compatibility assessment to assess direct and indirect impacts on the climate and the environment which will report by the end of 2022. This is sensible good governance for major investment of this kind.

All projects, including the A96 Programme, are subject to detailed review and assessment work to ensure we deliver the right schemes and keep impacts on the environment to the absolute minimum.

The Scottish Government is not stepping away from its commitment to the north and east of Scotland to improve the A96 corridor. The Government remains committed to improving the A96 and will take forward a transport enhancements programme that improves connectivity between surrounding towns, tackles congestion and addresses safety and environmental issues.

Extract from Background Note from Parliamentary Question S6W-02550 dated 27 September 2021

A96 Dualling Inverness to Aberdeen

The commitment to dualling the A96 between Inverness and Aberdeen has formed part of the Scottish Government roads investment programme since 2011, through the 2011 Infrastructure Investment Plan. This commitment along with the commitment to dual the A9 between Perth and Inverness was part of a policy to strengthen connectivity between Scotland's cities.

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The Cooperation Agreement confirms that the Scottish National Party and Scottish Green Party have and will maintain distinct positions on the dualling of the A96.

The current plan is to fully dual the A96 route between Inverness and Aberdeen, however, as part of the Cooperation Agreement with the Scottish Green Party, it has been agreed to conduct a transparent evidence-based review of the programme which will include a climate compatibility assessment to assess direct and indirect impacts on the climate and the environment which will report by the end of 2022. This is sensible good governance for major investment of this kind.

All projects, including the A96 Programme, are subject to detailed review and assessment work to ensure we deliver the right schemes and keep impacts on the environment to the absolute minimum.

The Scottish Government is not stepping away from its commitment to the north and east of Scotland to improve the A96 corridor. The Government remains committed to improving the A96 and will take forward a transport enhancements programme that improves connectivity between surrounding towns, tackles congestion and addresses safety and environmental issues.

Extract from Background Note from Parliamentary Question S6W-02552 dated 27 September 2021

A96 Dualling Inverness to Aberdeen

The commitment to dualling the A96 between Inverness and Aberdeen has formed part of the Scottish Government roads investment programme since 2011, through the 2011 Infrastructure Investment Plan. This commitment along with the commitment to dual the A9 between Perth and Inverness was part of a policy to strengthen connectivity between Scotland's cities.

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The Cooperation Agreement confirms that the Scottish National Party and Scottish Green Party have and will maintain distinct positions on the dualling of the A96.

The current plan is to fully dual the A96 route between Inverness and Aberdeen, however, as part of the Cooperation Agreement with the Scottish Green Party, it has been agreed to conduct a transparent evidence-based review of the programme which will include a climate compatibility assessment to assess direct and indirect impacts on the climate and the environment which will report by the end of 2022. This is sensible good governance for major investment of this kind.

All projects, including the A96 Programme, are subject to detailed review and assessment work to ensure we deliver the right schemes and keep impacts on the environment to the absolute minimum.

The Scottish Government is not stepping away from its commitment to the north and east of Scotland to improve the A96 corridor. The Government remains committed to improving the A96 and will take forward a transport enhancements programme that improves connectivity between surrounding towns, tackles congestion and addresses safety and environmental issues.

Extract from Background Note from Parliamentary Question S6W-02553 dated 27 September 2021

A96 Dualling Inverness to Aberdeen

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The Cooperation Agreement confirms that the Scottish National Party and Scottish Green Party have and will maintain distinct positions on the dualling of the A96.

The current plan is to fully dual the A96 route between Inverness and Aberdeen, however, as part of the Cooperation Agreement with the Scottish Green Party, it has been agreed to conduct a transparent evidence-based review of the programme which will include a climate compatibility assessment to assess direct and indirect impacts on the climate and the environment which will report by the end of 2022. This is sensible good governance for major investment of this kind.

All projects, including the A96 Programme, are subject to detailed review and assessment work to ensure we deliver the right schemes and keep impacts on the environment to the absolute minimum.

The Scottish Government is not stepping away from its commitment to the north and east of Scotland to improve the A96 corridor. The Government remains committed to improving the A96 and will take forward a transport enhancements programme that improves connectivity between surrounding towns, tackles congestion and addresses safety and environmental issues.

Extract from Background Note from Parliamentary Question S6O-00229 dated 30 September 2021

A96 Dualling Inverness to Aberdeen

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Design work is well underway on three sections that make up the A96 Dualling Programme. The substantial development work undertaken to date on the programme is demonstrating that the constraints on the existing A96 corridor, including the proximity of residential property and the number of accesses, means that to achieve full dualling means that nearly all of the route will need to be "offline".

The Cooperation Agreement confirms that the Scottish National Party and Scottish Green Party have and will maintain distinct positions on the dualling of the A96.

While the current plan is to fully dual the A96 route between Inverness and Aberdeen, as part of the Cooperation Agreement with the Scottish Green Party, we have agreed to conduct a transparent evidence-based review of the programme to report by the end of 2022.

We have undertaken substantial consultation and development work on this important programme which has been vital to inform our understanding of the significant undertaking of improving this key corridor. We now know that dualling the entire A96 would involve substantial offline "new" roads and in light of a range of changing policies including a focus on making better use of our assets and climate change we are undertaking this review. This is sensible good governance for major investment of this kind.

The Scottish Government is not stepping away from its commitment to the north and north east of Scotland to improve the A96 corridor. The Cooperation Agreement sets out that we will take forward a transport enhancements programme on the corridor that improves connectivity between surrounding towns, tackles congestion and addresses safety and environmental issues. This will include:

- Dualling from Inverness to Nairn
- Bypassing of Nairn, Keith, Elgin and Inverurie accompanied by measures to remove through traffic from the by-passed town centres
- Targeted road safety improvements where needed, for example between Fochabers and Huntly and Inverurie to Aberdeen
- The development of an A96 "Electric Highway"

Extract from Background Note from Parliamentary Question S6W-03184 dated 04 October 2021

A96 Dualling Inverness to Aberdeen

Whilst the current plan is to fully dual the A96 route between Inverness and Aberdeen, however we have agreed to conduct a transparent evidence-based review to include a climate compatibility assessment to assess direct and indirect impacts on the climate and the environment.

We have undertaken substantial development work on this important programme which has been vital to inform our understanding of the significant undertaking of improving this key corridor.

We now know that dualling the entire A96 will involve substantial offline “new” roads and in light of a range of changing policies including a focus on making better use of our assets and climate change we are undertaking this review.

This is sensible good governance for major investment of this kind.

All projects, including the A96 Programme, are subject to detailed review and assessment work to ensure we deliver the right schemes and keep impacts on the environment to the absolute minimum.

To be clear we are not cancelling improvements to A96 and the substantial development work undertaken will be vital in informing the evidence-based review.

We are still committed to improving the A96 and will take forward a transport enhancements programme that improves connectivity between surrounding towns, tackles congestion and addresses safety and environmental issues.

Extract from Background Note from Parliamentary Question S6W-03185 dated 04 October 2021

A96 Dualling Inverness to Aberdeen

Whilst the current plan is to fully dual the A96 route between Inverness and Aberdeen, however we have agreed to conduct a transparent evidence-based review to include a climate compatibility assessment to assess direct and indirect impacts on the climate and the environment.

We have undertaken substantial development work on this important programme which has been vital to inform our understanding of the significant undertaking of improving this key corridor.

We now know that dualling the entire A96 will involve substantial offline “new” roads and in light of a range of changing policies including a focus on making better use of our assets and climate change we are undertaking this review.

This is sensible good governance for major investment of this kind.

All projects, including the A96 Programme, are subject to detailed review and assessment work to ensure we deliver the right schemes and keep impacts on the environment to the absolute minimum.

To be clear we are not cancelling improvements to A96 and the substantial development work undertaken will be vital in informing the evidence-based review.

We are still committed to improving the A96 and will take forward a transport enhancements programme that improves connectivity between surrounding towns, tackles congestion and addresses safety and environmental issues.

Extract from briefing sent to Minister for Transport dated 5 October 2021

Top Lines

- The Scottish National Party and Scottish Green Party have and will maintain distinct positions on the dualling of the A96.
- However, as part of the cooperation agreement, we will take forward a transport enhancements programme on the A96 corridor that improves connectivity between surrounding towns, tackles congestion and addresses safety and environmental issues.
- The current plan is to fully dual the A96 route between Inverness and Aberdeen, however we agree to conduct a transparent, evidence-based review of the programme which will report by the end of 2022.
- Work on other trunk roads projects and programmes under construction, procurement or design and development, including the A9 Dualling, will continue and be subject to the statutory assessment and business case processes.
- As part of our programmes of investigation and investment, we undertake annual assessments of the safety performance of the trunk road network, including the A9 and A96. Further investigations are then carried out and, where appropriate, mitigation measures are prioritised for delivery. We are not stepping away from our commitment to the north and east of Scotland to improve the A96 corridor
- We have undertaken substantial development work on this important programme which has been vital to inform our understanding of the significant undertaking of improving this key corridor.
- We now know that dualling the entire A96 will involve substantial offline “new” roads and in light of a range of changing policies including a focus on making better use of our assets and climate change we are undertaking this review.
- This is sensible good governance for major investment of this kind.
- All projects, including the A96 Programme, are subject to detailed review and assessment work to ensure we deliver the right schemes and keep impacts on the environment to the absolute minimum.
- To be clear we are not cancelling improvements to A96 and the substantial development work undertaken will not go to waste rather be vital to inform the evidence-based review.
- We are still committed to improving the A96 and will take forward a transport enhancements programme that improves connectivity between surrounding towns, tackles congestion and addresses safety and environmental issues.

Extract from briefing sent to Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport dated 21 October 2021

Commitment to A96

The Scottish Government is committed to the north and east of Scotland, including improving the A96 corridor.

- As part of the cooperation agreement we will take forward an enhancements programme on the A96 corridor that improves connectivity between surrounding towns, tackles congestion and addresses safety and environmental issues.
- The current plan is to fully dual the A96 route between Inverness and Aberdeen,
- All projects, including the A96 Programme, are subject to detailed review and assessment work to ensure we deliver the right schemes and keep impacts on the environment to the absolute minimum.

Extract from Background Note from Parliamentary Question S6O-00389 dated 18 November 2021

We are committed to further significant infrastructure improvements, including investment in the A9, A96 and rail connectivity between Aberdeen and central belt.

COMMITMENT TO A96

The Scottish Government is committed to the north and east of Scotland, including improving the A96 corridor.

As part of the cooperation agreement we will take forward an enhancements programme on the A96 corridor that improves connectivity between surrounding towns, tackles congestion and addresses safety and environmental issues.

The current plan is to fully dual the A96 route between Inverness and Aberdeen, however we have agreed to conduct a transparent, evidence-based review of the programme which will report by the end of 2022.

This is sensible good governance for major investment of this kind, and to be clear, we remain committed to making much needed improvements to the A96 with the substantial development work already undertaken being vital to inform the evidence-based review.

Extract from briefing to the Minister for Transport dated 11 January 2023

An opportunity for you to highlight the Scottish Government's commitment to dualling the A9 while also improving the A96 corridor, supporting its vision of reducing inequalities, climate action, helping to deliver inclusive economic growth and improving our health and wellbeing.

The Scottish Government also remains committed to improving the A96 corridor. We will take forward an enhancements programme on the A96 corridor that improves connectivity between surrounding towns, tackles congestion and addresses safety and environmental issues.

The current plan is to fully dual the A96 route between Inverness and Aberdeen, however, we are conducting a transparent, evidence-based review of the programme. This is sensible good governance for major investment of this kind. A report on the Public Consultation and the Initial Appraisal was published on 22 December 2022.

At the same time we continue to progress the preparation stages of the A96 Dualling Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass) scheme with a view to completing the statutory process. This includes the significant work required to prepare for publication of made Orders, including the Compulsory Purchase Order, in the coming weeks. Subject to no legal challenge being received, the Scottish Ministers will then have the relevant powers to acquire the land necessary to construct the scheme.

Delivery of the scheme can only commence if approved under the relevant statutory procedures and thereafter a timetable for progress can be set in line with available budgets.

A96 (Corridor Review and Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn bypass) scheme)

- The Scottish Government remains committed to the north and north east of Scotland, including improving the A96 corridor. We will take forward an enhancements programme on the A96 corridor that improves connectivity between surrounding towns, tackles congestion and addresses safety and environmental issues.
- The current plan is to fully dual the A96 route between Inverness and Aberdeen; however we are conducting a transparent, evidence-based review of the programme.
- This sensible good governance for major investment of this kind.
- Appropriate, effective stakeholder and public engagement is being carried out at key stages during the review process. A four week public consultation survey, undertaken as a key element of the review, concluded on 10 June 2022 and generated unprecedented interest with almost 4,700 responses received and over 11,000 suggested options.
- Due to this high level of interest, it has taken more time than originally anticipated to look at and appraise all of these options.
- However, the first part of the review, a report on the Public Consultation and the Initial Appraisal was published on 22 December 2022.

- Extensive analysis of the feedback received, including the number of responses relating to each of the suggested options, are provided in the consultation report as published.
- We are now pushing forward with the next phase of further detailed work to inform the remaining stages of the Review. These include a robust appraisal of the retained options alongside a Climate Compatibility Assessment, with outcomes expected to be announced in the first half of 2023 for final public consultation, before a final decision can be reached.
- Given the effects of the climate emergency and Covid-19 on travel, the views of residents, stakeholders and businesses obtained during this consultation exercise will be vital to help us understand any impacts and associated changes to travel patterns along the corridor.
- To be clear, we remain committed to making much needed improvements to the A96 and the substantial development work undertaken will not go to waste but will rather be vital to inform the evidence-based review.
- Dualling from Inverness to Nairn as well as a bypass of Nairn is included in the transport enhancement programme on the A96 corridor we will take forward, as set out in the Bute House Agreement, and we continue to progress the preparation stages of the scheme to enable completion of the statutory process.
- The A96 Dualling Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass) scheme, which runs from Inverness to Hardmuir, is separate from the wider A96 review process which is currently being undertaken.
- We continue to progress the preparation stages of the scheme with a view to completing the statutory process. This includes the significant work required to prepare for publication of made Orders, including the Compulsory Purchase Order, in the coming weeks. Subject to no legal challenge being received, the Scottish Ministers will then have the relevant powers to acquire the land necessary to construct the scheme.
- Delivery of the scheme can only commence if approved under the relevant statutory procedures and thereafter a timetable for progress can be set in line with available budgets.

A96 Dualling Programme

Background and current status

The A96 is the trunk road linking the cities of Inverness and Aberdeen passing through various towns and villages along the route. The route is approximately 160km long, of which 138km is currently single carriageway.

On 6 December 2011, the then Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment launched the Infrastructure Investment Plan (IIP) which provides an overview of the Scottish Government's plans for infrastructure investment over the coming decades. Contained within the document was a commitment to complete the dualling of the A96 between Inverness and Aberdeen.

For design and assessment purposes the dualling programme has been split into four sections. The four sections and their status are provided in the table below:

Section	Status
Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Following a Public Local Inquiry into objections made to the scheme and consideration of the Reporters' Report, Ministerial decision to proceed with the Scheme received 16 February 2021. • Progressing with preparation of documentation to allow publication of Made Orders and completion of statutory process.
Hardmuir to Fochabers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development and assessment of the preferred option progressed. • Future progress is dependent on the outcome of the A96 Corridor Review.
East of Huntly to Fochabers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design development still to commence for this section. • Future progress is dependent on the outcome of the A96 Corridor Review.
East of Huntly to Aberdeen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The preferred option was announced on 21 December 2020. • Future progress is dependent on the outcome of the A96 Corridor Review.

In August 2021 the Scottish Government and Scottish Green Party Parliamentary Group entered into a Co-operation Agreement and shared policy programme (the Bute House Agreement).

In relation to the A96, the Bute House Agreement states that "...the Scottish Government will take forward a transport enhancements programme on the A96 corridor that improves connectivity between surrounding towns, tackles congestion and addresses safety and environmental issues. This will include:

- dualling from Inverness to Nairn;
- bypassing of Nairn, Keith, Elgin and Inverurie accompanied by measures to remove through traffic from the by-passed town centres;
- targeted road safety improvements where needed, for example between Fochabers and Huntly and Inverurie to Aberdeen; and
- the development of an A96 "Electric Highway"..."

The Agreement goes on to state that "...the current plan is to fully dual the A96 route between Inverness and Aberdeen; however, a transparent, evidence-based review will be conducted to include a climate compatibility assessment to assess direct and indirect impacts on the climate and the environment. This will report by the end of 2022..."

The Bute House Agreement is broadly drafted. In order to provide more detail on the form that the A96 Review would take, a summary of the appraisal process was outlined as part of the draft second Strategic Transport Projects Review Technical Report (STPR2) published in January 2022. The draft report summarised the following key steps:

The review is to be undertaken in accordance with the Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance (STAG). The STAG appraisal stages are:

- Initial Appraisal: Case for Change;
- Preliminary Options Appraisal;
- Detailed Options Appraisal; and
- Post Appraisal.

The review will consider the transport problems and opportunities on the A96 corridor, changing policy context and other relevant considerations such as development aspirations for the corridor and surrounding area. In addition, the review will include:

- Climate Compatibility Assessment;
- Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA);
- Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (DMRB) Stage 1 Assessment ;and
- Strategic Business Case.

A96 Dualling Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass)

The A96 Dualling Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass) scheme, which runs from Inverness to Hardmuir is separate from the wider A96 review process which is currently being undertaken.

