

CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

FOR DECISION

Title: APPROVAL OF PROPOSED CNPA RESPONSE TO
TRANSPORT SCOTLAND INFORMAL CONSULTATION
ON THE A9 DUALLING, PROJECT 7 GLEN GARRY TO
DALWHINNIE

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Purpose

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

Recommendations

That the Planning Committee:

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

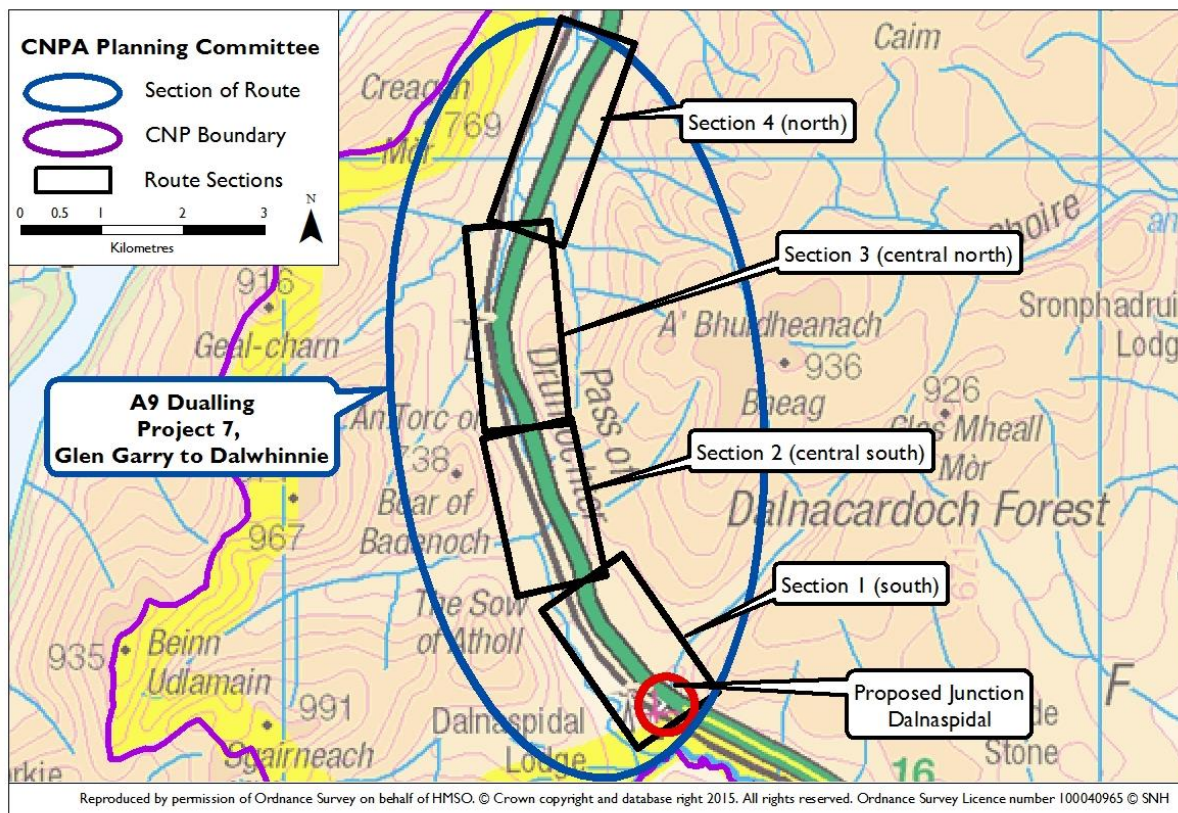
Background

1. 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 Committee have previously approved responses on projects 5, 6, and 8. This fourth consultation is for Project 7 which covers the section of the A9 between Glen Garry and Dalwhinnie. It includes junction options at Dalnaspidal. A location map of Project 7 is shown on the following page and includes the four key sections referred to in the paper.

Explanation of the DMRB Stage 2

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.
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.



Consultation Focus

4. 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:
 - a) significant omissions or errors;
 - b) key concerns with regard to residual impacts; and
 - c) suggestions for consideration in more detail at DMRB Stage 3.

CNPA's role in the Consultation

5. 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); and
 - d) community and private assets.

Route Wide Issues

6. 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)

7. 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 Stage 1 Design Guide

8. 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. An 'Access Strategy' has been developed by Transport Scotland to provide general guidance on provision for non-motorised users (NMUs). 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

9. 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 7 Glen Garry to Dalwhinnie

Route alignment

10. This project is split into four sections between Glen Garry and Dalwhinnie:
 - i. Section 1 - South
 - ii. Section 2 - Central South
 - iii. Section 3 - Central North
 - iv. Section 4 - North
11. Options for widening are proposed for each section. All options follow the existing

route (online widening). The options comprise two lanes in each direction, separated by a 2.5m central reserve and 2.5m verges (both with widened visibility where required).

