
CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

FOR DECISION

Title: Approval of proposed CNPA response to Transport Scotland informal consultation on the A9 Dualling, Project 5 Killiecrankie to Pitagowan

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Purpose

This paper provides an overview of Transport Scotland's proposals for dualling the section of A9 between Killiecrankie and Pitagowan and asks the Committee to endorse the proposed CNPA response to this informal consultation.

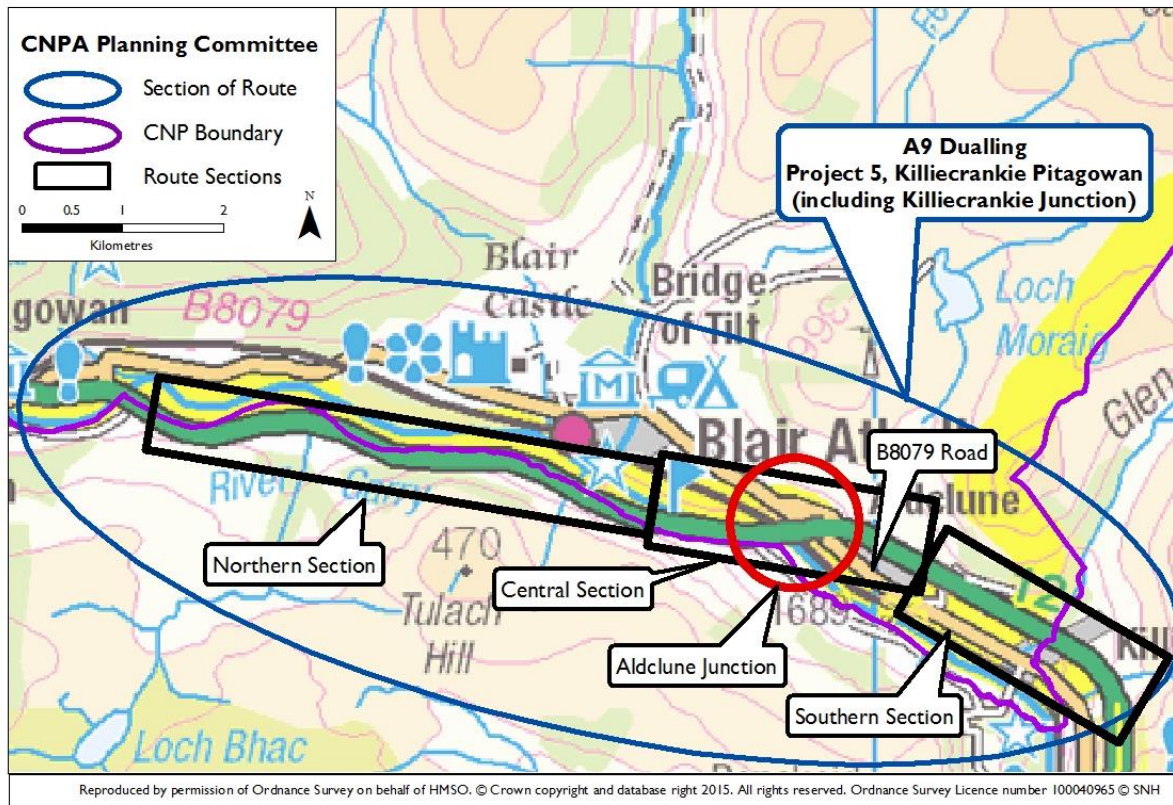
Recommendations

That the Committee:

- a) note the proposed options for dualling of the A9 between Killiecrankie and Pitagowan; and
- b) approve the proposed CNPA response to the informal consultation.

Background

1. A briefing paper was presented to Committee in July outlining the process and projected timescales for the dualling of the A9. The process for the project is dictated by the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (DMRB). The flowchart at Appendix I provides an overview of key steps in the process. The majority of projects are currently at Stage 2.
2. The CNPA and public agency partners are being informally consulted by Transport Scotland on outline proposals and options for dualling sections of the A9. The first consultation to be received was for Project 6 and was brought to Committee in October 2015. This second consultation is for Project 5 the section directly south of Project 6. Project 5 covers the section of the A9 between Killiecrankie to Pitagowan. It includes the junction south of Blair Atholl at Killiecrankie. A location map of Project 5, Killiecrankie to Pitagowan is shown below and includes the three key sections referred to in the paper as the Northern, Central, and Southern sections.