Progress continues on the preparation stages of the scheme with a view to completing the statutory process. This includes the significant work required to prepare for publication of made Orders, including the Compulsory Purchase Order, in the coming weeks. Subject to no legal challenge being received, the Scottish Ministers will then have the relevant powers to acquire the land necessary to construct the scheme.

Delivery of the scheme can only commence if approved under the relevant statutory procedures and thereafter a timetable for progress can be set in line with available budgets.

Future Progress (including funding and procurement)

Future progress including consideration of procurement options to deliver the A96 Dualling Programme will be subject to the outcome of the A96 Corridor Review and dependent on subsequent completion of relevant statutory procedures.

With respect to the Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass) scheme specifically, exact timescales for the next stages are difficult to estimate at this stage because the necessary procedural steps need to be completed to finalise the acquisition of land and take the powers required to build the scheme. These steps come with them a right of legal challenge.

Subject to finalisation of the statutory processes for the scheme it is hoped that more certainty over timescales will be able to be provided. At that stage, the timetable for

progress will be set in line with the chosen procurement strategy and available budgets.

As budgets across government are extremely constrained difficult choices may have to be made by Ministers in terms of progressing with (or prioritising) projects that come from the evidenced based review.

Extract from Background Note from Parliamentary Question S6W-13406 dated 18 January 2023

The Scottish Government remains committed to the north and north east of Scotland. This includes taking forward an enhancements programme on the A96 corridor that improves connectivity between surrounding towns, tackles congestion and addresses safety and environmental issues.

The current plan is to fully dual the A96 route between Inverness and Aberdeen; however, we are conducting a transparent, evidence-based review of the programme, the first part of which, a report on the Public Consultation and the Initial Appraisal: The Case for Change were published on 22 December 2022. This is sensible good governance for major investment of this kind.

A four week public consultation survey, undertaken as a key element of the review, concluded on 10 June 2022 and generated unprecedented interest with almost 4,700 responses received and over 11,000 suggested options.

The extensive further work required to appropriately inform and support the next key stages of the Review, which includes the Climate Compatibility Assessment and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) shall also be progressed to a conclusion in the first half of 2023.

Given the effects of the climate emergency and Covid-19 on travel, the views of residents, stakeholders and businesses obtained during this consultation exercise will be vital to help us understand any impacts and associated changes to travel patterns along the corridor.

To be clear, we remain committed to making much needed improvements to the A96 and the substantial consultation and development work previously undertaken on the dualling programme prior to the Bute House Agreement will not go to waste. It is proving vital in helping inform our understanding of this key corridor and in supporting the evidence based review.

Future improvements on the A96 Corridor shall be informed by the outcome of the A96 Corridor Review. The previously undertaken work will also be able to be utilised in the future should the review determine that dualling is the preferred solution to improving the corridor.

The A96 Dualling Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass) scheme, which runs from Inverness to Hardmuir, is included in the transport enhancement programme, as set out in the Bute House Agreement. This scheme is separate from the wider A96 review process which is currently being undertaken.

We continue to progress the preparation stages of this scheme with a view to completing the statutory process. This includes the significant work required to prepare for publication of made Orders, including the Compulsory Purchase Order, in the coming weeks. Subject to no legal challenge being received, the Scottish Ministers will then have the relevant powers to acquire the land necessary to construct the scheme.

Delivery of the scheme can only commence if approved under the relevant statutory procedures and thereafter a timetable for progress can be set in line with available budgets.

On 6 December 2011, the then Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment launched the Infrastructure Investment Plan (IIP) which provides an overview of the Scottish Government's plans for infrastructure investment over the coming decades. Contained within the document was a commitment to complete the dualling of the A96 between Inverness and Aberdeen by 2030 thus completing the dual carriageway network between all Scottish cities.

On 9 May 2013 the then Minister for Transport and Veterans set out how the A96 Dualling Programme would be taken forward over the following few years. This announcement identified packages of preliminary design and development work, with the objective of completing the full dualling between Inverness and Aberdeen by 2030.

For design and assessment purposes the dualling programme was split into four sections: Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass); Hardmuir to Fochabers; East of Fochabers to East of Huntly; and East of Huntly to Aberdeen. The four sections and status are provided in the table below:

Section	Status
Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass) Note: this section sits outside the A96 Corridor Review as it already has Ministerial consent following Public Local Inquiry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Following a Public Local Inquiry into objections made to the scheme and consideration of the Reporters' Report, Ministerial decision to proceed with the Scheme received 16 February 2021. • Progressing with preparation of documentation to allow publication of Made Orders in the coming weeks and completion of statutory process.
Hardmuir to Fochabers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Route option assessment work completed with preferred option announced in December 2018. • Development and assessment of the preferred option being progressed and nearing completion at the time of the Bute House Agreement. • Future progress is dependent on the outcome of the A96 Corridor Review.
East of Fochabers to East of Huntly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design development still to commence for this section. • Future progress is dependent on the outcome of the A96 Corridor Review.
East of Huntly to Aberdeen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Route option assessment work completed with preferred option announced in December 2020. • Development and assessment of the preferred option commenced early 2021 but on hold following the Bute House Agreement. • Future progress is dependent on the outcome of the A96 Corridor Review.

In August 2021 the Scottish Government and Scottish Green Party Parliamentary Group entered into a Co-operation Agreement and shared policy programme (the Bute House Agreement).

In relation to the A96, the Bute House Agreement states that "...the Scottish Government will take forward a transport enhancements programme on the A96 corridor that improves connectivity between surrounding towns, tackles congestion and addresses safety and environmental issues. This will include:

- dualling from Inverness to Nairn;
- bypassing of Nairn, Keith, Elgin and Inverurie accompanied by measures to remove through traffic from the by-passed town centres;
- targeted road safety improvements where needed, for example between Fochabers and Huntly and Inverurie to Aberdeen; and
- the development of an A96 "Electric Highway"..."

The Scottish Government's 2011 commitment to dual the A96 route between Inverness and Aberdeen remains; however, we are conducting a transparent, evidence-based review of the programme which is underway. This is sensible good governance for major investment of this kind.

Extract from Background Note from Parliamentary Question S6W-13407 dated 18 January 2023

The Scottish Government remains committed to the north and north east of Scotland. This includes taking forward an enhancements programme on the A96 corridor that improves connectivity between surrounding towns, tackles congestion and addresses safety and environmental issues.

The current plan is to fully dual the A96 route between Inverness and Aberdeen; however, we are conducting a transparent, evidence-based review of the programme, the first part of which, a report on the Public Consultation and the Initial Appraisal: The Case for Change were published on 22 December 2022. This is sensible good governance for major investment of this kind.

A four week public consultation survey, undertaken as a key element of the review, concluded on 10 June 2022 and generated unprecedented interest with almost 4,700 responses received and over 11,000 suggested options.

The extensive further work required to appropriately inform and support the next key stages of the Review, which includes the Climate Compatibility Assessment and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) shall also be progressed to a conclusion in the first half of 2023.

Given the effects of the climate emergency and Covid-19 on travel, the views of residents, stakeholders and businesses obtained during this consultation exercise will be vital to help us understand any impacts and associated changes to travel patterns along the corridor.

To be clear, we remain committed to making much needed improvements to the A96 and the substantial consultation and development work previously undertaken on the dualling programme prior to the Bute House Agreement will not go to waste. It is proving vital in helping inform our understanding of this key corridor and in supporting the evidence based review.

Future improvements on the A96 Corridor shall be informed by the outcome of the A96 Corridor Review. The previously undertaken work will also be able to be utilised in the future should the review determine that dualling is the preferred solution to improving the corridor.

The A96 Dualling Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass) scheme, which runs from Inverness to Hardmuir, is included in the transport enhancement programme, as set out in the Bute House Agreement. This scheme is separate from the wider A96 review process which is currently being undertaken.

We continue to progress the preparation stages of this scheme with a view to completing the statutory process. This includes the significant work required to prepare for publication of made Orders, including the Compulsory Purchase Order, in the coming weeks. Subject to no legal challenge being received, the Scottish Ministers will then have the relevant powers to acquire the land necessary to construct the scheme.

Delivery of the scheme can only commence if approved under the relevant statutory procedures and thereafter a timetable for progress can be set in line with available budgets.

On 6 December 2011, the then Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment launched the Infrastructure Investment Plan (IIP) which provides an overview of the Scottish Government's plans for infrastructure investment over the coming decades. Contained within the document was a commitment to complete the dualling of the A96 between Inverness and Aberdeen by 2030 thus completing the dual carriageway network between all Scottish cities.

On 9 May 2013 the then Minister for Transport and Veterans set out how the A96 Dualling Programme would be taken forward over the following few years. This announcement identified packages of preliminary design and development work, with the objective of completing the full dualling between Inverness and Aberdeen by 2030.

For design and assessment purposes the dualling programme was split into four sections: Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass); Hardmuir to Fochabers; East of Fochabers to East of Huntly; and East of Huntly to Aberdeen. The four sections and status are provided in the table below:

Section	Status
Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass) Note: this section sits outside the A96 Corridor Review as it already has Ministerial consent following Public Local Inquiry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Following a Public Local Inquiry into objections made to the scheme and consideration of the Reporters' Report, Ministerial decision to proceed with the Scheme received 16 February 2021. • Progressing with preparation of documentation to allow publication of Made Orders in the coming weeks and completion of statutory process.
Hardmuir to Fochabers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Route option assessment work completed with preferred option announced in December 2018. • Development and assessment of the preferred option being progressed and nearing completion at the time of the Bute House Agreement. • Future progress is dependent on the outcome of the A96 Corridor Review.
East of Fochabers to East of Huntly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design development still to commence for this section. • Future progress is dependent on the outcome of the A96 Corridor Review.
East of Huntly to Aberdeen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Route option assessment work completed with preferred option announced in December 2020. • Development and assessment of the preferred option commenced early 2021 but on hold following the Bute House Agreement. • Future progress is dependent on the outcome of the A96 Corridor Review.

In August 2021 the Scottish Government and Scottish Green Party Parliamentary Group entered into a Co-operation Agreement and shared policy programme (the Bute House Agreement).

In relation to the A96, the Bute House Agreement states that "...the Scottish Government will take forward a transport enhancements programme on the A96 corridor that improves connectivity between surrounding towns, tackles congestion and addresses safety and environmental issues. This will include:

- dualling from Inverness to Nairn;
- bypassing of Nairn, Keith, Elgin and Inverurie accompanied by measures to remove through traffic from the by-passed town centres;
- targeted road safety improvements where needed, for example between Fochabers and Huntly and Inverurie to Aberdeen; and
- the development of an A96 "Electric Highway"..."

The Scottish Government's 2011 commitment to dual the A96 route between Inverness and Aberdeen remains; however, we are conducting a transparent, evidence-based review of the programme which is underway. This is sensible good governance for major investment of this kind.

Extract from Background Note from Parliamentary Question S6W-13408 dated 18 January 2023

The Scottish Government remains committed to the north and north east of Scotland. This includes taking forward an enhancements programme on the A96 corridor that improves connectivity between surrounding towns, tackles congestion and addresses safety and environmental issues.

The current plan is to fully dual the A96 route between Inverness and Aberdeen; however, we are conducting a transparent, evidence-based review of the programme, the first part of which, a report on the Public Consultation and the Initial Appraisal: The Case for Change were published on 22 December 2022. This is sensible good governance for major investment of this kind.

A four week public consultation survey, undertaken as a key element of the review, concluded on 10 June 2022 and generated unprecedented interest with almost 4,700 responses received and over 11,000 suggested options.

The extensive further work required to appropriately inform and support the next key stages of the Review, which includes the Climate Compatibility Assessment and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) shall also be progressed to a conclusion in the first half of 2023.

Given the effects of the climate emergency and Covid-19 on travel, the views of residents, stakeholders and businesses obtained during this consultation exercise will be vital to help us understand any impacts and associated changes to travel patterns along the corridor.

To be clear, we remain committed to making much needed improvements to the A96 and the substantial consultation and development work previously undertaken on the dualling programme prior to the Bute House Agreement will not go to waste. It is proving vital in helping inform our understanding of this key corridor and in supporting the evidence based review.

Future improvements on the A96 Corridor shall be informed by the outcome of the A96 Corridor Review. The previously undertaken work will also be able to be utilised in the future should the review determine that dualling is the preferred solution to improving the corridor.

The A96 Dualling Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass) scheme, which runs from Inverness to Hardmuir, is included in the transport enhancement programme, as set out in the Bute House Agreement. This scheme is separate from the wider A96 review process which is currently being undertaken.

We continue to progress the preparation stages of this scheme with a view to completing the statutory process. This includes the significant work required to prepare for publication of made Orders, including the Compulsory Purchase Order, in the coming weeks. Subject to no legal challenge being received, the Scottish Ministers will then have the relevant powers to acquire the land necessary to construct the scheme.

Delivery of the scheme can only commence if approved under the relevant statutory procedures and thereafter a timetable for progress can be set in line with available budgets.

On 6 December 2011, the then Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment launched the Infrastructure Investment Plan (IIP) which provides an overview of the Scottish Government's plans for infrastructure investment over the coming decades. Contained within the document was a commitment to complete the dualling of the A96 between Inverness and Aberdeen by 2030 thus completing the dual carriageway network between all Scottish cities.

On 9 May 2013 the then Minister for Transport and Veterans set out how the A96 Dualling Programme would be taken forward over the following few years. This announcement identified packages of preliminary design and development work, with the objective of completing the full dualling between Inverness and Aberdeen by 2030.

For design and assessment purposes the dualling programme was split into four sections: Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass); Hardmuir to Fochabers; East of Fochabers to East of Huntly; and East of Huntly to Aberdeen. The four sections and status are provided in the table below:

Section	Status
Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass) Note: this section sits outside the A96 Corridor Review as it already has Ministerial consent following Public Local Inquiry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Following a Public Local Inquiry into objections made to the scheme and consideration of the Reporters' Report, Ministerial decision to proceed with the Scheme received 16 February 2021. • Progressing with preparation of documentation to allow publication of Made Orders in the coming weeks and completion of statutory process.
Hardmuir to Fochabers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Route option assessment work completed with preferred option announced in December 2018. • Development and assessment of the preferred option being progressed and nearing completion at the time of the Bute House Agreement. • Future progress is dependent on the outcome of the A96 Corridor Review.
East of Fochabers to East of Huntly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design development still to commence for this section. • Future progress is dependent on the outcome of the A96 Corridor Review.
East of Huntly to Aberdeen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Route option assessment work completed with preferred option announced in December 2020. • Development and assessment of the preferred option commenced early 2021 but on hold following the Bute House Agreement. • Future progress is dependent on the outcome of the A96 Corridor Review.

In August 2021 the Scottish Government and Scottish Green Party Parliamentary Group entered into a Co-operation Agreement and shared policy programme (the Bute House Agreement).

In relation to the A96, the Bute House Agreement states that "...the Scottish Government will take forward a transport enhancements programme on the A96 corridor that improves connectivity between surrounding towns, tackles congestion and addresses safety and environmental issues. This will include:

- dualling from Inverness to Nairn;
- bypassing of Nairn, Keith, Elgin and Inverurie accompanied by measures to remove through traffic from the by-passed town centres;
- targeted road safety improvements where needed, for example between Fochabers and Huntly and Inverurie to Aberdeen; and
- the development of an A96 "Electric Highway"..."

The Scottish Government's 2011 commitment to dual the A96 route between Inverness and Aberdeen remains; however, we are conducting a transparent, evidence-based review of the programme which is underway. This is sensible good governance for major investment of this kind.

Extract from Background Note from Parliamentary Question S6W-13409 dated 18 January 2023

The Scottish Government remains committed to the north and north east of Scotland. This includes taking forward an enhancements programme on the A96 corridor that improves connectivity between surrounding towns, tackles congestion and addresses safety and environmental issues.

The current plan is to fully dual the A96 route between Inverness and Aberdeen; however, we are conducting a transparent, evidence-based review of the programme, the first part of which, a report on the Public Consultation and the Initial Appraisal: The Case for Change were published on 22 December 2022. This is sensible good governance for major investment of this kind.

A four week public consultation survey, undertaken as a key element of the review, concluded on 10 June 2022 and generated unprecedented interest with almost 4,700 responses received and over 11,000 suggested options.

The extensive further work required to appropriately inform and support the next key stages of the Review, which includes the Climate Compatibility Assessment and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) shall also be progressed to a conclusion in the first half of 2023.

Given the effects of the climate emergency and Covid-19 on travel, the views of residents, stakeholders and businesses obtained during this consultation exercise will be vital to help us understand any impacts and associated changes to travel patterns along the corridor.

To be clear, we remain committed to making much needed improvements to the A96 and the substantial consultation and development work previously undertaken on the dualling programme prior to the Bute House Agreement will not go to waste. It is proving vital in helping inform our understanding of this key corridor and in supporting the evidence based review.

Future improvements on the A96 Corridor shall be informed by the outcome of the A96 Corridor Review. The previously undertaken work will also be able to be utilised in the future should the review determine that dualling is the preferred solution to improving the corridor.

The A96 Dualling Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass) scheme, which runs from Inverness to Hardmuir, is included in the transport enhancement programme, as set out in the Bute House Agreement. This scheme is separate from the wider A96 review process which is currently being undertaken.

We continue to progress the preparation stages of this scheme with a view to completing the statutory process. This includes the significant work required to prepare for publication of made Orders, including the Compulsory Purchase Order, in the coming weeks. Subject to no legal challenge being received, the Scottish Ministers will then have the relevant powers to acquire the land necessary to construct the scheme.

