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## CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

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### FOR DECISION

**Title:** APPROVAL OF PROPOSED CNPA RESPONSE TO TRANSPORT SCOTLAND INFORMAL CONSULTATION ON THE A9 DUALLING, PROJECT 11 DALRADDY TO SLOCHD

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### Purpose

This paper provides an overview of Transport Scotland's proposals for dualling the section of A9 between Dalraddy and Slochd 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 Dalraddy and Slochd; 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, 7, 8 and 9. This sixth consultation is for Project 11 which covers the section of the A9 from Dalraddy to Slochd. It includes junction options at Aviemore and Carr-Bridge.

### *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. This is the final Stage 2 consultation for a project within the National Park.

### **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 Natura and 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 11 Dalraddy to Slochd**

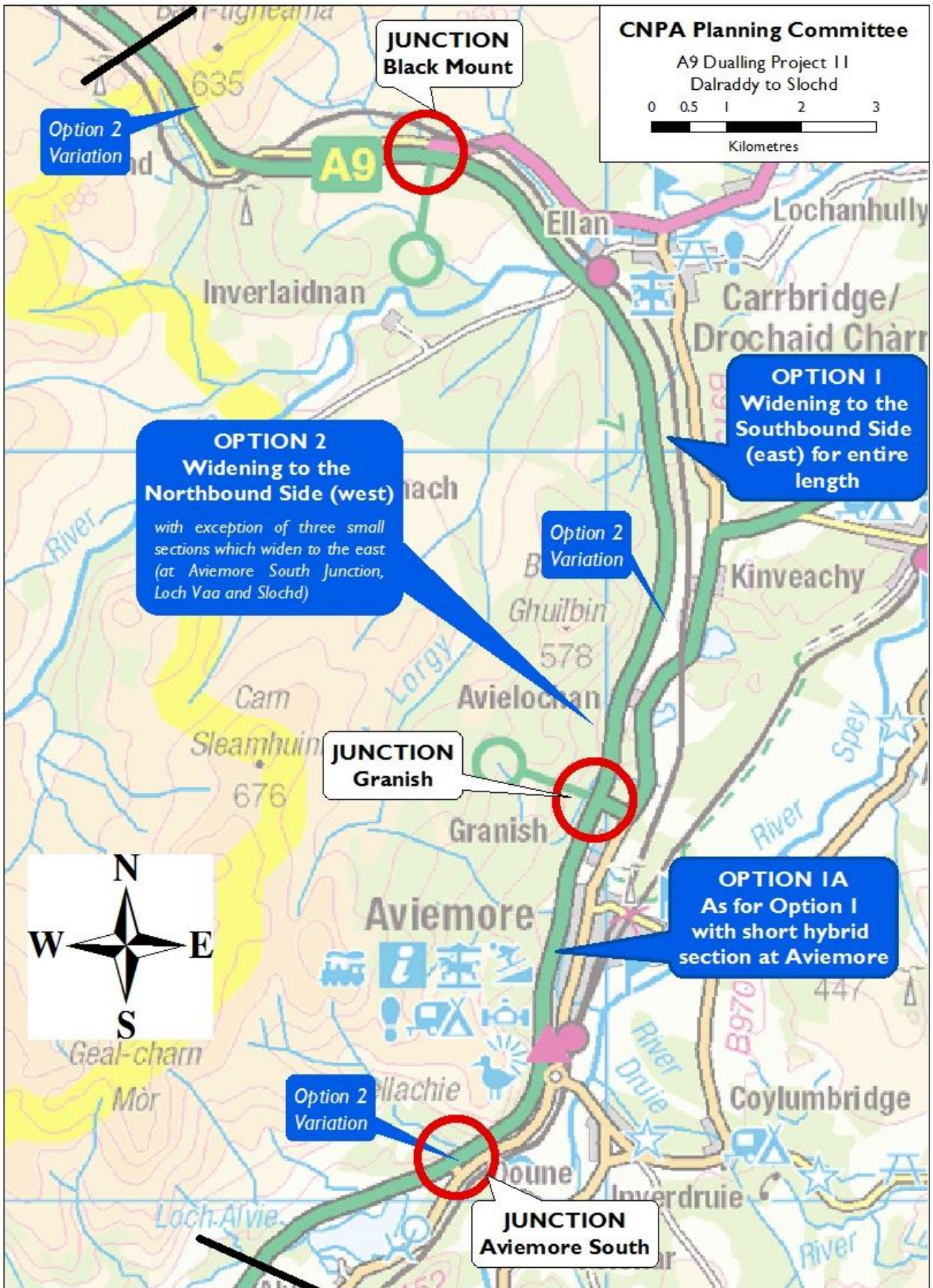
10. The route alignment and junction options are described below, further detail can be found in Appendix 1 and on the map on the following page.