12. For section one and section four, only one option is proposed. This is due to the topography and location of the road, railway line, and river which limits potential widening options.
13. For sections 1 and 3 there are multiple options proposed alternating between widening to the east or west of the road. For section 3 some of the options proposed comprise a 'split' carriageway. This means that there would be a division between the northbound and southbound carriageways, wider than the standard central reserve. Due to the sloping nature of the ground in some locations the carriageway will have to be 'built-up' from the lower ground or cut-in to the hill-side or both. This means that the proposed carriageway is likely to be higher than the existing, particularly where there is a tie-in with the existing carriageway in the south.

Junctions

14. This project includes four proposed junction options numbered 12, 20, 21, and 22 at Dalnaspidal all in the same location. All options include an underbridge under the A9 to accommodate the junction connector road and the *Allt Coire Mhic-sith* tributary. Access for properties at Balsporran and Drumochter Lodge will be examined at DMRB3, no provision is proposed at this stage.
15. Junction option 12 is a diamond shaped junction with slip roads. Junction option 20 proposes left in/out junctions to the north of Dalnaspidal. Junction option 21 proposes left in/out junctions to the north and to the south of Dalnaspidal. The final option (22) is the same as for option 21, however, the connector road underneath the A9 will lie to the west of the tributary instead of the east. The connector road lies to the east of the tributary for all of the other options. The connector road lying to the west has the benefit of requiring only one bridge over the burn whilst all other options will require two bridges.
16. Appendix I provides more detail on the proposed route and junction options.

Appraisal of options

17. Appendix I provides a full appraisal of access, landscape, ecology and community and private asset matters. The appraisal is summarised below.

Outdoor Access: Non Motorised Users (NMU)

18. The consultation report identifies NMU routes in the area, including Core Paths, Rights of Way, and National Cycle Route (NCR) 7 and potential impacts on these both in terms of the route itself as well as potential severance.
19. Options presented for both mainline and junction will impact existing features which support outdoor access for recreation, in particular the existing alignment of National Cycle Route 7 and parking provision at Dalnaspidal and Balsporran Cottages. There are also a number of existing laybys, carriageway crossings, and established setting-off points

likely to be affected. The majority of these features will require significant re-configuration in order to retain their established function within the new road layout.

20. For Section 1, option B is favoured due to an eastward alignment which reduces the impact upon NCR7. This alignment minimises westward land-take and thereby improves space available for re-alignment of NCR7 to the west of the widened carriageway.
21. For Section 3, options A and C are favoured due to a small reduction in eastward land take compared to option B. The former options retain more space for re-alignment of NCR7 to the west of the widened carriageway.
22. In respect of proposals for a junction at Dalnaspidal all options are deemed acceptable with the exception of Option 12 which is considered to introduce an excessively severe impact on NCR7 compared to the others. Option 12 would notably constrain options for re-alignment of NCR7 to the west of the widened carriageway.
23. Proposals for an enhanced layby close to Drumochter Summit to enhance visitor experience at this location are supported together with retention and improvement of parking at Balsporran Cottages and Dalnaspidal. Continuity of parking provision is considered to be vitally important with design and layout that is accessible from established setting-off points and is convenient to both directions of vehicular travel. The detail of these matters are not yet known and anticipated at Stage 3.
24. In terms of outdoor access, route options for 1a, 3a or c, are preferred combined with junction options 20, 21 or 22.

Landscape and Ecology

25. This project runs through Drumochter Pass, which is unquestionably one of the most dramatic features along the entire route. The landform encloses the east-west views by the steep sides of the pass but with longer views to the hills. In this context, fit with land form (or potential to fit with land form) is important in reducing the landscape impact on all sections. Mitigation planting and habitat enhancements along the corridor could contribute significantly to strategic landscape and habitat connectivity through this part of the Park and the split carriageway sections could have a substantial role in achieving this. Realising this outcome could take decades but in the context of the lifespan of the dualled A9 this is acceptable. The existing vegetation can be seen to give this effect in places and this has developed since the 1980s. Careful consideration needs to be given to the location and nature of planting if the best outcomes are to be achieved for the site, the wider area and the road-users experience.
26. For Section 1 (south) there are two options and a clear preference in landscape terms for option A which brings the road out from the hillside rather than cutting in to it. For ecology there is a very slight preference for option B due to the possibility of retaining some scrub vegetation along the existing embankments. This would likely be outweighed by the relative landscape impacts for this option.
27. For Section 3 (north) there are three options and a clear preference for option B. This has a split carriageway arrangement separated from one another by a slope with a 2.5-3m height difference. In contrast, option A would require a much higher road and