Delivery of the scheme can only commence if approved under the relevant statutory procedures and thereafter a timetable for progress can be set in line with available budgets.

On 6 December 2011, the then Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment launched the Infrastructure Investment Plan (IIP) which provides an overview of the Scottish Government's plans for infrastructure investment over the coming decades. Contained within the document was a commitment to complete the dualling of the A96 between Inverness and Aberdeen by 2030 thus completing the dual carriageway network between all Scottish cities.

On 9 May 2013 the then Minister for Transport and Veterans set out how the A96 Dualling Programme would be taken forward over the following few years. This announcement identified packages of preliminary design and development work, with the objective of completing the full dualling between Inverness and Aberdeen by 2030.

For design and assessment purposes the dualling programme was split into four sections: Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass); Hardmuir to Fochabers; East of Fochabers to East of Huntly; and East of Huntly to Aberdeen. The four sections and status are provided in the table below:

Section	Status
Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass) Note: this section sits outside the A96 Corridor Review as it already has Ministerial consent following Public Local Inquiry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Following a Public Local Inquiry into objections made to the scheme and consideration of the Reporters' Report, Ministerial decision to proceed with the Scheme received 16 February 2021. • Progressing with preparation of documentation to allow publication of Made Orders in the coming weeks and completion of statutory process.
Hardmuir to Fochabers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Route option assessment work completed with preferred option announced in December 2018. • Development and assessment of the preferred option being progressed and nearing completion at the time of the Bute House Agreement. • Future progress is dependent on the outcome of the A96 Corridor Review.
East of Fochabers to East of Huntly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design development still to commence for this section. • Future progress is dependent on the outcome of the A96 Corridor Review.
East of Huntly to Aberdeen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Route option assessment work completed with preferred option announced in December 2020. • Development and assessment of the preferred option commenced early 2021 but on hold following the Bute House Agreement. • Future progress is dependent on the outcome of the A96 Corridor Review.

In August 2021 the Scottish Government and Scottish Green Party Parliamentary Group entered into a Co-operation Agreement and shared policy programme (the Bute House Agreement).

In relation to the A96, the Bute House Agreement states that "...the Scottish Government will take forward a transport enhancements programme on the A96 corridor that improves connectivity between surrounding towns, tackles congestion and addresses safety and environmental issues. This will include:

- dualling from Inverness to Nairn;
- bypassing of Nairn, Keith, Elgin and Inverurie accompanied by measures to remove through traffic from the by-passed town centres;
- targeted road safety improvements where needed, for example between Fochabers and Huntly and Inverurie to Aberdeen; and
- the development of an A96 "Electric Highway"..."

The Scottish Government's 2011 commitment to dual the A96 route between Inverness and Aberdeen remains; however, we are conducting a transparent, evidence-based review of the programme which is underway. This is sensible good governance for major investment of this kind.

Meeting minutes sent to the Minister for Transport dated 20 January 2023

A96 Corridor Review - Minute of Minister for Transport meeting with Gillian Martin MSP 13:45 to 14:15 on 22 November 2022

Attendees

Jenny Gilruth (JG) MSP, Minister for Transport
[REDACTED], Private Secretary to Minister for Transport
Gillian Martin (GM), MSP for Aberdeenshire East

[REDACTED], Transport Scotland - Head of Design Team 1 and 3
[REDACTED], Transport Scotland - Design Manager

Agenda

1. Welcome
2. Discussion on the outcomes of the A96 Corridor Review Public Consultation
3. Any Other Business
4. Actions

1. Welcome - extended to all attendees from JG.

2. Discussion Points – The outcomes of the A96 Corridor Review Public Consultation, in particular whether the strength of feeling supporting dualling will be reflected in the report findings.

JG invited GM to raise the topics she wished to be discussed at the meeting.

- GM highlighted the strength of feeling amongst the local councillors and constituents towards dualling of the A96 and asked whether the consultation report will capture this. GM raised safety as a key issue and advised that her supplementary question in parliament is likely to be centred on the current status of the A96 Dualling East of Huntly to Aberdeen section as significant design work has been carried out on this section to date.
- [REDACTED] provided an overview of the appraisal process undertaken on the Review and the consultation exercise that generated 11,000 options for the team to consider. [REDACTED] advised that the Initial Appraisal: Case for Change report will outline the process of taking 11,000 options, down to the 16 options to progress to the next stage of appraisal. [REDACTED] highlighted that full Dualling between Inverness and Aberdeen is being taken to the further stage of appraisal.
- JG highlighted the importance of a 'Fair and Just Transition', and that the residents of the North East rely on using a car given limited alternatives in the rural areas.

- JG reiterated Scottish Government current commitment to dualling the A96 and acknowledged need to support the constituent MSPs that have campaigned on this matter for many years. JG noted current inflationary demands and fiscal challenges facing the government. GM acknowledged challenges and felt members of the public would do likewise.
- JG and GM discussed the importance of decarbonising the network and the part electric vehicles shall play in this, particularly in the rural areas. [REDACTED] advised that as part of the A96 Corridor Review, an A96 electric highway is being considered. This will consider not only electric but also the potential for Hydrogen as the North East is a leader in this field.
- JG requested that the A96 Corridor Review technical advisors (Jacobs Aecom) present to the constituency MSPs on the Public Consultation and Initial Appraisal: Case for Change reports, with the meeting to be held in the northeast (GM offered location as being in Inverurie) early in the new year. This will allow the MSPs to ask questions directly to the technical advisors.
Action: GM's office to investigate suitable venues in northeast for holding the meeting. Preference is Monday/Friday to give Minister greater opportunity to attend.
- JG confirmed the intention for the Public Consultation and Initial Appraisal: Case for Change reports to be published in December.
- A discussion was held on the Benefit Cost Ratio (BCR) for the A96 Dualling schemes. [REDACTED] advised that the BCR had previously been positive for the A96 Dualling Hardmuir to Fochabers and East of Huntly to Aberdeen schemes at route options stage of assessment. Further consideration of the BCRs would be required to assess the impact from the latest government policies including the 20% reduction in car kilometres. JG asked if the 20% reduction was applied across Scotland or on a regional basis as aware the urban centres in the central belt were considering greater reductions. [REDACTED] advised that this was being considered as part of the Transport Model for Scotland led by the Transport Strategy and Analysis team within Transport Scotland.
- GM asked how Active Travel is being considered as part of the A96 Corridor Review, in particular in her constituency with consideration of an active travel route from Oldmeldrum to Inverurie. [REDACTED] advised that Active Travel is being considered as part of the review and is included in the options being taken forward to the next stages of appraisal.
- GM repeated that her supplementary question in parliament is likely to be centred on the current status of the A96 Dualling East of Huntly to Aberdeen section and how the extensive previous design work and consultation should not go to waste.

3. Any Other Business

- JG thanked all attendees for their attendance and closed the meeting.

4. Actions

- **GM's office to investigate suitable venues in northeast and timescales for holding technical advisor update meeting, noting Minister preference for this to take place on either a Monday or a Friday.**

Meeting minutes sent to the Minister for Transport dated 20 January 2023

A96 Corridor Review - Minute of Minister for Transport meeting with Transport Scotland Officials Virtual Meeting - 16:30 to 17:00 on 14 December 2022

Attendees

Jenny Gilruth (JG) MSP, Minister for Transport
[REDACTED], Private Secretary to Minister for Transport

Lawrence Shackman (LS), Transport Scotland – Director of Major Projects
[REDACTED], Transport Scotland – Head of Design, Procurement and Contracts
[REDACTED], Transport Scotland - Head of Design Team 1 and 3
[REDACTED], Transport Scotland - Design Manager
[REDACTED], Transport Scotland – Communications Manager

Agenda

1. Welcome
2. Discussion and update on the corridor review and next steps
3. Any Other Business
4. Actions

5. Welcome - extended to all attendees from JG.

6. Discussion

- JG acknowledged that the Corridor Review will not conclude by the end of 2022 and stated that she is keen to see the next stage accelerated.
- JG requested that Transport Scotland Officials and the Review technical advisors present the findings of the two reports which are ready for publication (Consultation Report and Initial Appraisal: Case for Change Report) at a further meeting next week (w/c 19 December) (virtual). **Action: TS officials to liaise with Private Office to arrange a further meeting w/c 19 December.** *POST MEETING NOTE: Due to availability of the Minister for Transport, this meeting did not take place, with approval for publication provided via email.*
- [REDACTED] advised that work is already underway on the Corridor Review's next stages of appraisal. [REDACTED] added that the two reports to be published shortly provide further explanation of the process that is being undertaken for the Corridor Review.
- [REDACTED] outlined alternative approaches available when reporting the outcome of the next stage of the review – either with or without recommendations and for the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) to be published alongside in draft for consultation.
- LS confirmed the Review process mirrors that undertaken for STPR2, however, the timescales for each stage have been condensed.
- JG queried the process for publishing the two reports.

- [REDACTED] advised that the normal process for similar publications is to issue a news release and publish the reports on the Transport Scotland website, such as was the case for the equivalent stage on STPR2.
- [REDACTED] advised that the accompanying news release should also set out timescales for next steps.
- LS suggested Spring/Summer to be included in the news release for reporting on the outcome of the detailed appraisal.
- JG agreed that the timeline for the next stages should be made clear in the news release. **Action: Ensure new release includes details on the timeline for the next stages.**
- JG advised that Private Office will issue letters to the northeast MSPs advising of the proposed meeting to be held in the northeast early in the new year, where the Review's technical advisors and Transport Scotland officials can discuss the findings of the two reports and advise on next steps. **Action: TS officials to liaise with Private Office in the new year regarding arrangements for meeting with northeast MSPs.**

7. Any Other Business

- JG thanked all attendees for their attendance and closed the meeting.

8. Actions

- **Action: TS officials to liaise with Private Office to arrange a further meeting w/c 19 December.** *POST MEETING NOTE: Approval to publish provided via email without need for further meeting to be held.*
- **Action: Ensure news release includes details on the timeline for the next stages.**
- **Action: TS officials to liaise with Private Office in new year regarding arrangements for meeting with northeast MSPs.**

Extract from briefing to the Minister for Transport dated 26 January 2023

A96 CORRIDOR

The Scottish Government remains committed to the north and north east of Scotland, including improving the A96 corridor.

- We will take forward an enhancements programme on the A96 corridor that improves connectivity between surrounding towns, tackles congestion and addresses safety and environmental issues.
- The current plan is to fully dual the A96 route between Inverness and Aberdeen; however, we are conducting a transparent, evidence-based review of the programme which is underway.
- This is sensible good governance for major investment of this kind.

We published the Public Consultation and Initial Appraisal reports on the Corridor Review on 22 December 2022.

- A four week public consultation survey which concluded on 10 June 2022 received unprecedented interest with nearly 4,600 responses generating more than 11,000 suggestions for the route.
- Given the sheer volume of responses received and the high number of options this generated, it has rightly taken Transport Scotland more time than originally anticipated to examine and appraise all of these options.
- We are now pushing forward with the next phase of further detailed work to inform the remaining stages of the Review.
- These include a robust appraisal of the 16 retained options alongside a Climate Compatibility Assessment, with outcomes expected to be announced in the first half of 2023 for final public consultation, before a final decision can be reached.
- Given the effects of the climate emergency and Covid-19 on travel, the views of residents, stakeholders, and businesses obtained during this consultation exercise will be vital to help us understand any impacts and associated changes to travel patterns along the corridor.
- To be clear, we remain committed to making much needed improvements to the A96 and the substantial development work undertaken will not go to waste but will rather be vital to inform the evidence-based review.

The Transport Minister will be organising a meeting early this year for North and North East MSPs to hear directly from the Review's project team.

- This will include a summary of the Review's findings to date, the consultation responses and the next steps in the Review process.

A96 INVERNESS TO NAIRN (INCLUDING NAIRN BYPASS)

We will continue to take forward the preparation stages for dualling the A96 from Inverness to Nairn as well as a bypass of Nairn.

- Dualling from Inverness to Nairn as well as a bypass of Nairn is included in the transport enhancement programme, as set out in the Bute House Agreement, and we continue to progress the preparation stages of the scheme with a view to making the Orders in the coming weeks.

- The A96 Dualling Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass) scheme is separate from the wider A96 review process which is currently being undertaken as it has already received Ministerial consent following a Public Local Inquiry.
- The scheme will bring many benefits to the Highlands including improved journey time and reliability, improved connectivity, which includes improved connectivity to the new Dalcross Station and Park and Ride facilities, and improved road safety for all those who use this key artery.

Extract from briefing sent to the Minister for Transport dated 23 February 2023

LINES TO TAKE - A96 CORRIDOR

The Scottish Government remains committed to the north and north east of Scotland, including improving the A96 corridor.

- We will take forward an enhancements programme on the A96 corridor that improves connectivity between surrounding towns, tackles congestion and addresses safety and environmental issues.
- The current plan is to fully dual the A96 route between Inverness and Aberdeen, however, we are conducting a transparent, evidence-based review of the programme which is well underway.
- This is sensible good governance for major investment of this kind.

We published the Public Consultation and Initial Appraisal reports on the Corridor Review on 22 December 2022.

- A four week public consultation survey which concluded on 10 June 2022 received unprecedented interest with nearly 4,600 responses generating more than 11,000 suggestions for the route.
- Given the sheer volume of responses received and the high number of options this generated, it has rightly taken Transport Scotland more time than originally anticipated to examine and appraise all of these options.
- We are now pushing forward with the next phase of further detailed work to inform the remaining stages of the Review.
- These include a robust appraisal of the 16 retained options alongside a Climate Compatibility Assessment, with outcomes expected to be announced in the first half of 2023 for final public consultation, before a final decision can be reached.
- To be clear, we remain committed to making much needed improvements to the A96 and the substantial development work undertaken will not go to waste but will rather be vital to inform the evidence-based review.

A roundtable meeting for North and North East MSPs to hear directly from the Review's project team has been arranged for 28 February 2023.

- This will include a summary of the Review's findings to date, the consultation responses and the next steps in the Review process.

A96: Inverness to Nairn

- We will continue to take forward the preparation stages for dualling the A96 from Inverness to Nairn as well as a bypass of Nairn.
- Dualling from Inverness to Nairn as well as a bypass of Nairn is included in the transport enhancement programme, as set out in the Shared Policy Agreement, and we continue to progress the preparation stages of the scheme with a view to making the Orders.
- The A96 Dualling Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass) scheme is separate from the wider A96 review process which is currently being undertaken as it has already received Ministerial consent following a Public Local Inquiry.

- Delivery of the scheme can only commence if approved under the relevant statutory authorisation process and thereafter a timetable for progress can be set in line with available budgets.

Extract from briefing sent to the Minister for Transport dated 24 February 2023

- The Scottish Government is committed to the north and north east of Scotland, including improving the A96 corridor. The current plan is to fully dual the A96 route between Inverness and Aberdeen, however as part of the Co-operation Agreement, Ministers have agreed to conduct a transparent, evidence-based review of the programme.
- An opportunity for members along the A96 corridor to hear directly from the Review's project team on the Corridor Review's findings to date, the consultation responses and the next steps in the review process.

A96 Corridor Review Top Lines:

- The Scottish Government remains committed to the north and north east of Scotland, including improving the A96 corridor. We will take forward an enhancements programme on the A96 corridor that improves connectivity between surrounding towns, tackles congestion and addresses safety and environmental issues.
- The current plan is to fully dual the A96 route between Inverness and Aberdeen; however, we are conducting a transparent, evidence-based review of the programme which is underway. This is a sensible good governance for major investment of this kind.
- We have undertaken substantial consultation and development work on this important programme which has been vital to inform our understanding of the significant undertaking of improving this key corridor.
- We know that dualling the entire A96 would involve substantial offline "new" roads and in light of a range of changing policies including a focus on making better use of our assets and climate change we are undertaking this review.
- Appropriate, effective stakeholder and public engagement is being carried out at key stages during the review process. Given the effects of the climate emergency and Covid-19 on travel, the views of residents, stakeholders and businesses obtained is vital to help us understand any impacts and associated changes to travel patterns along the corridor.
- A four week public consultation survey, undertaken as a key element of the review, concluded on 10 June 2022 and generated unprecedented interest with almost 4,700 responses received and over 11,000 suggested options.
- Given the sheer volume of responses received and the high number of options this generated, it has rightly taken Transport Scotland more time than originally anticipated to examine and appraise all of these options, however the first part of the review, a report on the Public Consultation and the Initial Appraisal: The Case for Change, was published on 22 December 2022.

- Transport Scotland is now pushing forward with the next phase of further detailed work to inform the remaining stages of the Review.
- These include a robust appraisal of the 16 retained options alongside a Climate Compatibility Assessment, with outcomes expected to be announced in the first half of 2023 for final public consultation, before a final decision can be reached.
- To be clear, we remain committed to making much needed improvements to the A96 and the substantial development work undertaken will not go to waste but will rather be vital to inform the evidence-based review.

A96 Dualling Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn bypass) scheme Lines

- We will continue to take forward the preparation stages for dualling the A96 from Inverness to Nairn as well as a bypass of Nairn. Dualling from Inverness to Nairn as well as a bypass of Nairn is included in the transport enhancement programme, as set out in the Bute House Agreement, and we continue to progress the preparation stages of the scheme with a view to making the Orders in the coming weeks.
- The A96 Dualling Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass) scheme is separate from the wider A96 review process which is currently being undertaken as it has already received Ministerial consent following a Public Local Inquiry.
- Delivery of the scheme can only commence if approved under the relevant statutory authorisation process and thereafter a timetable for progress can be set in line with available budgets.