#### **Route alignment**

11. This project is structured differently from previous ones. Previous consultations have split the project into multiple sections and then presented options for each of these sections. For this project only 3 options are presented, each one for the entirety of the length of the project:
- i. **Option 1** – Widening to the east (southbound side) for the length of the project
  - ii. **Option 1A** – As for Option 1 but with a small section at Aviemore widening to both sides
  - iii. **Option 2** - Widening to the west (northbound side) for the length of the project with the exception of a short section to the south of Aviemore at the junction location, another near Loch Vaa, and the other at the Slochd where it will widen to the east (southbound side)

#### **Junctions**

12. This project includes three junctions each with a number of options detailed below.
13. **Aviemore South** – all route alignments are the same at this location, widening to the southbound side (east). There are three junction options proposed, each incorporating an 'overbridge' providing access over the A9. One option would result in a slight re-alignment of the B9152. All options are in a similar position to the existing junction.
14. **Granish** (Aviemore North) – four options are proposed, each incorporating an 'underbridge' providing access under the A9. Two of the junction options are compatible with the route alignment which widens to the southbound (east) side and the other two are compatible with the route alignment which widens to the northbound (west) side. All options are in a similar position to the existing junction.
15. **Black Mount** (Carr-Bridge) – six junction options are proposed at this location. Three are compatible with southbound (east) widening and the other three are compatible with the northbound (west) widening. All options incorporate an 'overbridge' providing access over the A9. Two of the options provide for 'restricted movements' only. This would allow traffic travelling from the north on the A9 to turn off at this junction but traffic travelling on the A9 from the south would not be able to turn off. Those coming onto the A9 at this junction from the A938 Carr-Bridge road would be able to turn on to the road and travel northbound but not southbound.



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## Appraisal of options

16. 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)**

17. In respect of public access and NMU interests no specific comment is made over which of the proposed mainline options are favoured. It is noted that Option I and IA will lead to significant impacts upon the 'Aviemore Orbital' core path (LBS30), however, this is considered to be resolvable through mitigation. Impacts on Craigellachie NNR are most prevalent in respect of Option 2 as are effects on General Wade's Military Road with losses at key sections.
18. No direct impacts are noted for any of the junction options at Aviemore South. There is some potential for encroachment towards the Speyside Way Extension due to junction scale, thereby reducing existing levels of user amenity, however, this may be an unavoidable outcome and mitigation will be required
19. All junction options at Granish will impact on existing alignments of General Wade's Military Road. It is likely that Option C2I would have the least eventual impact.
20. The restricted movements junctions proposed at Black Mount would minimise the overall construction scale of the junction which is located on relatively level open ground. This may have a lesser impact on amenity of NMUs than other junction options. A possible reduction in traffic using the junction for southbound journeys may be beneficial with reduced volumes using the Carr-Bridge/Slochd link road positively impacting NCR7 users. There are well established problems over traffic speeding through Carr-Bridge which may also be positively impacted. Conversely there may be greater volumes of traffic passing through the village if all Slochd traffic travelling to/from the south were unable to utilise a restricted junction for this purpose.

