

Main Issue 3

Impacts and opportunities from the A9 and Highland Main Line upgrades



How can we capitalise on road and rail improvements?

Background

The proposed dualling of the A9 is one of Scotland's largest infrastructure programmes, involving upgrading 80 miles of road from single to dual carriageway between Perth and Inverness. The £3 billion programme is being developed by Transport Scotland and is designed to deliver economic growth through improved road safety and quicker journey times, as well as better links to pedestrian, cycling and public transport facilities. The route is being delivered in 11 sections, with a number of these being located in the National Park. It is scheduled for completion in 2025.

Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) are currently leading the development of a strategic approach to ensuring that the economic development potential of the dualled A9 is maximised. The Cairngorms National Park Authority is participating in the development of this strategy along with other key partners including Scottish Government, Transport Scotland, Perth and Kinross Council, The Highland Council and VisitScotland.

Proposals to upgrade the Highland Main Line are also currently being prepared to improve rail connections between the north of Scotland and the central belt. The long term goal of this project is to achieve a fastest journey time of 2 hours and 45 minutes between Inverness and the central belt, with an average journey time of 3 hours and to deliver an hourly service by 2019.

Once completed, these transport upgrades are likely to increase the accessibility of some settlements within the National Park, including by linking them more effectively to key locations outwith the Park such as Inverness and Perth. This might increase the demand for development land in some areas and could bring increased opportunities for inward investment within the Park.

However, there may also be threats associated with these proposals. For example, the improved accessibility to key locations outside the Park might increase commuting. It could also increase demand for second or holiday homes in parts of the Park. These factors might have an adverse impact on community vitality and vibrancy, as well as the affordability of housing.

Conversely, some areas may become less accessible as the new A9 dual carriageway is likely to have fewer junctions than the current single carriageway. There is also a risk that some communities may become effectively more 'by-passed' by the new A9 arrangements, with the possibility of fewer visitors diverting off the main road to make use of local facilities and amenities. Similarly, the proposals for faster journey times on the Highland Main Line might result in trains stopping less frequently in some locations in the future, and this could have a negative impact on community vitality and viability.



Preferred Option

We think the new Local Development Plan should be used, as far as possible, to make the most of the new development opportunities that the A9 and rail upgrades are likely to present.

We have identified a limited number of new economic development sites, which we think will be well-located to take advantage of the potential for new inward investment as a result of these transport upgrades. These are located at Aviemore, Carr-Bridge, Dalwhinnie and Kincaig. You can find more detail on these sites in the settlement section (p60). These sites will also help to address the overall demand for economic development land within the National Park (see Main Issue 6, p40).

We also think that the new Local Development Plan could play a role in helping to support those communities that are at risk of being 'by-passed' as a result of the A9 dualling project. The settlement section of this report (p60) identifies those communities where we think this may be an issue, and proposed settlement objectives are included to help support local facilities and amenities in these areas.

Options for addressing the affordability of housing in the Park, including in areas where there is a high level of second/holiday home ownership, are considered further in Main Issue 5 (p34). These options should help to mitigate any adverse impact on housing affordability resulting from the A9 dualling.



Reasonable Alternative Options

As an alternative to the preferred approach outlined above, and given the limited evidence on the need for new economic development land (see Main Issue 6, p40), it may be reasonable to continue to adopt the existing Local Development Plan's approach to economic development.

This option would continue to rely on flexible policies to support economic development on unallocated land rather than identifying specific sites for business development in the Plan. However, this existing approach has not delivered any significant level of employment development, and we do not think this would take full advantage of the potential for inward investment that the A9 dualling proposals provide.



Questions

- Do you agree with our proposals to allocate new employment land to take advantage of the opportunities for inward investment associated with the A9 and rail upgrades?
- Do you agree that we should seek to support those communities that are at risk of being by-passed by the A9 dualling project?