A96 Dualling Programme

Background and current status

The A96 is the trunk road linking the cities of Inverness and Aberdeen passing through various towns and villages along the route. The route is approximately 160km long, of which 138km is currently single carriageway.

On 6 December 2011, the then Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment launched the Infrastructure Investment Plan (IIP) which provides an overview of the Scottish Government’s plans for infrastructure investment over the coming decades. Contained within the document was a commitment to complete the dualling of the A96 between Inverness and Aberdeen.

For design and assessment purposes the dualling programme has been split into four sections. The four sections and their status are provided in the table below:

Section	Status
Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Following a Public Local Inquiry into objections made to the scheme and consideration of the Reporters’ Report, Ministerial decision to proceed with the Scheme received 16 February 2021. • Progressing with preparation of documentation to allow publication of Made Orders and completion of statutory process.
Hardmuir to Fochabers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development and assessment of the preferred option progressed. • Future progress is dependent on the outcome of the A96 Corridor Review.
East of Fochabers to East of Huntly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design development still to commence for this section. • Future progress is dependent on the outcome of the A96 Corridor Review.
East of Huntly to Aberdeen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The preferred option was announced on 21 December 2020. • Future progress is dependent on the outcome of the A96 Corridor Review.

In August 2021 the Scottish Government and Scottish Green Party Parliamentary Group entered into a Co-operation Agreement and shared policy programme (the Bute House Agreement).

In relation to the A96, the Bute House Agreement states that “...the Scottish Government will take forward a transport enhancements programme on the A96 corridor that improves connectivity between surrounding towns, tackles congestion and addresses safety and environmental issues. This will include:

- dualling from Inverness to Nairn;

- bypassing of Nairn, Keith, Elgin and Inverurie accompanied by measures to remove through traffic from the by-passed town centres;
- targeted road safety improvements where needed, for example between Fochabers and Huntly and Inverurie to Aberdeen; and
- the development of an A96 “Electric Highway”...

The Agreement goes on to state that “...the current plan is to fully dual the A96 route between Inverness and Aberdeen; however, a transparent, evidence-based review will be conducted to include a climate compatibility assessment to assess direct and indirect impacts on the climate and the environment. This will report by the end of 2022...”

The review is to be undertaken in accordance with the Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance (STAG). The STAG appraisal stages are:

- Initial Appraisal: Case for Change (outcome published in December 2022);
- Preliminary Options Appraisal;
- Detailed Options Appraisal; and
- Post Appraisal.

The review is considering the transport problems and opportunities on the A96 corridor, changing policy context and other relevant considerations such as development aspirations for the corridor and surrounding area. In addition, the review will include:

- Climate Compatibility Assessment;
- Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA); and
- Strategic Business Case.

A96 Dualling Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass)

The A96 Dualling Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass) scheme, which runs from Inverness to Hardmuir is separate from the wider A96 review process which is currently being undertaken.

Progress continues on the preparation stages of the scheme with a view to completing the statutory process. This includes the significant work required to prepare for publication of made Orders, including the Compulsory Purchase Order, in the coming weeks. Subject to no legal challenge being received, the Scottish Ministers will then have the relevant powers to acquire the land necessary to construct the scheme.

Delivery of the scheme can only commence if approved under the relevant statutory procedures and thereafter a timetable for progress can be set in line with available budgets.

Future Progress (including funding and procurement)

Future progress including consideration of procurement options to deliver the A96 Dualling Programme will be subject to the outcome of the A96 Corridor Review and dependent on subsequent completion of relevant statutory procedures.

With respect to the Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass) scheme specifically, exact timescales for the next stages are difficult to estimate at this stage because the necessary procedural steps need to be completed to finalise the acquisition of land and take the powers required to build the scheme. These steps come with them a right of legal challenge.

Subject to finalisation of the statutory processes for the scheme it is hoped that more certainty over timescales will be able to be provided. At that stage, the timetable for progress will be set in line with the chosen procurement strategy and available budgets.

As budgets across government are extremely constrained difficult choices may have to be made by Ministers in terms of progressing with (or prioritising) projects that come from the evidenced based review.

A96 Corridor Review Public Consultation Update

Public Consultation Summary

The four week public consultation for the A96 Corridor Review went live on 12 May 2022. The consultation comprised an online Story Map and accompanying digital survey which asked respondents to identify the key problems and opportunities associated with using the transport corridor, and to list their top five options they considered would address the problems and/or opportunities they identified.

The consultation experienced an unprecedented level of engagement from the public, with 4,594 responses to the survey received in the four week period. In addition, a further 93 email responses were received in this period and the Story Map was viewed over 6,000 times. To set this in context, the STPR2 National Survey which covered transport issues Scotland-wide ran for 12 weeks and received 3,025 responses. The level of response to the A96 Corridor Review online survey has far exceeded expectations. Whilst this level of engagement is welcomed, and clearly evidences the investment of the public in the A96 corridor, the volume of detailed feedback received presents the project team with significant programme challenges.

The results of the public consultation show the majority of respondents (**96%**) stated that **car is their primary mode of travel** on the A96 corridor. Public transport is a much less prevalent mode of transport amongst respondents, with **5%** using it on a daily or weekly basis. Just under half (**46%**) indicated that they do not use public transport within the A96 corridor.

On **road safety**, **58%** of respondents stated that they felt very unsafe or somewhat unsafe when using the road network, compared to **21%** who said they felt very safe or somewhat safe. The three top safety concerns raised by respondents were: dangerous overtaking, lack of overtaking opportunities and indicating the road is unsafe in general.

When asked about the current **A96 road network**, the majority of respondents expressed dissatisfaction. Around **88%** of respondents were very dissatisfied or dissatisfied with the availability of safe overtaking opportunities, with **5%** expressing satisfaction and **0%** being very satisfied. **79%** of respondents were very dissatisfied and dissatisfied with levels of traffic congestion, with **9%** saying they were very satisfied or satisfied. **76%** of respondents were very dissatisfied or dissatisfied with the length of journey times compared to **12%** who were very satisfied or satisfied.

Regarding **walking and wheeling**, the availability of safe infrastructure had the highest levels of dissatisfaction amongst respondents, with **43%** being very dissatisfied or dissatisfied and **8%** being either very satisfied or satisfied. The ability to walk/wheel safely had the joint highest level of dissatisfaction, with **43%** of respondents also being very dissatisfied or dissatisfied, and **7%** either very satisfied or satisfied. When asked about walking/wheeling routes, **41%** selected either very dissatisfied or dissatisfied, and **6%** either very satisfied or satisfied.

In relation to the **cycling network**, the ability to cycle safely had the highest level of dissatisfaction with **50%** selecting either very dissatisfied or dissatisfied and **4%** selecting very satisfied or satisfied. Regarding the availability of cycling infrastructure, **46%** selected either very dissatisfied or dissatisfied, with **5%** very satisfied or satisfied. When asked about cycling routes and accessibility to cycling routes, **45%** selected either very dissatisfied or dissatisfied and **4%** were very satisfied or satisfied.

Regarding the **bus network and travel**, **50%** of respondents were very dissatisfied or dissatisfied with journey times relative to cars/vans, compared to **5%** who were very satisfied or satisfied. With regards to accessibility to key services, **38%** of respondents were very dissatisfied or dissatisfied compared to **8%** who were either very satisfied or satisfied. The same was true of frequency of services, with **37%** of respondents stating they were very dissatisfied or dissatisfied compared to **8%** who were either very satisfied or satisfied.

In relation to the **rail network**, **63%** were either very dissatisfied or dissatisfied with the cost of travel, compared to **7%** who were either very satisfied or satisfied. The same was true of the frequency of train services, with **44%** very dissatisfied or dissatisfied, compared to **18%** that selected very satisfied or satisfied. In relation to the ability to access key services along the rail network, **34%** selected either very dissatisfied or dissatisfied compared to **18%** who chose either very satisfied or satisfied.

Regarding **wider transport issues**, respondents were most dissatisfied with the integration between different methods of transport with **53%** being very dissatisfied or dissatisfied with this and only **4%** selecting either very satisfied or satisfied. In relation to connectivity to other parts of Scotland, **51%** selected either very dissatisfied or dissatisfied, with **23%** selecting either very satisfied or satisfied. When asked about the adaptability of transport infrastructure to the effects of climate change, **49%** selected either very dissatisfied or dissatisfied, while **9%** were either very satisfied or satisfied with this aspect of the current corridor.

The most frequently noted **suggestions** to deal with road safety, raised by **49%** of respondents, were on general road dualling, full dualling of the road, or dualling between Nairn to Aberdeen to address safety issues. A smaller percentage of respondents, (**12%**) suggested providing safer overtaking opportunities.

Figure 1 shows the top five road safety suggestions put forward by respondents. It is worth noting that for the bar charts in this section of the summary, the total values do not add up to 100% as only the top five or ten categories have been displayed. Similarly, as these were open-ended questions, some respondents detailed multiple suggestions or priorities in their answers.

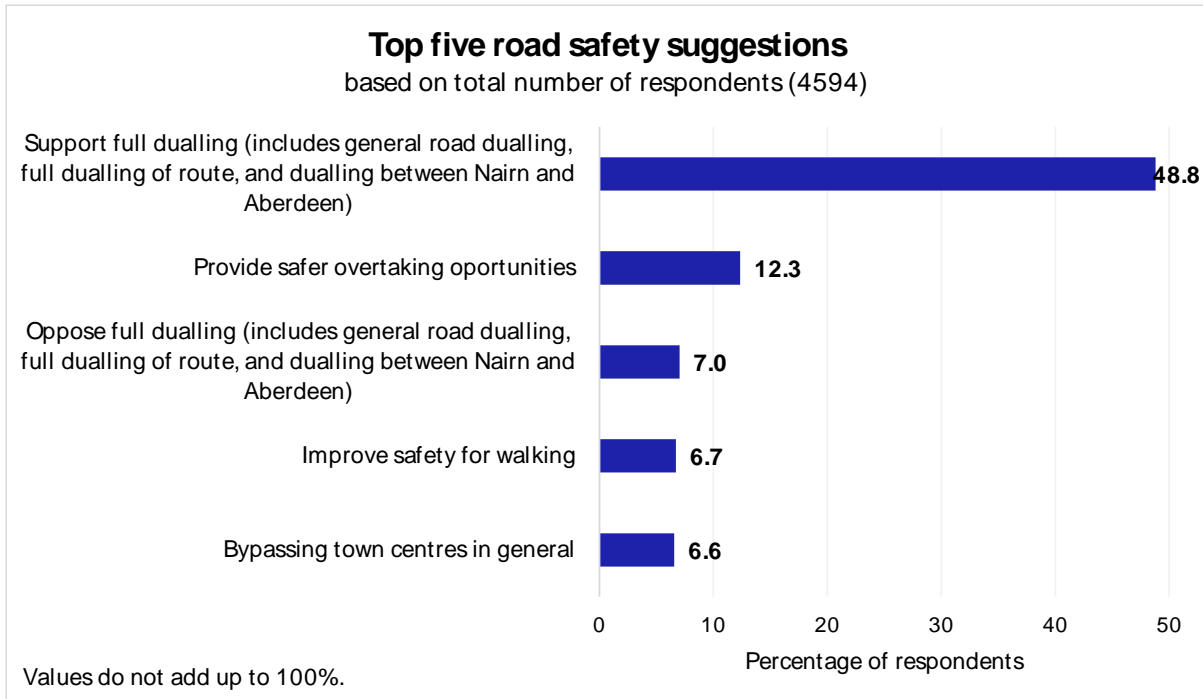


Figure 1: Top five road safety suggestions

The most frequently raised **priority** for the A96 Corridor Review was dualling the route, raised by **55%** of respondents. Improving road safety was raised by **50%** of respondents, which included general safety concerns as well as safety of driving, cycling and walking. **30%** of respondents raised improving rail services, including train connections, cost, and comfort of travel, and **30%** of respondents raised bypassing town centres. Other **priorities** by respondents included improvements to bus services which was raised by **24%** of respondents; **24%** of respondents also suggested general public transport improvements (including public transport connectivity and integration); and better road maintenance (including infrastructure, surface, signage etc) which was raised by **22%**. **12%** of respondents opposed full or partial dualling. **Error! Reference source not found.** shows the top ten priorities of all transport user groups.

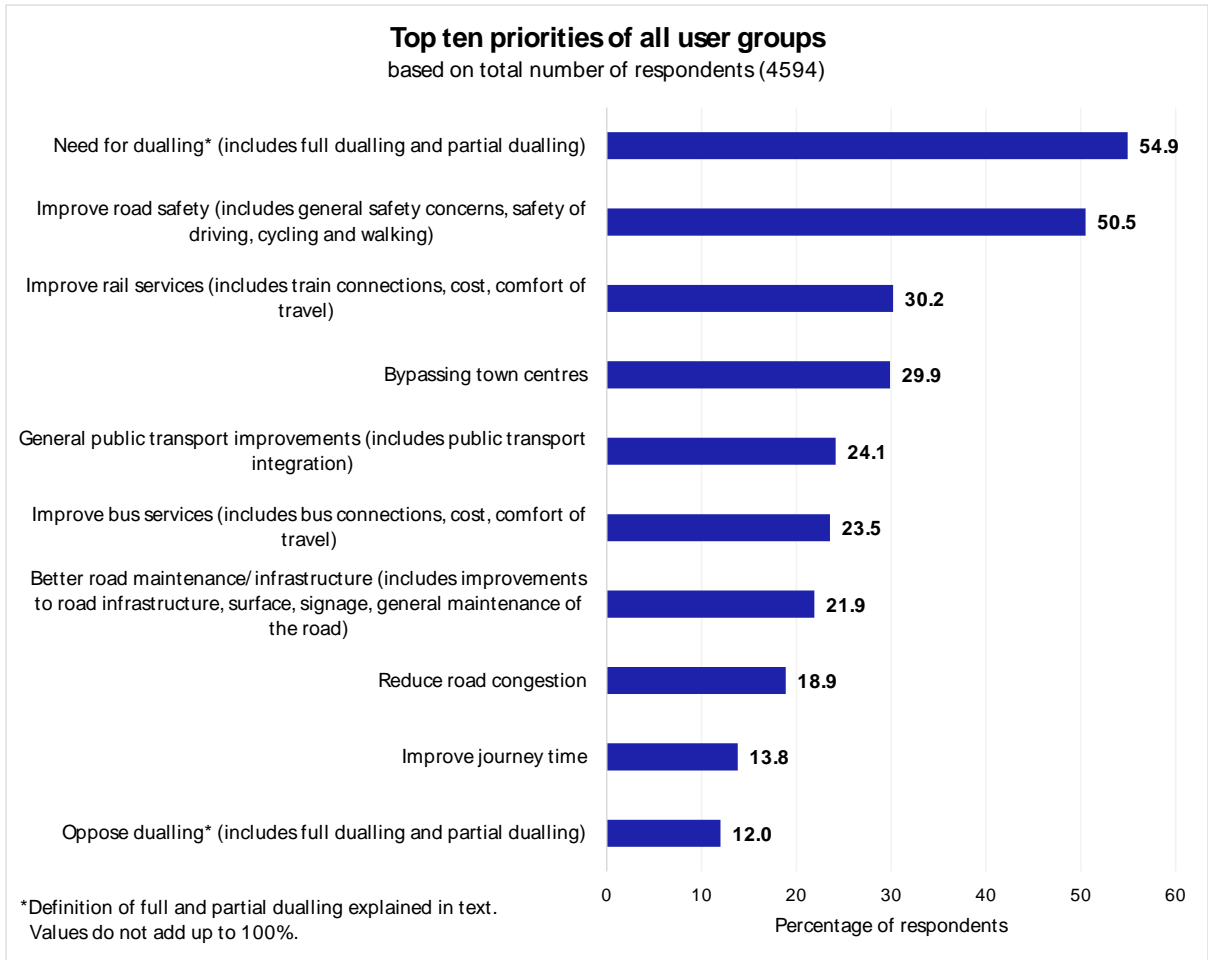


Figure 2: Top ten priorities of all transport user groups

Respondents were also asked to provide up to five suggestions which could be implemented to improve travel across the A96 corridor. The most frequently raised **suggestions** for the A96 Corridor was the need for dualling raised by **55%** of respondents. Improving road safety was suggested by **30%** of respondents and improving rail services was raised by **25%** of respondents. Other suggestions included bypassing town centres raised by **22%**, improving bus connections raised by **21%**, and general public transport improvements raised by **20%**. **Error! Reference source not found.** shows the top ten suggestions of all transport user groups.