Explanation of the DMRB Stage 2

- The Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (DMRB) Stage 2 assessment is a stage of the design process that allows a number of route options to be considered. The process provides information to help the Scottish Ministers to identify a preferred route option. Environmental impacts are considered alongside engineering, traffic and economic requirements. Once a preferred route option is confirmed, the design detail will be further developed and refined at DMRB Stage 3.
- This Stage 2 consultation is non-statutory and is not a public consultation. Only the partners who sit on the Environmental Steering Group (ESG) for the project (SNH, SEPA, Historic Environment Scotland, Scottish Water, Local Authorities, and CNPA) are being asked to comment on options. The public are being asked to feed into the process separately through public exhibitions. Detailed proposals will be developed and subject to a formal statutory consultation at DMRB Stage 3 (see Appendix 1).

Consultation Focus

- Transport Scotland has provided a large amount of very detailed information in the Consultation Report. Key elements of this are summarised in this paper. CNPA are asked to comment on the following:
 - significant omissions or errors;
 - key concerns with regard to residual impacts; and
 - suggestions for consideration in more details at DMRB Stage 3.

CNPA's role in the Consultation

6. The partners in the ESG are all being consulted on this project. To avoid duplication of effort, the CNPA comments focus on issues relating closely to our remit and expertise and specifically those issues not covered by other partners. These include:
 - a) Outdoor Access (CNPA is the Access Authority)
 - b) Landscape
 - c) Ecology (non-designated sites - SNH deals with designated sites only)
 - d) Community & Private Assets.

Route Wide Issues

7. Many of the issues relating to the economy, tourism, communities, and disruption are similar for all projects along the route, including issues both during and post construction. Transport Scotland has established a number of Forums to consider how potential issues and opportunities might be addressed. Any issues that are locally specific to a particular section of the route will be picked up in consultation.

Policy Context

The Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (DMRB)

8. The Roads (Scotland) Act 1984 (the Act) confers powers and duties to the Secretary of State as roads authority. The Act declares that the Secretary of State shall manage and maintain trunk roads and for the purposes of such management and maintenance he shall have power to reconstruct, alter, widen, improve or renew any such road or to determine the means by which the public right of passage over it, or over any part of it, may be exercised. The infrastructure requirement of the dualling proposal has been developed following the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (DMRB), which is considered to be sufficient to ensure a robust and fit for purpose design. Statutory (planning) permissions must also be gained through the Roads (Scotland) Act 1984. The DMRB process is shown in Appendix I.

The DMRB Stage 1 Design Guide

9. The Design Guide produced at Stage 1 of the DMRB is the key document against which proposals are assessed, incorporating principles for landscape, ecology, water etc. It does not include outdoor access but an 'Access Strategy' is currently being developed by Transport Scotland. The CNPA contributed to the development of this Design Guide which has been influenced by policies in the National Park Partnership Plan, Local Development Plan and other relevant strategies. Proposals put forward in the consultation are assessed against the Design Guide for compliance and impact.

National Park Partnership Plan and Local Development Plan

10. A preliminary assessment of the compliance of the project and each of the proposed route options against national, regional, and local development planning policies is provided in the Consultation Report. A limitation of the current assessment is that each route option is assessed against the available 'Stage 2' information. At DMRB Stage 2, the proposed route options have not been subject to detailed design or mitigation which might influence whether the option is fully compliant with policy. A detailed assessment will be undertaken by Transport Scotland at DMRB Stage 3 when the final design and mitigation is developed.

