Road Expo Scotland 2024 – Keynote Speech

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150 words per minute, 1527 words, Approx 10 Mins

Introduction

Good morning everyone. It is a pleasure to be here today to address such a forward-thinking group of professionals dedicated to the improvement of road infrastructure in Scotland.

As we gather today at this event, let us focus our attention on our ambitions to deliver a more safe, prosperous and resilient future for Scotland.

Scotland's Road Safety Framework to 2030

I am passionate about road safety and making a difference. Scotland's Road Safety Framework to 2030 sets out our vision for Scotland to have the best road safety performance in the world by 2030 with an ambitious long-term goal where no one is seriously injured or killed on our roads by 2050.

Road Safety Performance

To monitor our progress of our long-term goal, where no one is seriously injured or killed, Transport Scotland has published road casualty statistics for 2023 on 30 October. It confirms that 155 people were killed in reported road accidents in Scotland in 2023.

The Scottish Government is clear that one life lost on our roads is one too many. That is why we are investing record £36m this financial year to deliver a wide range of initiatives aimed at improving driver behaviour and ultimately reducing the number of casualties on our roads.

National Speed Management Review (Consultation Launch)

We recognise that vehicle speed plays a crucial factor in our endeavour to enhance road safety in Scotland. By managing speeds effectively, we can create safer roads, reduce collisions, and support more efficient travel for everyone.

A National Speed Management Review is being undertaken to examine the potential effects of changes to national speed limits across Scotland.

Today (27th November) I am pleased to announce that we have launched a public consultation on proposed changes to speed limits in Scotland.

The consultation invites feedback on proposals to lower the national speed limit on single carriageway roads from 60 mph to 50 mph and to increase speed limits for heavy goods vehicles over 7.5 tonnes on single carriageways from 40 mph to 50 mph and on dual carriageways from 50 mph to 60 mph.

These changes, supported by analysis, show the potential to significantly lower the risk of injury collisions while ensuring journey times remain reliable and efficient — an essential consideration for time-sensitive goods transportation.

We are committed to ensuring that this process reflects the views and needs of all road users. The consultation is now live and will remain open until 5th March 2025.

I encourage everyone—whether an individual, community group, or industry stakeholder—to visit Transport Scotland's website and share their thoughts.

To further support this process, we will host a series of engagement sessions across the country in early 2025, offering opportunities for meaningful dialogue and collaboration. Your feedback will be invaluable in shaping a safer future for Scotland's roads.

Severe Weather

Last year we had a record number of storms. Storm Bert being the most recent. As we head into winter, it is important that the trunk road network is resilient to ensure that we can serve every community in Scotland and maintain public safety.

The preparation for winter is actioned through partnerships with other agencies such as the Met Office and Police Scotland, as part of the Multi-Agency Response Team (MART). The MART can be activated for planned events or incidents like a severe weather event.

It enables us a more effective response to large-scale trunk road issues and forms part of the wider ‘all modes response’ which also feeds into the Scottish Government’s resilience response arrangements.

Resilience planning is not just about the physical resilience of the trunk road network but also about how disruption is managed and the speed of recovery. This can be seen best through the work on the A83 Rest and Be Thankful.

A83 Rest and Be Thankful

Our commitment to the delivery of a permanent and resilient solution at the A83 Rest and Be Thankful is a priority for the Scottish Government and we continue to seek ways to achieve this as quickly as possible.

We are aware of the importance of the A83 trunk road to the communities and economy of the Argyll and Bute area, and this is why we are delivering a range of measures in the short, medium and long term to reduce the risk of impact of landslides at the Rest and Be Thankful.

Following the Scottish Government's announcement of the preferred route option in June 2023 for the long-term solution, the detailed design and assessment of the 1.4km long debris flow shelter is progressing at pace.

Our medium-term solution consists of a series of improvements to the Old Military Road that is used as a diversion route when the A83 is closed. Phase 1 of these works, which comprises the realignment of the southern end of the route, is now complete and the new link road is in operation. It is expected that the remainder of the medium-term improvement works will be carried out on a phased basis, with the next phase getting underway next year.

In the short term a range of landslide mitigation measures, such as debris and rockfall fences and catchpits, are currently implemented on the hillside above the A83.

It is precisely because we have invested in the short-term solution meant we had measures in place to address the most recent landslide in September.

All of this underlines our commitment to work with local communities and key stakeholders to ensure that Argyll & Bute remains open for business.

A9 Dualling Programme

This leads on to the A9. It must be safe, reliable and resilient, and that is what this Scottish Government will deliver. The magnitude of the investment and the complexities of upgrading infrastructure at this scale, in this financial environment, have been and will continue to be considerable. But this is a challenge we will meet.

Last December, the Scottish Government announced the delivery plan for completion of A9 Dualling. We have made good early progress in meeting delivery plan targets - the procurement of the Tay Crossing to Ballinluig project began in May 2024 and the construction contract for the Tomatin to Moy project was awarded in July 2024.

Our strong programme enables us to deliver on that commitment we have made. We anticipate nearly 50% of the A9 between Perth and Inverness will be operating as dual carriageway by the end of 2030, rising to 85% by the end of 2033 and 100% by the end of 2035.

The delivery plan targets completion by the end of 2035, but it should be recognised that this could be affected by circumstances beyond our control, such as severe weather, Brexit, and global pandemics. To not recognise those additional challenges beyond our control would be remiss.

This project stands as a testament to our commitment to building safer, more sustainable, and highly efficient roads for the future.

Approach to Climate Change

Turning to the environment, we will continue to emphasise the importance of managing and reducing the impacts of our projects, including encouraging and incentivising reductions in carbon emissions.

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.

Unfortunately, the impacts of climate change are already being felt starkly across Scotland. The Scottish Government has published this September the Third Scottish National Adaptation Plan. This Plan sets out actions to build Scotland's resilience to the impacts of climate change across five outcomes including public services, where adaptation actions are set out in relation to our transport system.

Trunk Road Adaptation

In relation to trunk road adaptation, our approach seeks to ensure our roads are well adapted and resilient to the current, projected and unexpected impacts of climate change.

Transport Scotland will empower its Operating Companies to bring adaptation into everything they do, consider innovative solutions and target improvements at known problem locations.

We will also publish a Trunk Road Adaptation Plan in 2025. This is based on the most up to date climate change projections, vulnerability and risk assessments, building on studies undertaken to identify locations where future adaptation of the trunk road network is required.

Conclusion

In conclusion, by prioritising safety, embracing sustainability, and striving for efficiency, we not only enhance our infrastructure but also enrich our communities and protect our environment. Together, we have the power to drive progress and make a lasting positive impact on Scotland's transport infrastructure and help shape high quality and sustainable public services.

I wish you all the very best for this year's Roads Expo. I hope you enjoy the event, and I thank you for your time this morning. Road Expo is a great opportunity for the roads community to come together and share your experience and best practice.

Scotland has earned a solid reputation across the globe for transport infrastructure engineering excellence - and the talent pool expected at this year's Road Expo will only serve to reinforce that view.