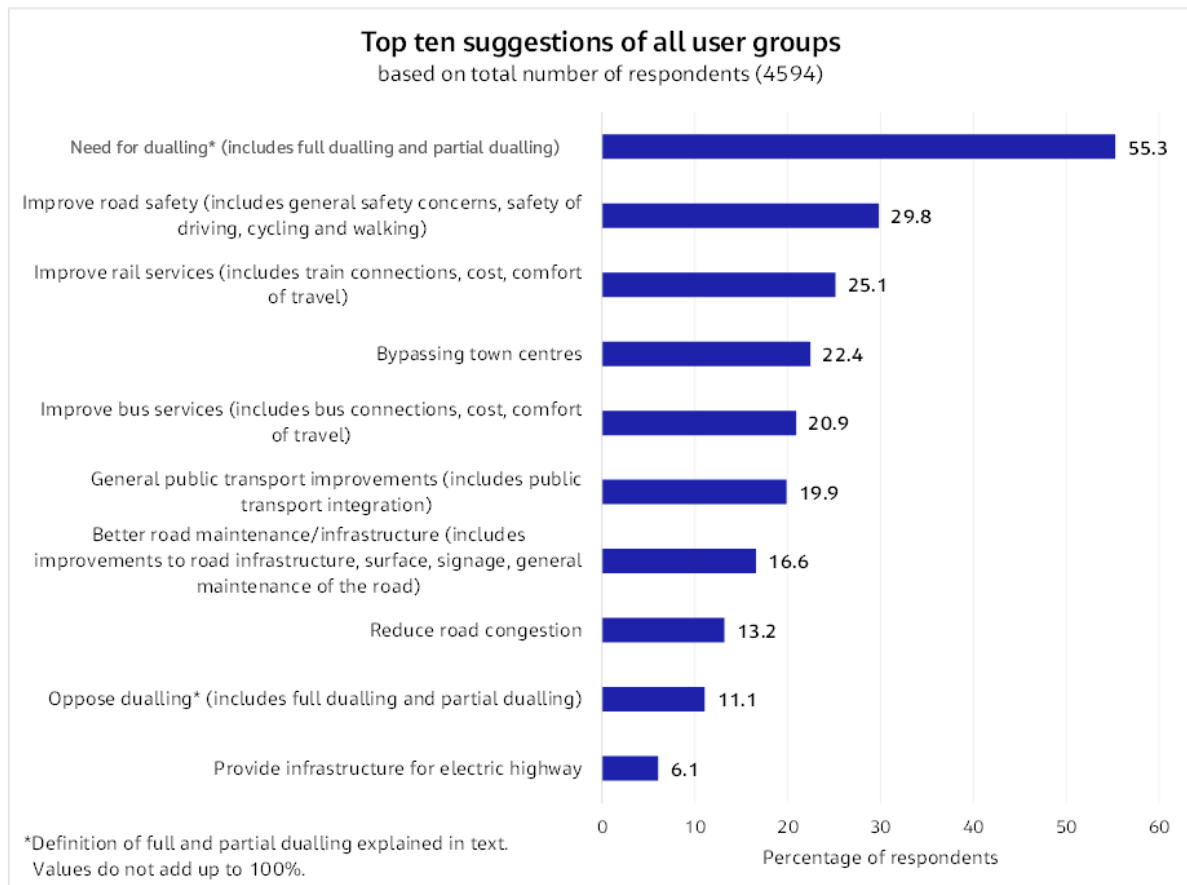


Figure 3: Top ten suggestions of all transport user groups

STAG - Initial Appraisal: The Case for Change Summary

The Initial Appraisal: The Case for Change report presents details of the policy and geographic, socio-economic and environmental context for the study area. It also includes the identification and definition of the transport related problems and opportunities in the transport corridor, the development of the **Transport Planning Objectives** and the approach to **option generation and sifting**, before presenting the short list of options that have been retained to progress to the next stages of appraisal. Further details of the key problems and opportunities are outlined below.

Problems and Opportunities

A wide range of data sources have been used to identify the transport related problems and opportunities in the region. Analysis of the data has also enabled problems and opportunities identified through stakeholder engagement to be evidenced to understand the real and perceived nature of feedback and comments raised. Sources of analysis have included primary data such as Scotland's Census 2011, Scottish Household Survey (SHS), Business Register and Employment Survey (BRES) and accident data, as well as data gathered from recent reports and studies relevant to the transport corridor including from the existing A96 Dualling commissions. The feedback from public consultation survey has also been taken into account. The data has been interrogated and collated making use of GIS tools and through the creation of data dashboards.

In summary, the key problems identified were:

- **Socio-Economic and Location of Services:** Employment and key services tend to be focused in Aberdeen, Inverness and Elgin, and there is a significant challenge to limit the amount of travel by unsustainable modes.
- **Public Transport Connectivity:** Evidence suggests that large sections of the population in the transport appraisal study area cannot access key services such as hospitals with emergency departments, or higher education within two hours by public transport.
- **Competitiveness of Public Transport with Other Modes:** Bus journey times are not competitive and the cost of rail and long-distance bus fares are also high compared to the equivalent car fuel costs. Public consultation has also indicated that the perception of delay and a lack of multi-modal integration, combined with the perceived high cost of fares, particularly for rail, makes public transport in the study area unattractive to users.
- **Travel Choice and Behaviour:** The level of car ownership in the transport appraisal study area is generally higher than the Scottish average and there appears to be a reliance on private vehicles for travel.
- **Safety and Resilience:** Analysis of accident data, suggests that selected rural and urban sections of the A96 trunk road show a Killed or Seriously Injured (KSI) accident rate higher than the national average. The A96 is affected by closures and delays with recommended diversion routes of up to

65 km long, and the rail network also demonstrates a certain level of unreliability.

- **Health and Environment:** Transport is a major contributor to CO₂ emissions, and the route of the A96 puts a relatively large proportion of the population near the source of transport emissions and noise.

In summary, the **key opportunities identified** were:

- **Sustainable Economic Growth:** There is an opportunity to support and enhance sustainable economic growth through increasing sustainable choices for walking and cycling, including for tourism.
- **Safety, Health and Environmental Impacts of Travel:** There is the opportunity to improve safety by reducing the shorter journeys currently made by private car in the towns along the corridor, and to improve health and environmental impacts by the transition to electric vehicles and other alternative fuels, including hydrogen.
- **Travel Choice and Behaviour:** Travel choices throughout the transport appraisal study area would be increased through increasing sustainable travel options and by maximising technology to help seamlessly integrate public transport modes and provide better information systems, thereby enhancing the travel experience.

Transport Planning Objectives (TPOs)

TPOs are of central importance to the STAG process and should align with the problems and opportunities identified by the A96 Corridor Review. The development of the TPOs has been based on the comprehensive and evidenced understanding of the problems and opportunities identified for the transport corridor, including those identified during the public consultation exercise. The TPOs have been developed to closely align with those set at the national level in the second Strategic Transport Projects Review (STPR2) and a series of sub-objectives have been developed with a particular focus on the specific evidence-based problems and opportunities for the corridor. The finalised A96 Corridor Review TPOs and sub-objectives are outlined below.

A96 Corridor Review Transport Planning Objectives (TPOs)	A96 Corridor Review Sub-Objectives
TPO 1 – A sustainable strategic transport corridor that contributes to the Scottish Government’s net zero emissions target.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Reduce transport related emissions through a shift to more sustainable modes of transport.</i> • <i>Increase the active travel mode share for shorter everyday journeys.</i>
TPO 2 – An inclusive strategic transport corridor that improves the accessibility of public transport in rural areas for access to healthcare, employment and education.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Increase public transport mode share by improving connections between sustainable modes of transport.</i> • <i>Reduce the reliance on private car for access to healthcare, employment and education.</i>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Improve mobility and inclusion, recognising the specific needs of disadvantaged and vulnerable users.</i>
TPO 3 – A coherent strategic transport corridor that enhances communities as places, supporting health, wellbeing and the environment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Reduce demand for unsustainable travel by enhancing place-making within settlements along the A96.</i> • <i>Increase active travel mode share for both shorter and longer distance journeys.</i> • <i>Reduce real and perceived severance caused by the strategic transport network both between and within communities.</i> • <i>Protect or enhance the natural environment and heritage.</i>
TPO 4 – An integrated strategic transport system that contributes towards sustainable inclusive growth throughout the corridor and beyond.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Increase sustainable access to labour markets and key centres for employment, education and training.</i> • <i>Increase the mode share of freight by sustainable modes.</i> • <i>Increase competitiveness of key sectors by improving journey time reliability for commercial transport.</i>
TPO 5 – A reliable and resilient strategic transport system that is safe for users.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Reduce the accident rates and severity of transport related casualties in line with reduction targets.</i> • <i>Improve resilience to disruption (from climate change events and maintenance activities) through adaptation of the corridor's trunk road and rail infrastructure.</i>

Option Generation and Sifting

The A96 Corridor Review is multi-modal such that it covers a range of transport assets. A robust method to generate, 'clean' and sift options; ensuring a broad range of options across all modes are considered has been developed as part of the STAG Initial Appraisal: The Case for Change. This comprised the following steps:

Generation of Long List of Initial 'Options' - based on a range of sources, including a review of options identified from recent local and regional studies, stakeholder engagement and public consultation, and a project team workshop. Options were identified across all modes and encapsulate many of the main themes identified from the problems and opportunities. This resulted in a total of **11,091** suggested options.

Option 'Cleaning' – the suggested options included a number that either required further definition, were duplicated options or were options that were broadly similar. As such, an exercise was undertaken to 'clean' the long list. Following the option cleaning exercise, 227 options were retained in the long list of interventions to be sifted.

Option Sifting – the approach to sifting was developed to drive consistency in the sifting of options across modes and was based on to the STPR2 methodology. The 227 remaining options were processed and sifted out based on the following criteria:

- Considered as Out of Scope
- Do not address the Problems and/or Opportunities identified
- Concerns over deliverability
- The option is already being progressed elsewhere, including through STPR2 at the national level
- The problems and/or opportunities are better addressed through another option
- Rationalised with another, similar option

For the A96 Corridor Review, 211 options were sifted out or rationalised at this stage.

Following the sifting exercise, **16 options** specific to the A96 Corridor Review remain in the process. Table 1 lists the options that have been retained to progress to the next stages of appraisal. The retained options cover Active Travel, Bus, Freight, Multimodal, Public Transport, Rail and Roads (**which includes full dualling**).

Table 1: List of Retained Options

Mode of Transport	Option
Active Travel	Active Communities
Active Travel	Active Connections
Bus	Bus Priority Measures and Park & Ride
Freight	Introduce Rail Freight Terminals
Multimodal	Improved Public Transport Passenger Interchange Facilities
Multimodal	Active Travel Hubs
Public Transport	Investment in Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) and Mobility as a Service (MaaS)
Rail	Linespeed, Passenger and Freight capacity improvements on the Aberdeen to Inverness rail line
Rail	Improved parking provision at Rail Stations
Road	A96 Full Dualling (plus targeted Trunk Road Improvements)
Road	Targeted road safety improvements (which includes consideration of Partial Dualling)
Road	Elgin Bypass*
Road	Keith Bypass*
Road	Inverurie Bypass*
Road	Forres Bypass*
Technology	A96 Electric Corridor

*The category of road has not been defined at this stage.

Extract from Background Note from Parliamentary Question S6O-01979 dated 8 March 2023

LINES TO TAKE - A96 CORRIDOR

The Scottish Government remains committed to the north and north east of Scotland, including improving the A96 corridor.

- We will take forward an enhancements programme on the A96 corridor that improves connectivity between surrounding towns, tackles congestion and addresses safety and environmental issues.
- The current plan is to fully dual the A96 route between Inverness and Aberdeen, however, we are conducting a transparent, evidence-based review of the programme which is well underway.
- This is sensible good governance for major investment of this kind.

We published the Public Consultation and Initial Appraisal reports on the Corridor Review on 22 December 2022.

- Consultation with local communities is an essential part of the A96 Corridor Review. The views of residents, stakeholders, and businesses obtained during this consultation exercise will be vital to help us understand any impacts and associated changes to travel patterns along the corridor.
- A four week public consultation survey which concluded on 10 June 2022 received unprecedented interest with nearly 4,600 responses generating more than 11,000 suggestions for the route.
- Given the sheer volume of responses received and the high number of options this generated, it has rightly taken Transport Scotland more time than originally anticipated to examine and appraise all of these options.
- We are now pushing forward with the next phase of further detailed work to inform the remaining stages of the Review.
- These include a robust appraisal of the 16 retained options alongside a Climate Compatibility Assessment, with outcomes expected to be announced in the first half of 2023 for final public consultation, before a final decision can be reached.
- To be clear, we remain committed to making much needed improvements to the A96 and the substantial development work undertaken will not go to waste but will rather be vital to inform the evidence-based review.

A roundtable meeting for North and North East MSPs to hear directly from the Review's project team took place on 28 Feb.

- I am grateful to Gillian Martin for convening the meeting in Parliament.
- The purpose of the meeting being to allow the consultants, Jacobs Aecom, to update members on the outcome of the A96 corridor review.
- It was a timely opportunity for MSPs to query the options presented and to fully provide them with an understanding of the Review's findings to date, the consultation responses and the next steps in the Review process.

A96 DUALLING INVERNESS TO NAIRN (INCLUDING NAIRN BYPASS) – LINES TO TAKE

We continue to take forward the preparation stages for dualling the A96 from Inverness to Nairn as well as a bypass of Nairn.

- The A96 Dualling Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass) scheme, which runs from Inverness to Hardmuir is separate from the wider A96 review process which is currently being undertaken as it has already received Ministerial consent following a Public Local Inquiry.
- Transport Scotland continues to progress the preparation stages of the scheme with a view to completing the statutory process. This includes the significant work required to prepare for publication of made Orders, including the Compulsory Purchase Order, in the coming weeks.
- Subject to no legal challenge being received, the Scottish Ministers will then have the relevant powers to acquire the land necessary to construct the scheme.
- Delivery of the scheme can only commence if approved under the relevant statutory procedures and thereafter a timetable for progress can be set in line with available budgets.

Extract from Background Note from Parliamentary Question S6O-01981 dated 9 March 2023

A96 Corridor Review

I recognise that consultation with local communities is essential to the Review, and it is vital that the views of residents, stakeholders and businesses help us understand impacts and changes to travel patterns along the corridor.

- A roundtable meeting for North and North East MSPs to hear directly from the Review's project team took place on 28 February.
- Appropriate, effective stakeholder and public engagement is being carried out at key stages during the review process. A four week public consultation survey, undertaken as a key element of the review, concluded on 10 June 2022 generated unprecedented interest with almost 4,700 responses received and over 11,000 suggested options.
- The Public Consultation and Initial Appraisal reports on the Corridor Review were published on 22 December 2022.
- Given the high volume of responses and options this generated, it has rightly taken more time than originally anticipated to examine and appraise all of these options.
- Further detailed work to inform the remaining stages of the Review is being progressed, including a robust appraisal of the 16 retained options alongside a Climate Compatibility Assessment, with outcomes expected to be announced in the first half of 2023 for final consultation, before a final decision can be reached.
- To be clear, I remain committed to making much needed improvements to the A96 and the substantial development work undertaken will not go to waste but will rather be vital to inform the evidence-based review.

Extract from briefing sent to the Minister for Transport dated 10 March 2023

A96 Dualling

- The Scottish Government remains committed to the north and north east of Scotland, including improving the A96 corridor.
- We will take forward an enhancements programme on the A96 corridor that improves connectivity between surrounding towns, tackles congestion and addresses safety and environmental issues.
- The plan is to fully dual the A96 route between Inverness and Aberdeen; however, we are conducting a transparent, evidence-based review of the programme which is underway.
- A four week public consultation survey which concluded on 10 June 2022 received unprecedented interest with nearly 4,600 responses generating more than 11,000 suggestions for the route.
- Given the sheer volume of responses received and the high number of options generated, it has rightly taken more time than originally anticipated to examine and appraise all options.
- We are now pushing forward with the next phase of further detailed work to inform the remaining stages of the Review.
- These include a robust appraisal of the 16 retained options alongside a Climate Compatibility Assessment, with outcomes expected to be announced in the first half of 2023 for final public consultation, before a final decision can be reached.
- We published the Public Consultation and Initial Appraisal reports on the Corridor Review on 22 December 2022.
- A roundtable meeting for North and North East MSPs to hear directly from the Review's project team took place on 28 Feb.
- We will continue to take forward the preparation stages for dualling the A96 from Inverness to Nairn as well as a bypass of Nairn.

A96 Dualling Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass)

- Dualling from Inverness to Nairn as well as a bypass of Nairn is included in the transport enhancement programme, as set out in the Bute House Agreement and we continue to progress the preparation stages of the scheme with a view to completing the statutory authorisation process.
- This includes the significant ongoing and intensive work required to prepare for publication of Made Orders, including the Compulsory Purchase Order.
- The A96 Dualling Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass) scheme is separate from the wider A96 review process which is currently being undertaken as it has already received Ministerial consent following a Public Local Inquiry.
- Delivery of the scheme can only commence if approved under the relevant statutory authorisation process and thereafter a timetable for progress can be set in line with available budgets.

Extract from Background Note from Parliamentary Question S6O-02023 dated 16 March 2023

LINES TO TAKE ON OTHER NE ROADS PROJECTS:

A96 Corridor Review

- The Scottish Government remains committed to the north and north east of Scotland, including improving the A96 corridor.
- We will take forward an enhancements programme on the A96 corridor that improves connectivity between surrounding towns, tackles congestion and addresses safety and environmental issues.
- The current plan is to fully dual the A96 route between Inverness and Aberdeen; however, we are conducting a transparent, evidence-based review of the programme which is underway.
- This is sensible good governance for major investment of this kind.
- We published the Public Consultation and Initial Appraisal reports on the Corridor Review on 22 December 2022.
- A roundtable meeting for North and North East MSPs, including Liam Kerr MSP, to hear directly from the Review's project team took place on 28 February 2023.
- I chaired that meeting and the project review team were able to provide a summary of the Review's findings to date, the consultation responses and the next steps in the Review process.
- We are now pushing forward with the next phase of further detailed work to inform the remaining stages of the Review.
- These include a robust appraisal of the 16 retained options alongside a Climate Compatibility Assessment, with outcomes expected to be announced in the first half of 2023 for final public consultation, before a final decision can be reached.
- To be clear, we remain committed to making much needed improvements to the A96 and the substantial development work undertaken will not go to waste but will rather be vital to inform the evidence-based review.