create a steep embankment that would dominate the view from the railway. Option C also has a split lane but the change in level is managed by a retaining wall about 2.5m high and 700m long. This would add another significant engineered feature that further erodes the quality of naturalness that is a strong landscape characteristic. The 'split' carriageway means that the separate lanes can each take the route that fits best with the topography. This would minimise the landscape and visual impacts of the additional highway by allowing smaller cuttings and embankments. It also subtly emphasises the sheer difficulty of road building in this area which reflect the wild and rugged character of the landscape. There would also be scope for natural vegetation to develop between lanes and either side of the road.

28. There are no options for sections 2 and 4. Both would have landscape and ecological impacts due to the loss of habitat and large excavations and embankments.
29. There is a clear preference from both landscape and ecology for junction 22. This has a small footprint and is the only option requiring a single bridging of the burn which passes under the A9, all other options will require two bridges.
30. In terms of landscape and ecology, route options 1a and 3b are preferred combined with junction option 22.

Community and Private Assets

31. The consultation report identifies no significant impact on community and private assets. The information provided shows no loss of development land, community facilities, or community owned land associated with this project and there are no properties proposed for demolition. It is noted that sheep farming and highland estate shooting activities take place in this area. There is also a small scale accommodation provider impacted by the works.
32. Based on the issues identified in the consultation report, there is no preference for any particular route in terms of Community and Private Assets. However, the information does indicate that junction option 12 is less favourable as it will significantly impact more rough grazing than for other options.
33. All options will impact on estate activities and also on private accesses for both residential and commercial properties at Balsporran B&B and Drumochter Lodge.

Proposed Response to Consultation

34. 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 I.

Significant omissions or errors

35. The identification and analysis of the key relevant issues within the Consultation Report are accurate.

Key concerns with regard to residual impacts

36. Route options for all sections will impact on the access for residential and commercial properties in the area as well as access for NMUs on NCR7 and to popular walking routes and Munros.
37. Junction Option 12 is the least favoured due to the large land take required, impact on landscape and access. Junction 22 is the most preferred due to the small land take and the requirement for river crossings is minimised.
38. Preferences in terms of access are contrary in some cases to preferences for landscape and ecology. The preferences in terms of access relate to possible impacts on the ability to accommodate NCR7 on the existing route line. It is likely that these issues can be addressed at DMRB3 and that NCR7 will need to be re-aligned in places.
39. It is proposed that CNPA respond with a preference for route options 1a, and 3b and Junction Option 22 provided that mitigation can be achieved for NCR7 and NMU interests.

Suggestions for consideration in more detail at DMRB Stage 3

40. The CNPA suggests the following:
 - a) the detailed proposals will need to be carefully considered against the policies of the National Park Partnership Plan, 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 and also present opportunities for enhancement, in particular for NMUs and NCR7, access to properties, and enhancement planting for habitat connectivity, landscape, and views;
 - c) it is recommended that, as matter of considerable importance, all opportunity is taken to enhance (or replace with appropriate alternatives) existing features which support NMU access including car parking and improvements to public transport connectivity;
 - d) 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;
 - e) this area is prone to closure due to accidents, adverse weather, and snow fall, the impact of the design - in particular steep slope or retaining wall - needs to give consideration to this and also how traffic can be managed or turned around/diverted if the road is closed;
 - f) there should be detailed proposals to avoid detrimental impacts upon National Cycle Route 7 (NCR7) and its users, this is particularly challenging for this project, the approach should be one of seeking overall improvement to the existing standard which can be managed through a combination of design and mitigation - CNPA supports the principle of maintaining and where possible increasing, the distance of NCR7 from the carriageway;
 - g) where existing crossing points have been identified crossing the A9 carriageway, all viable options should be considered to allow them to continue once the upgraded A9 is operational or an alternative provided - permanent severance of existing Core Paths should be avoided;
 - h) 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; and,

- i) 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

- 41. That Members approve the proposed CNPA response to Transport Scotland Consultation on the A9 Dualling, Project 7 Glen Garry to Dalwhinnie**

Next Steps

42. Once a preferred route option is confirmed, the design detail will be further developed and refined at DMRB Stage 3 which is anticipated to start later this year, 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.
43. The next DMRB Stage 2 consultation response will be for Project 9, Crubenmore to Kincaig, it is likely to come to Committee in August or September 2016.

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