Summary of Project 5 Killiecrankie to Pitagowan

11. Four proposed route options have been identified for this project. For the majority of the options, the widened road will follow the existing route. This is referred to as 'online' widening. The three sections identified alternate between widening to the north and to the south of the road. Appendix 2 has more detail on the proposed route and junction options. Each of these options comprises two lanes in each direction, separated by a 2.5m central reserve and 2.5m verges (both with widened visibility where required).
12. All of the options retain the existing bridge over the River Garry and require an additional bridge to be built adjacent to it.
13. This project includes a grade separated junction at Aldclune in the Central section. There are two proposed junction variants 'A' and 'B'. Both junction variants link to the existing B8079 which passes under the A9 so no new over or under passes are required.
14. Variant A is a restricted junction which allows for traffic to exit the northbound carriageway but not to enter it, and allows for traffic to enter the southbound carriageway but not to exit it. Any traffic wishing to get on to the A9 and travel north could not use this junction, they would have to drive through Blair Atholl and utilise the House of Bruar junction to the north. Traffic data shows that there are low numbers of traffic making these movements at present. An additional consideration is that junction variant A would mean that any traffic from the Shierglas quarry which is travelling north may now need to pass through Blair Atholl and Killiecrankie.
15. Junction variant B provides for all northbound and southbound traffic movements.

Appraisal of options

16. Appendix 2 has more detail on the proposed route and junction options with a full appraisal of access, landscape, ecology and community & private asset matters. The appraisal is summarised below:

Outdoor Access: Non Motorised Users (NMU)

17. The consultation report identifies NMU routes in the area, including Core Paths, Rights of Way, and National Cycle Route (NCR) 7. The report identifies the potential impact on these both in terms of the route itself as well as potential severance. Route options 3 and 4 combined are identified as having the highest potential impact on NMUs. These options are likely to cause the removal/diversion of a path (Path 1) which runs parallel to the A9 at House of Urrard to the west of Killiecrankie, although there is potential to mitigate against this. Junction variant B creates the lowest impact upon existing NMU interest, it allows for all traffic movements and should result in less traffic on the B8079 road which is also National Cycle Route 7.

Landscape and Ecology

18. In terms of landscape and ecology, route option 4 is the preferred option combined with junction variant A. This route option is for widening of all sections on the northern side of the dual carriageway with the limited junction variant. This option has the smallest footprint and the lowest landscape and ecological impact of all options. It does, however, increase the risk of traffic through the villages, especially HGV from the quarry. This could significantly affect the quality of experience of using these local roads and of being within the villages. This affects the landscape special qualities of the area

and the villages. The Southern section of route option 4 passes through part of the Killiecrankie Battlefield site which has already been impacted by the existing road. Route options 1 and 2 are considered to have the greatest impact on this site.

19. There are no alternatives given for the northern section of the route, which has the potential to have significant impacts on woodland, erosion of the Historic Landscape for Blair Castle, visual effects from large cuttings, and impact on the designed landscape.

Community & Private Assets

20. This Project will result in the possible demolition of one residential property at Garrybank, Blair Atholl. If possible the design of the proposed route options in this area will be refined to avoid this impact. There will be partial loss of land for Network Rail and Shierglas Quarry. The Quarry access will be stopped up during construction, access provisions to be developed as part of Stage 3. There is no loss of development land, community facilities, or community land.
21. Route options 3 and 4 have the lowest land take and impact the least on agricultural land, route option 2 has the highest land take and impacts the greatest amount of agricultural land.
22. Junction variant B has the highest land take, predominantly from Atholl Estates. Overall the potential impacts on Atholl Estate would be unchanged from Moderate/Substantial. Loss of land would be least when Variant B is combined with Route Option 4.
23. The potential impact of northbound quarry traffic travelling through Blair Atholl based on junction variant A is a concern in terms of impact on all road users, the community, and visitor experience. The level of potential traffic and an impact assessment has not been provided in the consultation report.

Proposed Response to Consultation

24. A detailed response is being prepared for submission to Transport Scotland identifying issues, mitigation requirements, and areas for further consideration based on the points above and the detail in Appendix 2. It should be noted that some of this project falls outside the National Park, however, there may be implications for the special qualities of the National Park and the route as a whole and are therefore considered as part of this paper.