Extract from briefing to the Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero & Just Transition dated 24 March 2023

A96 Corridor

The previously announced Ministerial commitment is to fully dual the A96 route between Inverness and Aberdeen; however, as outlined in the Bute House Agreement we are conducting a transparent, evidence-based review of the programme which is underway. The Review's initial appraisal reported on 22 December 2022. Transport Scotland is now pushing forward with the next phase of further detailed work to inform the remaining stages of the Review, with outcomes expected to be announced in the first half of 2023 for final public consultation, before a final decision can be reached.

A96 Dualling Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass)

The A96 Dualling Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass) scheme is separate from the wider A96 Corridor Review as it has already received Ministerial consent following a Public Local Inquiry. It is also included in the transport enhancement programme, as set out in the Bute House Agreement.

Transport Scotland continues to progress the preparation stages of the scheme with a view to completing the statutory authorisation process. This includes the significant ongoing work required to prepare for publication of made Orders, including the Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO).

The scheme is considered as essential infrastructure by the Highland Council to support development growth in the area and also facilitates delivery of the inter-dependent A9/A96 Inshes to Smithton scheme which is a City Region Deal project. Ministers have repeatedly confirmed their intention to dual this section of the A96 both in parliament and to local MSPs (including Fergus Ewing MSP who has been a long campaigner for the scheme) and residents. The current Minister for Transport recently confirmed to Parliament that Orders would be made in the coming weeks.

To date just under £30 million has been spent on the preparatory work for the scheme, which is commensurate with the essential design and assessment work required for any similar road scheme of this size. The current published estimated total cost for the scheme is £375m - £475m at 2014 prices (excluding non-recoverable VAT).

Extract from briefing to the Minister for Transport dated 4 April 2023

- We are also committed to taking forward an enhancements programme on the A96 corridor and the current plan is to fully dual the A96 between Inverness and Aberdeen. However, as part of the cooperation agreement we have agreed to conduct a transparent, evidence-based review of the programme. We published the Public Consultation and Initial Appraisal reports on the Corridor Review on 22 December 2022.
- We are now pushing forward with the next phase of further detailed work to inform the remaining stages of the Review. These include a robust appraisal of the 16 retained options alongside a Climate Compatibility Assessment, with outcomes expected to be announced in the first half of 2023 for final public consultation, before a final decision can be reached.
- The A96 Dualling Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass) scheme is separate from the wider A96 review process which is currently being undertaken as it has already received Ministerial consent following a Public Local Inquiry.
- Delivery of the scheme can only commence if approved under the relevant statutory authorisation process and thereafter a timetable for progress can be set in line with available budgets.

Extract from briefing sent to the Minister for Transport dated 12 April 2023

A96 Dualling Programme (including A96 Corridor Review)

Background

The A96 is the trunk road linking the cities of Inverness and Aberdeen passing through various towns and villages along the route. The route is approximately 160km long, of which 138km is currently single carriageway.

On 6 December 2011, the then Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment launched the Infrastructure Investment Plan (IIP) which provided an overview of the Scottish Government's plans for infrastructure investment over the coming decades. Contained within the document was a commitment to complete the dualling of the A96 between Inverness and Aberdeen by 2030.

For design and assessment purposes the dualling programme was split into four sections, namely:

- **Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass)** – currently going through statutory process
- **Hardmuir to Fochabers** – design work paused with future progress subject to outcome of A96 Corridor Review
- **East of Fochabers to East of Huntly** – design work yet to get underway – future progress subject to outcome of A96 Corridor Review
- **East of Huntly to Aberdeen** – design work paused with future progress subject to outcome of A96 Corridor Review



As part of the Cooperation Agreement with the Scottish Green Party, concluded on 30 August 2021, it was confirmed that the Scottish Government will take forward a transport enhancements programme on the corridor that improves connectivity

between surrounding towns, tackles congestion and addresses safety and environmental issues. The current plan is to fully dual the A96 route between Inverness and Aberdeen, however, it has been agreed to conduct a transparent evidence-based review which is well underway.

The A96 Corridor Review is being undertaken in accordance with the Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance (STAG). Following the publication of the Initial Appraisal: Case for Change report on 22 December 2022, we are progressing the next phase of further detailed work to inform the remaining stages of the Review. This includes a robust appraisal of the 16 retained options alongside a Climate Compatibility Assessment, with outcomes expected to be announced in the first half of 2023 for final public consultation, before a final decision can be reached.

On the Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass) section, this is separate from the wider A96 review process which is currently being undertaken as it has already received Ministerial (19 February 2021) consent following a Public Local Inquiry. The next stage of the process will be to make the Orders to secure the powers required to acquire the land and rights necessary for construction.

To date we have spent just under £30 million on the preparatory work on the Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass) scheme, which is commensurate with the essential design and assessment work required for any similar road scheme of this size.

Delivery of the scheme can only commence if approved under the relevant statutory authorisation process and thereafter a timetable for progress can be set in line with available budgets.

Prior to the Shared Policy Agreement, development and assessment work on the Hardmuir to Fochabers section was well underway and draft Orders had expected to be published by end 2021/22. Development and assessment work was also underway on the East of Huntly to Aberdeen section with a preferred route option announced on 21 December 2020. Development work on these two sections has been paused since the publication for the Shared Policy Agreement with future progress subject to the outcome of A96 Corridor Review.

At this early stage of development it is difficult to give an accurate estimate of the cost of the A96 Dualling programme, however it is estimated to be in the region of £3 billion (at 2014 prices). More detailed estimates for each section of the programme are subject to progression of relevant stages of the design and preparation process.

Hot issues/top lines

Hot Issues:

A96 Corridor Review

As part of the Cooperation Agreement with the Scottish Green Party it was agreed to conduct a transparent, evidence-based review of the programme which is well

underway. The Scottish National Party and Scottish Green Party have and will maintain distinct positions on the dualling of the A96.

It is expected that the outcome of the A96 Corridor Review will be available this summer. There is significant interest in the A96 with cross party support, with the exception of the Green Party, to fully dualling the A96. The former Minister for Transport attended a roundtable meeting with North and North East MSPs, chaired by Gillian Martin MSP, on 28 February 2023 during which the project review team were able to provide a summary of the Review's findings to date, the consultation responses received and the next steps in the Review process.

A96 Dualling Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass)

The current published estimated total cost for the scheme is £375m - £475m at 2014 prices (excluding non-recoverable VAT).

There has been significant public and political interest in completing this scheme, including long standing campaigner for a bypass of Nairn, Fergus Ewing MSP.

On 7 March 2023 the now First Minister was quoted in the P&J "I am absolutely committed to dualling the A96 Inverness to Nairn, including the Nairn bypass. Within my first few weeks in office, I will ensure the statutory orders are signed off to start the work on this important commitment". The article also confirms he would bring urgency and pace to the review of options being considered for the dualling of the rest of the A96.

Top Lines:

- The Scottish Government is committed to the north and east of Scotland, including improving the A96 corridor.
- The current plan is to fully dual the A96 route between Inverness and Aberdeen, however as part of the Green Party Co-operation Agreement Ministers have agreed to conduct a transparent, evidence-based review of the programme.
- We know that dualling the entire A96 would involve substantial offline "new" roads and in light of a range of changing policies including a focus on making better use of our assets and climate change we are undertaking this review.
- This sensible good governance for major investment of this kind.
- As part of the Co-operation agreement, the Scottish Government will take forward a transport enhancements programme on the A96 corridor that improves connectivity between surrounding towns, tackles congestion and addresses safety and environmental issues.
- A four week public consultation survey which concluded on 10 June 2022 received unprecedented interest with nearly 4,600 responses generating more than 11,000 suggestions for the route.
- Given the sheer volume of responses received and the high number of options this generated, it has rightly taken more time than originally anticipated to examine and appraise all of these options.
- We published the Public Consultation and Initial Appraisal reports on the Corridor Review on 22 December 2022.

- We are now pushing forward with the next phase of further detailed work to inform the remaining stages of the Review.
- These include a robust appraisal of the 16 retained options alongside a Climate Compatibility Assessment, with outcomes expected to be announced in the first half of 2023 for final public consultation, before a final decision can be reached.
- Given the effects of the climate emergency and Covid-19 on travel, the views of residents, stakeholders, and businesses obtained during this consultation exercise will be vital to help us understand any impacts and associated changes to travel patterns along the corridor.
- To be clear, we remain committed to making much needed improvements to the A96 and the substantial development work undertaken will not go to waste but will rather be vital to inform the evidence-based review.
- Dualling from Inverness to Nairn as well as a bypass of Nairn is included in the transport enhancement programme on the A96 corridor we will take forward, as set out in the Bute House Agreement, and we continue to progress the preparation stages of the scheme with a view to completing the statutory process.
- The A96 Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass) scheme, which runs from Inverness to Hardmuir, is separate from the wider A96 review process which is currently being undertaken.
- Delivery of each section of the programme can only commence if approved under the relevant statutory procedures and thereafter a timetable for progress can be set in line with available budgets.

Date when scheme was first proposed

On 6 December 2011, the then Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment launched the Infrastructure Investment Plan (IIP) which provides an overview of the Scottish Government's plans for infrastructure investment over the coming decades. Contained within the document was a commitment to complete the dualling of the A96 between Inverness and Aberdeen by 2030.

BCR

A96 Dualling Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass): BCR 1.2 to 1.4 (as reported in December 2016 when draft Orders were published for consultation)

An economic assessment of the interventions being considered as part of the A96 Corridor Review (including full dualling) is currently being undertaken and will be reported on its conclusion.

Latest cost estimate

A96 Dualling Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass)

Significant funding will be required from future spending reviews to take forward construction of the project. The current published estimated total cost for the scheme is £375m - £475m at 2014 prices (excluding non-recoverable VAT).

A96 Corridor Review

At this early stage of development it is difficult to give an accurate estimate of the cost of fully dualling the A96, however it is estimated to be in the region of £3 billion (at 2014 prices). Broad estimated costs for each of the interventions being considered as part of the A96 Corridor Review (including full dualling) is currently being developed and will be reported on its conclusion.

STAG Assessment Details

The Scottish Government's Strategic Transport Projects Review (STPR), published in 2008, set out a number of transport priorities for the Inverness to Aberdeen corridor. These transport priorities included upgrading of the A96 to dual carriageway between Inverness and Nairn, a bypass of Nairn and a targeted programme of measures to reduce accident severity.

In December 2011, The Agenda for Cities, "Scotland's Cities: Delivering for Scotland", was published by the Scottish Government alongside its Infrastructure Investment Plan (IIP). The IIP contained a commitment to complete the dual carriageway network between all Scotland's cities by 2030.

Following this Transport Scotland commissioned the "Inverness to Aberdeen Corridor Study", an appraisal of the 160km Inverness to Aberdeen corridor. This appraisal was undertaken in accordance with an evidenced based approach outlined in the Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance (STAG) with outcomes summarised in the A96 Dualling Inverness to Nairn Strategic Business Case (SBC) published in 2014. The SBC built upon the evidence base of the STPR and sought opportunities to address the growing economic and transport demands along the corridor.

Following the signing of the Bute House Agreement in 2021, a transparent evidence-based review of the A96 corridor is well underway and is being undertaken in accordance with the Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance (STAG) approach. The Initial Appraisal: Case for Change report was published in December 2022 and the robust further appraisal of the 16 retained options are expected to be announced in the first half of 2023 for final public consultation.

Accident stats

Please find below the Personal Injury Accidents data for A96 Inverness to Aberdeen for the years 2017 to 2022 and the map of the area covered:

Accidents by Year / Severity

Year	Fatal	Seriou s	Very Serious	Moderatel y Serious	Less Serious	Slight	TOTA L
2017	2	12	0	0	0	31	45
2018	1	11	0	0	0	24	36
2019	5	4	1	5	6	17	38

2020	3	0	2	5	2	5	17
2021	2	0	3	4	6	10	25
2022	1	0	4	4	2	11	22
TOTAL	14	27	10	18	16	98	183

Source: Transport Scotland Accident Manager Database

Notes:

Statistics for Police Scotland

Date Period: 01/01/2017 - 31/12/2022

Date Extracted: 08/04/2023



Extract from briefing sent to Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero and Just Transition dated 14 April 2023

A96 Dualling Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass) and A96 Corridor Review

- The Scottish Government remains committed to the north and north east of Scotland, including improving the A96 corridor. The current plan is to fully dual the A96 route between Inverness and Aberdeen, however, as part of the Shared Policy Agreement it has been agreed to conduct a transparent, evidence-based review of the programme which is well underway.
- Following the publication of the Initial Appraisal: Case for Change report on 22 December 2022, we are progressing with the next phase of further detailed work to inform the remaining stages of the Review. These include a robust appraisal of the 16 retained options alongside a Climate Compatibility Assessment, with outcomes expected to be announced in the first half of 2023 for final public consultation, before a final decision can be reached.
- The A96 Dualling Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass) scheme is separate from the wider A96 review process which is currently being undertaken as it has already received Ministerial consent (19 February 2021) following a Public Local Inquiry. The next stage of the process will be to make the Orders to secure the powers required to acquire the land and rights necessary for construction.
- Delivery of the scheme can only commence if approved under the relevant statutory authorisation process and thereafter a timetable for progress can be set in line with available budgets. On 7 March 2023 the now First Minister was quoted in the P&J *“I am absolutely committed to dualling the A96 Inverness to Nairn, including the Nairn bypass. Within my first few weeks in office, I will ensure the statutory orders are signed off to start the work on this important commitment”*. The article also confirms he would bring urgency and pace to the review of options being considered for the dualling of the rest of the A96.
- The current published estimated total cost for the scheme is £375m - £475m at 2014 prices (excluding non-recoverable VAT).

Extract from briefing sent to Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero & Just Transition dated 27 April 2023

- **A96 Dualling Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass) and A96 Corridor Review** - The current plan is to fully dual the A96 route between Inverness and Aberdeen, however, as part of the Shared Policy Agreement it has been agreed to conduct a transparent, evidence-based review of the programme which is well underway and outcomes expected to be announced this summer for final public consultation, before a final decision can be reached. The A96 Dualling Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass) scheme is separate from the wider A96 review process as it has already received Ministerial consent (19 February 2021) following a Public Local Inquiry. The next stage of the process will be to make the Orders.

Extract from briefing sent to the Deputy First Minister dated 15 May 2023

A96 Corridor

The Scottish Government remains committed to the north and north east of Scotland, including improving the A96 corridor.

- We will take forward an enhancements programme on the A96 corridor that improves connectivity between surrounding towns, tackles congestion and addresses safety and environmental issues.
- The current plan is to fully dual the A96 route between Inverness and Aberdeen; however, we are conducting a transparent, evidence-based review of the programme which is well underway.
- This is sensible good governance for major investment of this kind.
- Following publication of the Initial Appraisal report on 22 December 2022, we are now pushing forward with the next phase of further detailed work to inform the remaining stages of the Review, with outcomes expected to be announced this summer for final public consultation, before a final decision can be reached.

We will continue to take forward the preparation stages for dualling the A96 from Inverness to Nairn as well as a bypass of Nairn.

- The A96 Dualling Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass) scheme is separate from the wider A96 review process which is currently being undertaken as it has already received Ministerial consent following a Public Local Inquiry.
- We continue to progress the preparation stages of the scheme with a view to completing the statutory authorisation process.
- This includes the significant ongoing and intensive work required to prepare for publication of Made Orders, including the Compulsory Purchase Order.
- Delivery of the scheme can only commence if approved under the relevant statutory authorisation process and thereafter a timetable for progress can be set in line with available budgets.

Extract from briefing sent to the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Net Zero and Just Transition dated 17 May 2023

A96 CORRIDOR

Top Lines

- The Scottish Government remains committed to the north and north east of Scotland, including improving the A96 corridor.
- We will take forward a transport enhancements programme on the A96 corridor that improves connectivity between surrounding towns, tackles congestion and addresses safety and environmental issues.
- The current plan is to fully dual the A96 route between Inverness and Aberdeen, however, we are undertaking a transparent, evidence-based review of the programme which is well underway.
- This is sensible good governance for major investment of this kind.
- A four week public consultation survey which concluded on 10 June 2022 received unprecedented interest with nearly 4,600 responses generating more than 11,000 suggestions for the route.
- Given the sheer volume of responses received and the high number of options this generated, it has rightly taken more time than originally anticipated to examine and appraise all of these options. We published the Public Consultation and Initial Appraisal reports on the Corridor Review on 22 December 2022.
- We are now pushing forward with the next phase of further detailed work to inform the remaining stages of the Review.
- These include a robust appraisal of the retained options alongside a Climate Compatibility Assessment, with outcomes expected to be announced this summer for final public consultation, before a final decision can be reached.
- We also continue to take forward the preparation stages for dualling the A96 from Inverness to Nairn as well as a bypass of Nairn with a view to completing the statutory authorisation process. This includes the significant ongoing and intensive work required to prepare for publication of Made Orders, including the Compulsory Purchase Order.
- This A96 Dualling Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass) scheme is separate from the wider A96 corridor review process which is currently being undertaken as it has already received Ministerial consent following a Public Local Inquiry.
- Delivery of the scheme can only commence if approved under the relevant statutory authorisation process and thereafter a timetable for progress can be set in line with available budgets.

Extract from briefing sent to the Deputy First Minister dated 24 May 2023

- We will take forward an enhancements programme on the A96 corridor that improves connectivity between surrounding towns, tackles congestion and addresses safety and environmental issues.
- The current plan is to fully dual the A96 route between Inverness and Aberdeen; however, we are conducting a transparent, evidence-based review of the programme which is well underway.
- This is sensible good governance for major investment of this kind.
- Dualling from Inverness to Nairn as well as a bypass of Nairn is included in the transport enhancement programme, is separate to the wider review process and we continue to progress the preparation stages of the scheme with a view to completing the statutory authorisation process.
- More information will be provided to Parliament in due course.

Extract from briefing sent to the Minister for Transport dated 30 May 2023

A96 CORRIDOR

The Scottish Government remains absolutely committed to improving the A96.

- We will take forward an enhancements programme on the A96 corridor that improves connectivity between surrounding towns, tackles congestion and addresses safety and environmental issues.
- The current plan is to fully dual the A96 route between Inverness and Aberdeen; however, we are conducting a transparent, evidence-based review of the corridor which is well underway with outcomes from this expected to be ready for consultation this summer.

We remain absolutely committed to dualling the Inverness to Nairn section including the Nairn bypass.

- We continue to progress the preparation stages of the scheme with a view to completing the statutory process for that as soon as possible. This includes the significant ongoing and intensive work required to prepare for publication of Made Orders, including the Compulsory Purchase Order.

Extract from briefing sent to the Minister for Transport dated 7 June 2023

A96 CORRIDOR

The Scottish Government remains absolutely committed to improving the A96.

- We will take forward an enhancements programme on the A96 corridor that improves connectivity between surrounding towns, tackles congestion and addresses safety and environmental issues.
- The current plan is to fully dual the A96 route between Inverness and Aberdeen; however, we are conducting a transparent, evidence-based review of the corridor which is well underway with outcomes from this expected to be ready for consultation this summer.

We remain absolutely committed to dualling the Inverness to Nairn section including the Nairn bypass.

- We continue to progress the preparation stages of the scheme with a view to completing the statutory process for that as soon as possible. This includes the significant ongoing and intensive work required to prepare for publication of Made Orders, including the Compulsory Purchase Order.

Extract from presentation sent to the Minister for Transport dated 7 June 2023

We are responsible for the design, procurement and delivery of:

- A96 Dualling Programme - £3bn (subject to outcome of A96 Corridor Review)

Current Key Workstreams

- Progressing preparatory work on made Orders for the A96 Dualling Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass) scheme.

Forthcoming Opportunities – Summer/Autumn 2023

- Publish made Orders on A96 Dualling Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass) scheme.
- Announce outcome of A96 Corridor Review for final public consultation.

Extract from briefing sent to the Minister for Transport dated 7 June 2023

A96 CORRIDOR

- The Scottish Government remains absolutely committed to the north and north east of Scotland, including improving the A96 corridor.
- We will take forward an enhancements programme on the A96 corridor that improves connectivity between surrounding towns, tackles congestion and addresses safety and environmental issues.
- The current plan is to fully dual the A96 route between Inverness and Aberdeen; however, we are conducting a transparent, evidence-based review of the programme which is underway.
- This is sensible good governance for major investment of this kind.
- A four week public consultation survey which concluded on 10 June 2022 received unprecedented interest with nearly 4,600 responses generating more than 11,000 suggestions for the route.
- We published the Public Consultation and Initial Appraisal reports on the Corridor Review on 22 December 2022.
- We are now pushing forward with the next phase of further detailed work to inform the remaining stages of the Review.
- These include a robust appraisal of the 16 retained options alongside a Climate Compatibility Assessment, with outcomes expected to be announced in Summer 2023 for final public consultation, before a final decision can be reached.

A96 DUALLING INVERNESS TO NAIRN INCLUDING NAIRN BYPASS

- We also continue to take forward the preparation stages for dualling the A96 from Inverness to Nairn as well as a bypass of Nairn with a view to completing the statutory authorisation process as soon as possible.
- The A96 Dualling Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass) scheme is separate from the wider A96 review process which is currently being undertaken as it has already received Ministerial consent following a Public Local Inquiry.
- Delivery of the scheme can only commence if approved under the relevant statutory authorisation process and thereafter a timetable for progress can be set in line with available budgets.

Extract from briefing sent to the Minister for Transport dated 7 June 2023

A96 CORRIDOR

Top Lines

- The Scottish Government remains absolutely committed to improving the A96.
- We will take forward an enhancements programme on the A96 corridor that improves connectivity between surrounding towns, tackles congestion and addresses safety and environmental issues.
- Improving the A96 corridor will also act as a catalyst to attract inward investment and stimulate continued sustainable growth of our business communities, especially the tourism industry along this key route.
- The current plan is to fully dual the A96 route between Inverness and Aberdeen; however, we are conducting a transparent, evidence-based review of the corridor which is well underway with outcomes from this expected to be ready for consultation this summer.
- A four week public consultation survey on the Review which concluded on 10 June 2022 received unprecedented interest with nearly 4,600 responses generating more than 11,000 suggestions for the route.
- Given the sheer volume of responses received and the high number of options this generated, it rightly took more time than originally anticipated to examine and appraise all of these options.
- We published the Public Consultation and Initial Appraisal reports on the Corridor Review on 22 December 2022.
- We are now pushing forward with the next phase of further detailed work to inform the remaining stages of the Review.
- These include a robust appraisal of the 16 retained options alongside a Climate Compatibility Assessment, with outcomes expected to be announced this summer for final public consultation, before a final decision can be reached.

A96 DUALLING INVERNESS TO NAIRN (INCLUDING NAIRN BYPASS)

- We remain absolutely committed to dualling the Inverness to Nairn section including the Nairn bypass.
- The A96 Dualling Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass) scheme is separate from the wider A96 review process which is currently being undertaken as it has already received Ministerial consent following a Public Local Inquiry.
- We continue to progress the preparation stages of the scheme with a view to completing the statutory process for that as soon as possible.
- This includes the significant ongoing and intensive work required to prepare for publication of Made Orders, including the Compulsory Purchase Order.
- Delivery of the scheme can only commence if approved under the relevant statutory authorisation process and thereafter a timetable for progress can be set in line with available budgets.

Extract from briefing sent to Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero and Just Transition dated 13 June 2023

This Government remains committed to the north and north east of Scotland, including improving the A96 corridor.

- We will take forward a transport enhancements programme on the A96 corridor that improves connectivity between surrounding towns, tackles congestion and addresses safety and environmental issues.
- The current plan is to fully dual the A96 route between Inverness and Aberdeen, however, we are undertaking a transparent, evidence-based review of the programme which is well underway.
- This is sensible good governance for major investment of this kind.
- A four week public consultation survey which concluded on 10 June 2022 received unprecedented interest with nearly 4,600 responses generating more than 11,000 suggestions for the route.
- Given the sheer volume of responses received and the high number of options this generated, it has rightly taken more time than originally anticipated to examine and appraise all of these options. We published the Public Consultation and Initial Appraisal reports on the Corridor Review on 22 December 2022.
- We are now pushing forward with the next phase of further detailed work to inform the remaining stages of the Review.
- These include a robust appraisal of the retained options alongside a Climate Compatibility Assessment, with outcomes expected to be announced this summer for final public consultation, before a final decision can be reached.
- We also continue to take forward the preparation stages for dualling the A96 from Inverness to Nairn as well as a bypass of Nairn with a view to completing the statutory authorisation process. This includes the significant ongoing and intensive work required to prepare for publication of Made Orders, including the Compulsory Purchase Order.
- This A96 Dualling Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass) scheme is separate from the wider A96 corridor review process which is currently being undertaken as it has already received Ministerial consent following a Public Local Inquiry.
- Delivery of the scheme can only commence if approved under the relevant statutory authorisation process and thereafter a timetable for progress can be set in line with available budgets.

Extract from Background Note from Parliamentary Question S6O-02358 dated 14 June 2023

A96

The Scottish Government remains absolutely committed to improving the A96.

- We will take forward an enhancements programme on the A96 corridor that improves connectivity between surrounding towns, tackles congestion and addresses safety and environmental issues.
- The current plan is to fully dual the A96 route between Inverness and Aberdeen; however, we are conducting a transparent, evidence-based review of the corridor which is well underway with outcomes from this expected to be ready for consultation this summer.
- This is sensible good governance for major investment of this kind.

We published the Public Consultation and Initial Appraisal reports on the Corridor Review on 22 December 2022.

- A four week public consultation survey which concluded on 10 June 2022 received unprecedented interest with nearly 4,600 responses generating more than 11,000 suggestions for the route.
- Given the sheer volume of responses received and the high number of options this generated, it has rightly taken more time than originally anticipated to examine and appraise all of these options.
- We are now pushing forward with the next phase of further detailed work to inform the remaining stages of the Review.
- These include a robust appraisal of the 16 retained options alongside a Climate Compatibility Assessment, with outcomes expected to be announced this summer for final public consultation, before a final decision can be reached.
- Given the effects of the climate emergency and Covid-19 on travel, the views of residents, stakeholders, and businesses obtained during this consultation exercise will be vital to help us understand any impacts and associated changes to travel patterns along the corridor.
- To be clear, we remain committed to making much needed improvements to the A96 and the substantial development work undertaken will not go to waste but will rather be vital to inform the evidence-based review.

A roundtable meeting for North and North East MSPs to hear directly from the Review's project team took place on 28 Feb.

- The former Minister for Transport and the project review team were able to provide a summary of the Review's findings to date, the consultation responses and the next steps in the Review process.

INVERNESS TO NAIRN

We remain absolutely committed to dualling the Inverness to Nairn section including the Nairn bypass.

- Dualling from Inverness to Nairn as well as a bypass of Nairn is included in the transport enhancement programme, as set out in the Bute House Agreement and we continue to progress the preparation stages of the scheme with a view to completing the statutory process for that as soon as possible.
- This includes the significant ongoing and intensive work required to prepare for publication of Made Orders, including the Compulsory Purchase Order.
- To date we have spent just under £30 million on the preparatory work for the scheme, which is commensurate with the essential design and assessment work required for any similar road scheme of this size.
- The A96 Dualling Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass) scheme is separate from the wider A96 review process which is currently being undertaken as it has already received Ministerial consent following a Public Local Inquiry.
- Delivery of the scheme can only commence if approved under the relevant statutory authorisation process and thereafter a timetable for progress can be set in line with available budgets.

Extract from Background Note from Parliamentary Question S6W-18469 dated 15 June 2023

A96 Corridor

- The Scottish Government remains absolutely committed to improving the A96 corridor. As part of the Bute House Agreement we will take forward an enhancements programme on the A96 corridor that improves connectivity between surrounding towns, tackles congestion and addresses safety and environmental issues.
- The current plan is to fully dual the A96 route between Inverness and Aberdeen; however, we are conducting a transparent, evidence-based review of the corridor which is well underway with outcomes from this expected to be ready for consultation this summer.
- This is sensible good governance for major investment of this kind.
- A four week public consultation survey on the corridor review, which concluded on 10 June 2022, received unprecedented interest with nearly 4,600 responses generating more than 11,000 suggestions for the route.
- Given the sheer volume of responses received and the high number of options this generated, it rightly took time to examine and appraise all of these options.
- We published the Public Consultation and Initial Appraisal reports on the Corridor Review on 22 December 2022.
- We are now pushing forward with the next phase of further detailed work to inform the remaining stages of the Review.
- These include a robust appraisal of the 16 retained options alongside a Climate Compatibility Assessment, with outcomes expected to be announced this summer for final public consultation, before a final decision can be reached.
- Given the effects of the climate emergency and Covid-19 on travel, the views of residents, stakeholders, and businesses obtained during this consultation exercise will be vital to help us understand any impacts and associated changes to travel patterns along the corridor.
- To be clear, we remain committed to making much needed improvements to the A96 and the substantial development work undertaken will not go to waste but will rather be vital to inform the evidence-based review.

A96 Dualling Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass)

- We remain absolutely committed to dualling the Inverness to Nairn section including the Nairn bypass.

- The A96 Dualling Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass) scheme is separate from the wider A96 review process which is currently being undertaken as it has already received Ministerial consent following a Public Local Inquiry.
- We continue to progress the preparation stages of the scheme with a view to completing the statutory process for that as soon as possible. This includes the significant ongoing and intensive work required to prepare for publication of Made Orders, including the Compulsory Purchase Order.
- Delivery of the scheme can only commence if approved under the relevant statutory authorisation process and thereafter a timetable for progress can be set in line with available budgets.

Extract from briefing sent to the Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero and Just Transition dated 21 June 2023

August - October

- Announce outcome of A96 corridor review detailed assessment (TBC)

Extract from briefing sent to the Minister for Transport dated 26 June 2023

A96 CORRIDOR

The Scottish Government remains absolutely committed to improving the A96.

- We will take forward an enhancements programme on the A96 corridor that improves connectivity between surrounding towns, tackles congestion and addresses safety and environmental issues.
- The current plan is to fully dual the route and as part of this process we are undertaking a transparent, evidence-based review of the programme with the outcomes of this expected to be ready for consultation this summer.
- This is sensible good governance for major investment of this kind.

We published the Public Consultation and Initial Appraisal reports on the Corridor Review on 22 December 2022.

- We are now pushing forward with the next phase of further detailed work to inform the remaining stages of the Review.
- These include a robust appraisal of the 16 retained options alongside a Climate Compatibility Assessment, with outcomes expected to be announced this summer for final public consultation, before a final decision can be reached.
- Given the effects of the climate emergency and Covid-19 on travel, the views of residents, stakeholders, and businesses obtained during this consultation exercise will be vital to help us understand any impacts and associated changes to travel patterns along the corridor.
- To be clear, we remain committed to making much needed improvements to the A96 and the substantial development work undertaken will not go to waste but will rather be vital to inform the evidence-based review.

INVERNESS TO NAIRN

We remain absolutely committed to dualling the Inverness to Nairn section including the Nairn bypass.

- Dualling from Inverness to Nairn as well as a bypass of Nairn is included in the transport enhancement programme, as set out in the Bute House Agreement and we continue to progress the preparation stages of the scheme with a view to completing the statutory process for that as soon as possible.
- This includes the significant ongoing and intensive work required to prepare for publication of Made Orders, including the Compulsory Purchase Order.
- To date, we have spent just under £30 million on the preparatory work for the scheme, which is commensurate with the essential design and assessment work required for any similar road scheme of this size.
- The A96 Dualling Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass) scheme is separate from the wider A96 review process which is currently being undertaken as it has already received Ministerial consent following a Public Local Inquiry.
- Delivery of the scheme can only commence if approved under the relevant statutory authorisation process and thereafter a timetable for progress can be set in line with available budgets.

Extract from briefing sent to the First Minister dated 15 August 2023

A96 CORRIDOR

The Scottish Government remains absolutely committed to improving the A96.

- We will take forward an enhancements programme on the A96 corridor that improves connectivity between surrounding towns, tackles congestion and addresses safety and environmental issues.
- The current plan is to fully dual the route and as part of this process we are undertaking a transparent, evidence-based review of the programme with the outcomes of this expected to be ready for consultation following summer recess.
- This is sensible good governance for major investment of this kind.

We published the Public Consultation and Initial Appraisal reports on the Corridor Review on 22 December 2022.

- We are now pushing forward with the next phase of further detailed work to inform the remaining stages of the Review.
- These include a robust appraisal of the 16 retained options alongside a Climate Compatibility Assessment and relevant statutory assessments, with outcomes expected to be announced following summer recess for final public consultation, before a final decision can be reached.
- Given the effects of the climate emergency and Covid-19 on travel, the views of residents, stakeholders, and businesses is vital to help us understand any impacts and associated changes to travel patterns along the corridor.
- To be clear, we remain committed to making much needed improvements to the A96 and the substantial development work undertaken will not go to waste but will rather be vital to inform the evidence-based review.

INVERNESS TO NAIRN

We remain absolutely committed to dualling the Inverness to Nairn section including the Nairn bypass.

- Dualling from Inverness to Nairn as well as a bypass of Nairn is included in the transport enhancement programme, as set out in the Bute House Agreement and we continue to progress the preparation stages of the scheme with a view to completing the statutory process for that as soon as possible.
- This includes the significant ongoing and intensive work required to prepare for publication of Made Orders, including the Compulsory Purchase Order.
- The A96 Dualling Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass) scheme is separate from the wider A96 review process which is currently being undertaken as it has already received Ministerial consent following a Public Local Inquiry.
- Delivery of the scheme can only commence if approved under the relevant statutory authorisation process and thereafter a timetable for progress can be set in line with available budgets.

Extract from briefing sent to Minister for Transport dated 29 August 2023

The Scottish Government remains absolutely committed to improving the A96.

- We will take forward an enhancements programme on the A96 corridor that improves connectivity between surrounding towns, tackles congestion and addresses safety and environmental issues.
- The current plan is to fully dual the route and as part of this process we are undertaking a transparent, evidence-based review of the programme with the outcomes of this expected to be ready for consultation following summer recess.
- This is sensible good governance for major investment of this kind.

We published the Public Consultation and Initial Appraisal reports on the Corridor Review on 22 December 2022.

- We are now pushing forward with the next phase of further detailed work to inform the remaining stages of the Review.
- These include a robust appraisal of the 16 retained options alongside a Climate Compatibility Assessment, with outcomes expected to be ready following summer recess for final public consultation, before a final decision can be reached.
- Given the effects of the climate emergency and Covid-19 on travel, the views of residents, stakeholders, and businesses obtained during this consultation exercise will be vital to help us understand any impacts and associated changes to travel patterns along the corridor.
- To be clear, we remain committed to making much needed improvements to the A96 and the substantial development work undertaken will not go to waste but will rather be vital to inform the evidence-based review.

INVERNESS TO NAIRN

We remain absolutely committed to dualling the Inverness to Nairn section including the Nairn bypass.