Significant omissions or errors

25. The identification and analysis of the key relevant issues within the Consultation Report are accurate. Full analysis of the impact of stopping up Shierglas Quarry and the impact on NMUs, National Cycle Route 7, and local communities is not given. Potential impacts could vary depending on the route and frequency of quarry traffic. The lack of alternative options given for the northern section of the route is a concern given the potential for significant impacts. This requires further explanation.

Key concerns with regard to residual impacts

26. There is a preference for route option 4 in landscape and ecology terms. This has the lesser impact on the landscape by requiring less excavation and a smaller effect upon the battlefield site. It also retains the most important tree belts that offer screening within the central part of the scheme. Route option 4 does have the greatest potential impact on NMUs due to the potential removal or diversion of a path (Path 1). Mitigation is possible and should be explored as part of this route option.
27. Junction variant A is smaller than B and so will likewise take less area for construction and have a smaller impact on landscape and visual effects. The impact of junction variant A over that of Variant B is marginal, however, as both options will result in loss of land and fragmentation of woodland.
28. Junction variant A has the potential for increased traffic on the B8079. This increased traffic may have a beneficial impact on the communities in terms of the visitor economy, however, there may be a negative impact if this includes significant levels of traffic and in particular HGV quarry traffic.
29. The existing junction allows access both northbound and southbound. The loss of functionality associated with junction variant A could have impacts on the local community with regard to increased traffic in villages, particularly at peak visitor times and events such as the Horse Trials at Blair Castle.
30. The Core Path linking Blair Atholl to the Tullach Hill Viewpoint in the northern section uses an existing underpass. The crossing point is important in serving recreational access from Blair Atholl. This Crossing Point should be retained both during and post construction.
31. It is proposed that CNPA respond in favour of route option 4 and junction variant B provided that mitigation can be achieved for Path 1 and the Crossing Point at Blair Atholl.

Suggestions for consideration in more detail at DMRB Stage 3

32. The CNPA suggests the following.
- a) The detailed proposals will need to be carefully considered against the policies of the CNP Local Development Plan, the Cairngorms National Park Core Paths Plan and the Design Guide.
 - b) The proposed options create issues that require mitigation proposals to be explored.
 - c) Where possible, it would be helpful to identify initial proposals for 'accommodation works' to accommodate those communities and owners of private assets who will be adversely impacted by the project.

- d) There should be detailed proposals to avoid detrimental impacts upon National Cycle Route 7 (NCR7) and its users. For example, where it becomes necessary to realign NCR7 or incorporate it within new junctions, the approach should be one of seeking overall improvement to the existing standard. This can be managed through a combination of design and mitigation. The CNPA supports the principle of maintaining and where possible increasing, the distance of NCR7 from the carriageway.
- e) Where existing Core Paths have been identified crossing the A9 carriageway, all viable options should be considered to allow them to continue once the upgraded A9 is operational. This should be done through a combination of diversion to nearby, adjacent, or new underbridges or overbridges. Permanent severance of existing Core Paths should be avoided.
- f) Where non-designated local paths are affected and permanent severance is likely, all viable options should be considered to allow them to continue once the upgraded A9 is operational. It is recognised that, in certain circumstances, maintaining Core Paths may be prioritised over non-designated paths.
- g) If permanent severance of a path becomes necessary, it should be supported by a clear rationale and assessment to demonstrate that the severance will not unreasonably affect access opportunities in that area. The assessment should take account of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003.

Recommendation

That Members approve the proposed CNPA response to Transport Scotland Consultation on the A9 Dualling, Project 5 Killiecrankie to Pitagowan

Next Steps

- 33. Once a preferred route option is confirmed, the design detail will be further developed and refined at DMRB Stage 3. For Project 5 Killiecrankie to Pitagowan, DMRB Stage 3 is anticipated to start in early 2016, and will include completion of an Environmental Impact Assessment and preparation of an Environmental Statement. Officers will report back to the Committee at an appropriate stage in that process.
- 34. The next DMRB Stage 2 consultation responses will be brought to Committee on Friday 18th December for Project 4, Pitlochry to Killiecrankie (out with the CNP but any potential impacts on CNP will be considered) and Project 8 Dalwhinnie to Crubenmore.

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November 2015

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