- Dualling from Inverness to Nairn as well as a bypass of Nairn is included in the transport enhancement programme, as set out in the Bute House Agreement and we continue to progress the preparation stages of the scheme with a view to completing the statutory process for that as soon as possible.
- This includes the significant ongoing and intensive work required to prepare for publication of Made Orders, including the Compulsory Purchase Order.
- This work includes careful consideration of complex land title information, a vital part of the procedural steps which need to be completed to finalise the acquisition of land and take the powers required to build the scheme.
- To date we have spent just under £30 million on the preparatory work for the scheme, which is commensurate with the essential design and assessment work required for any similar road scheme of this size.
- The A96 Dualling Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass) scheme is separate from the wider A96 review process which is currently being undertaken as it has already received Ministerial consent following a Public Local Inquiry.

- Delivery of the scheme can only commence if approved under the relevant statutory authorisation process and thereafter a timetable for progress can be set in line with available budgets.

Sensitivities

Fergus Ewing MSP has written to Transport Scotland querying why the making of orders for A96 Dualling Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass) scheme is taking so long. Our response to this is currently in preparation.

Given completion of the statutory process and acquisition of necessary land requires capital expenditure over a number of years, and set in the context of the current economic and fiscal challenges being faced by the Scottish Government, due consideration of this multi-year spend commitment needs to be fully considered when proceeding with the making of the Compulsory Purchase Order. Consideration to this is being given as part of the robust governance approval procedures undertaken for all major infrastructure investments of this kind.

The Capital Spending Review refresh, which was published in May 2022, identified necessary funding to complete the statutory process for the scheme and to purchase the land required. However, the Scottish Government has been clear that due to funding cuts, the need to provide funding to assist with the cost of living crisis and inflationary pressures, it is no longer possible to fund all the previous commitments from the capital spending review and as a result, capital spending plans are under review as part of the 2024-25 Budget exercise. In addition, significant funding will be required from future spending reviews to take forward the construction of the scheme.

Extract from briefing sent to First Minister dated 23 August 2023

A96 DUALLING / CORRIDOR REVIEW

The Scottish Government remains absolutely committed to improving the A96.

- We will take forward an enhancements programme on the A96 corridor that improves connectivity between surrounding towns, tackles congestion and addresses safety and environmental issues.
- The current plan is to fully dual the route and as part of this process we are undertaking a transparent, evidence-based review of the programme with the outcomes of this expected to be ready in the coming weeks for final public consultation, before a final decision can be reached.
- This is sensible good governance for major investment of this kind.

We published the Public Consultation and Initial Appraisal reports on the Corridor Review on 22 December 2022.

- We are now pushing forward with the next phase of further detailed work to inform the remaining stages of the Review.
- These include a robust appraisal of the 16 retained options alongside a Climate Compatibility Assessment, with outcomes expected to be announced *in the coming weeks* for final public consultation, before a final decision can be reached.
- Given the effects of the climate emergency and Covid-19 on travel, the views of residents, stakeholders, and businesses obtained during the review is helping us understand any impacts and associated changes to travel patterns along the corridor.
- To be clear, we remain committed to making much needed improvements to the A96 and the substantial development work undertaken will not go to waste but will rather be vital to inform the evidence-based review.

INVERNESS TO NAIRN (INCLUDING NAIRN BYPASS)

We remain absolutely committed to dualling the Inverness to Nairn section including the Nairn bypass.

- Dualling from Inverness to Nairn as well as a bypass of Nairn is included in the transport enhancement programme, as set out in the Bute House Agreement and we continue to progress the preparation stages of the scheme with a view to completing the statutory process for that as soon as possible.
- This includes the significant ongoing and intensive work required to prepare for publication of Made Orders, including the Compulsory Purchase Order.
- This work includes careful consideration of complex land title information, a vital part of the procedural steps which need to be completed to finalise the acquisition of land and take the powers required to build the scheme.
- The A96 Dualling Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass) scheme is separate from the wider A96 review process which is currently being undertaken as it has already received Ministerial consent following a Public Local Inquiry.

- Delivery of the scheme can only commence if approved under the relevant statutory authorisation process and thereafter a timetable for progress can be set in line with available budgets.

Extract from briefing sent to Minister for Transport dated 7 September 2023

A96 CORRIDOR

The Scottish Government remains absolutely committed to improving the A96, including dualling Inverness to Nairn and the Nairn Bypass and we will publish the review of the A96 Dualling Programme following the public engagement last year.

- As the First Minister made clear in his statement on the Programme for Government, the Scottish Government is fully committed to making improvements to the A96.
- The current plan is to fully dual the route and as part of this process we are undertaking a transparent, evidence-based review of the programme with the outcomes of this expected to be ready in the coming months for final public consultation, before a final decision can be reached.
- This is sensible good governance for major investment of this kind.

We published the Public Consultation and Initial Appraisal reports on the Corridor Review on 22 December 2022.

- We are now pushing forward with the next phase of further detailed work to inform the remaining stages of the Review.
- These include a robust appraisal of the 16 retained options alongside a Climate Compatibility Assessment and statutory assessments, with outcomes expected to be announced in the coming months for final public consultation, before a final decision can be reached.
- To be clear, we remain committed to making much needed improvements to the A96.

INVERNESS TO NAIRN

We remain absolutely committed to dualling the Inverness to Nairn section including the Nairn bypass.

- The Scottish Government is also committed to dualling the Inverness to Nairn section including the Nairn bypass and we continue to progress the preparation stages of the scheme with a view to completing the statutory process for that as soon as possible.
- This includes the significant ongoing and intensive work required to prepare for publication of Made Orders, including the Compulsory Purchase Order. The work currently being taken forward on the scheme includes careful consideration of complex land title information, a vital part of the procedural steps which need to be completed to finalise the acquisition of land and take the powers required to build the scheme.
- The A96 Dualling Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass) scheme is separate from the wider A96 review process which is currently being undertaken as it has already received Ministerial consent following a Public Local Inquiry.
- Delivery of the scheme can only commence if approved under the relevant statutory authorisation process and thereafter a timetable for progress can be set in line with available budgets.

Extract from briefing sent to Minister for Transport and Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Net Zero and Just Transition dated 8 September 2023

A96 CORRIDOR

A96 Corridor Review

As confirmed in our Programme for Government published on 5 September 2023, the Scottish Government is fully committed to making improvements to the A96. The current plan is to fully dual the route and as part of this process we are undertaking a transparent, evidence-based review of the programme. This is a sensible good governance for major investment of this kind.

Following publication of the initial appraisal report and the accompanying consultation report at the end of last year, Transport Scotland is now pushing forward with the further detailed work to inform the remaining stages of the review.

These include a robust appraisal of the 16 retained options alongside a Climate Compatibility Assessment and statutory assessments, with outcomes from this expected to be ready in the coming months for final public consultation, before a final decision can be reached.

Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass)

The Scottish Government is also committed to dualling the Inverness to Nairn section including the Nairn bypass. The A96 Dualling Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass) scheme is separate from the wider A96 Corridor Review, having already received Ministerial consent following a public local inquiry.

We continue to progress the preparation stages of the scheme with a view to completing the statutory process for that as soon as possible. This includes the significant ongoing and intensive work required to prepare for publication of Made Orders, including the Compulsory Purchase Order. Subject to no legal challenge being received following the making of the Orders, the Scottish Ministers will then have the relevant powers to acquire the land necessary to construct the scheme.

Delivery of the scheme can only commence if approved under the relevant statutory authorisation process and thereafter a timetable for progress can be set in line with available budgets.

Extract from briefing sent to Minister for Transport dated 11 September 2023

PLANS FOR THE A96 AND THE A96 CORRIDOR REVIEW

As confirmed in our Programme for Government published on 5 September 2023, the Scottish Government is fully committed to making improvements to the A96. We will take forward an enhancements programme on the A96 corridor that improves connectivity between surrounding towns, tackles congestion and addresses safety and environmental issues.

The current plan is to fully dual the route and as part of this process we are undertaking a transparent, evidence-based review of the programme. This is sensible good governance for major investment of this kind.

We have undertaken substantial consultation and development work on this important programme which has been vital to inform our understanding of the significant undertaking of improving this key corridor. We know that dualling the entire A96 would involve substantial offline “new” roads and in light of a range of changing policies including a focus on making better use of our assets and climate change we are undertaking this review.

Appropriate, effective stakeholder and public engagement is being carried out at key stages during the review process. Given the effects of the climate emergency and Covid-19 on travel, the views of residents, stakeholders and businesses obtained is vital to help us understand any impacts and associated changes to travel patterns along the corridor.

A four week public consultation survey, undertaken as a key element of the review last year, generated unprecedented interest with almost 4,700 responses received and over 11,000 suggested options for improving the corridor.

Given the sheer volume of responses received and the high number of options this generated, it has rightly taken Transport Scotland more time than originally anticipated to examine and appraise all of these options, however the first part of the review, a report on the Public Consultation and the Initial Appraisal: The Case for Change, was published on 22 December 2022.

Following publication of the initial appraisal report and the accompanying consultation report at the end of last year, Transport Scotland is now pushing forward with the further detailed work to inform the remaining stages of the review.

These include a robust appraisal of the retained options alongside a Climate Compatibility Assessment and statutory assessments, with outcomes from this expected to be ready in the coming months for final public consultation, before a final decision can be reached.

To be clear, we remain committed to making much needed improvements to the A96.

INVERNESS TO NAIRN AND NAIRN BYPASS

The Scottish Government is committed to dualling the Inverness to Nairn section including the Nairn bypass and we continue to progress the preparation stages of the scheme with a view to completing the statutory process for that as soon as possible.

The work currently being taken forward on the scheme includes careful consideration of complex land title information, a vital part of the procedural steps which need to be completed to finalise the acquisition of land and take the powers required to build the scheme. Subject to no legal challenge being received following the making of the Orders, the Scottish Ministers will then have the relevant powers to acquire the land necessary to construct the scheme.

The A96 Dualling Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass) scheme is separate from the wider A96 Corridor Review, having already received Ministerial consent following a public local inquiry.

Delivery of the scheme can only commence if approved under the relevant statutory authorisation process and thereafter a timetable for progress can be set in line with available budgets.

Future Progress (including funding and procurement)

Future progress including consideration of procurement options to deliver improvements to the A96 will be subject to the outcome of the A96 Corridor Review and dependent on subsequent completion of relevant statutory procedures.

With respect to the Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass) scheme specifically, exact timescales for the next stages are difficult to estimate at this stage because the necessary procedural steps need to be completed to finalise the acquisition of land and take the powers required to build the scheme. These steps come with them a right of legal challenge.

Subject to finalisation of the statutory processes for the scheme it is hoped that more certainty over timescales will be able to be provided. At that stage, the timetable for progress will be set in line with the chosen procurement strategy and available budgets.

As budgets across government are extremely constrained difficult choices may have to be made by Ministers in terms of progressing with (or prioritising) projects that come from the evidenced based review.

Extract from Background Note from Parliamentary Question S6O-02519 dated 14 September 2023

TOP LINES

A96 Corridor Review

As confirmed in the Programme for Government published on 5 September 2023, the Scottish Government is fully committed to making improvements to the A96. We will take forward an enhancements programme on the A96 corridor that improves connectivity between surrounding towns, tackles congestion and addresses safety and environmental issues.

The current plan is to fully dual the route and as part of this process we are undertaking a transparent, evidence-based review of the programme with the outcomes of this expected to be ready in the coming months for final public consultation, before a final public decision can be reached. This is a sensible good governance for major investment of this kind.

Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass)

The Scottish Government is committed to dualling the Inverness to Nairn section including the Nairn bypass. The A96 Dualling Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass) scheme is separate from the wider A96 Corridor Review, having already received Ministerial consent following a public local inquiry.

We continue to progress the preparation stages of the scheme with a view to completing the statutory process for that as soon as possible. This includes the significant ongoing and intensive work required to prepare for publication of Made Orders, including the Compulsory Purchase Order.

Delivery of the scheme can only commence if approved under the relevant statutory authorisation process and thereafter a timetable for progress can be set in line with available budgets.

BACKGROUND

A96 Dualling Inverness to Aberdeen

The A96 is the trunk road linking the cities of Inverness and Aberdeen passing through various towns and villages along the route. The route is approximately 160km long, of which 138km is currently single carriageway.

On 6 December 2011, the then Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment launched the Infrastructure Investment Plan (IIP) which provided an overview of the Scottish Government's plans for infrastructure investment over the coming decades. Contained within the document was a commitment to complete the dualling of the A96 between Inverness and Aberdeen.

For design and assessment purposes the dualling programme was split into four sections: Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass); Hardmuir to Fochabers; East of Fochabers to East of Huntly; and East of Huntly to Aberdeen.

In August 2021 the Scottish Government and Scottish Green Party Parliamentary Group entered into a Co-operation Agreement and shared policy programme (the Bute House Agreement).

In relation to the A96, the Bute House Agreement states that "...the Scottish Government will take forward a transport enhancements programme on the A96 corridor that improves connectivity between surrounding towns, tackles congestion and addresses safety and environmental issues. This will include:

- dualling from Inverness to Nairn;
- bypassing of Nairn, Keith, Elgin and Inverurie accompanied by measures to remove through traffic from the by-passed town centres;
- targeted road safety improvements where needed, for example between Fochabers and Huntly and Inverurie to Aberdeen; and
- the development of an A96 "Electric Highway"..."

The Agreement goes on to state that "...the current plan is to fully dual the A96 route between Inverness and Aberdeen; however, a transparent, evidence-based review will be conducted to include a climate compatibility assessment to assess direct and indirect impacts on the climate and the environment..."

The review is being undertaken in accordance with the Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance (STAG). The STAG appraisal stages are:

- Initial Appraisal: Case for Change (outcome published in December 2022);
- Preliminary Options Appraisal;
- Detailed Options Appraisal; and
- Post Appraisal.

The review is considering the transport problems and opportunities on the A96 corridor, changing policy context and other relevant considerations such as development aspirations for the corridor and surrounding area. In addition, the review will include:

- Climate Compatibility Assessment;
- Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA); and
- Strategic Business Case.

A96 Corridor Review

We have undertaken substantial consultation and development work on this important programme which has been vital to inform our understanding of the significant undertaking of improving this key corridor. We know that dualling the entire A96 would involve substantial offline "new" roads and in light of a range of changing policies including a focus on making better use of our assets and climate change we are undertaking this review.

Appropriate, effective stakeholder and public engagement is being carried out at key stages during the review process. Given the effects of the climate emergency and Covid-19 on travel, the views of residents, stakeholders and businesses obtained is vital to help us understand any impacts and associated changes to travel patterns along the corridor.

A four week public consultation survey, undertaken as a key element of the review last year, generated unprecedented interest with almost 4,700 responses received and over 11,000 suggested options for improving the corridor.

Analysis of the survey responses received identified the most frequently raised **priority** was dualling the route, raised by **55%** of respondents. Improving road safety was raised by **50%** of respondents, which included general safety concerns as well as safety of driving, cycling and walking. **30%** of respondents raised improving rail services, including train connections, cost, and comfort of travel, and **30%** of respondents raised bypassing town centres. Other **priorities** by respondents included improvements to bus services which was raised by **24%** of respondents; **24%** of respondents also suggested general public transport improvements (including public transport connectivity and integration); and better road maintenance (including infrastructure, surface, signage etc) which was raised by **22%**. **12%** of respondents opposed full or partial dualling.

The level of response to the A96 Corridor Review consultation survey far exceeded expectations. Whilst this level of engagement is welcomed, and clearly evidences the investment of the public in the A96 corridor, the volume of detailed feedback received presented the project team with significant programme challenges.

Given the sheer volume of responses received and the high number of options this generated, it has rightly taken Transport Scotland more time than originally anticipated to examine and appraise all of these options, however the first part of the review, a report on the Public Consultation and the Initial Appraisal: The Case for Change, was published on 22 December 2022.

Following publication of the initial appraisal report and the accompanying consultation report at the end of last year, Transport Scotland is now pushing forward with the further detailed work to inform the remaining stages of the review.

These include a robust appraisal of the retained options alongside a Climate Compatibility Assessment and statutory assessments, with outcomes from this expected to be ready in the coming months for final public consultation, before a final decision can be reached.

A roundtable meeting for North and North East MSPs to hear directly from the Review's project team took place on 28 February 2023. The meeting was facilitated by Gillian Martin MSP and the former Minister for Transport, Jenny Gilruth MSP, along with the Review's project team were in attendance. The meeting provided a timely opportunity for MSPs to query the options presented and to fully provide them with an understanding of the Review's findings to date, the consultation responses

and the next steps in the Review process. Douglas Lumsden MSP was invited to but did not attend the roundtable meeting.

To be clear, we remain committed to making much needed improvements to the A96.

Future Progress (including funding and procurement)

Future progress including consideration of procurement options to deliver improvements to the A96 will be subject to the outcome of the A96 Corridor Review and dependent on subsequent completion of relevant statutory procedures.

With respect to the Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass) scheme specifically, exact timescales for the next stages are difficult to estimate at this stage because the necessary procedural steps need to be completed to finalise the acquisition of land and take the powers required to build the scheme. These steps come with them a right of legal challenge.

Subject to finalisation of the statutory processes for the scheme it is hoped that more certainty over timescales will be able to be provided. At that stage, the timetable for progress will be set in line with the chosen procurement strategy and available budgets.

As budgets across government are extremely constrained difficult choices may have to be made by Ministers in terms of progressing with (or prioritising) projects that come from the evidenced based review.