### **Landscape and Ecology**

21. This Project will result in some of the most significant changes along the whole of the A9 programme as it goes through the CNP. In particular the excavation for the Slochd and the need to 'thread' it past Aviemore presents many technical difficulties. There is really only one option for the Slochd and the issues are common to all of the options presented.
22. In landscape and ecological terms Option I (widening on the southbound side/to the east) results in the least loss of habitat and landscape features. This is because it requires smaller excavations to the west and therefore less woodland loss on the upslope side. There would be greater filling to the east to support the new carriageway but this presents more opportunities for mitigation planting (this will take some time to be effective) and in places south of Carr-Bridge may even open some views to southbound travellers towards the mountain core. It does, however, build closer to more homes and Aviemore in general and this may offset these advantages depending on the detailing of the final scheme and mitigation planting. There is potential for the loss of existing trees which provide a screen between the road and Aviemore at present.
23. Option IA takes the same alignment as Option I, however, it avoids the properties around Aviemore and minimises the loss of Craigellachie NNR.

24. Option 2 mostly widens on the northbound side (to the west) though not always. There is a greater requirement to excavate along the steep slopes close to the roadside. In places this is quite extensive (in addition to the Slochd). These excavated areas may take a long time to fully revegetate back to woodland. Of particular concern is a large excavation that may impact upon Tor Beag Fort (a Scheduled Monument). This option would also require the loss of parts Craigellachie NNR including Loch Puladdern, which was previously reduced when the current A9 was built in the 1980's. The carriageway would be closer to Highburnside, however, it would occupy space between the road and housing taken by immature landscaping for the development.
25. The junction designs are mostly grouped into two broad styles; half clover leaf and T junction types. The former have a strongly urban form with tight sweeping loops for the access and slip roads which are mounted on similarly formed cutting or embankments. The T junction types tend to lend themselves to the CNP better because of the simpler geometry and that the earthworks are more easily planted in a way that compliments surrounding woodlands. One option at Granish includes a roundabout in addition to a clover leaf shape which would mean it requires lighting. This would compound the landscape effect of the urban form.

### **Community and Private Assets**

26. Option 1 widens to the east and would result in the demolition of 5 residential properties and land take from 1 other. Three of these properties are in Aviemore. Option 1A is the same as Option 1 with the exception of the section passing Aviemore. This alternative option would result in no demolition of properties in Aviemore but would increase the number of properties impacted through land take to 9. Both options would result in land take from commercial properties, community land, agricultural holdings and housing sites. Option 1 and 1A would result in the loss of 24% of a croft holding at Carr-Bridge.
27. Option 2 widens away from Aviemore and therefore has a much lower impact on properties in this area but a much greater impact on the National Nature Reserve at Craigellachie and the public amenity of the site. All options have an impact on properties in Carr-Bridge including houses on Station Road and the currently unused Timber Yard. The consultation report does not accurately assess this impact and this will be noted to Transport Scotland. Option 2 will have a much lower impact on land take at the Croft at Carr-Bridge but will still require land take from several agricultural holdings in this location.
28. The Junction Options at Aviemore South will all have a slight impact on three agricultural holdings and on one residential property. Junction Option A18 in this location would result in the demolition of one residential property.
29. Two of the junction options (C31 and C34) at Granish would result in demolition of a property and a slight impact on agricultural and forestry holdings. The alternative options (C18 and C21) would have only a 'slight' impact on this property. The access road which links the A95 with the A9 at this location already experiences high levels of use by HGVs wishing to join the A9 to travel south. There are no proposals to upgrade this A95 junction as part of this consultation.
30. Junction Options at Black Mount (Carr-Bridge) will have a slight impact on an agricultural holding and forestry operations. Two of the junction options are restricted movement junctions and will have a potentially negative impact on local businesses at Slochd, in particular at Slochd Mhor Lodge. Customers travelling to this business from the south would be

required to leave the A9 at the Granish junction and travel through Carr-Bridge. The community at the Slochd would lose their current access and be reliant on the Black Mount junction. The existing access road has a narrow bridge and 3 tonne weight limit which will severely restrict the ability of larger vehicles such as service vehicles and estate vehicles to access the properties and wider area.

### **Proposed Response to Consultation**

31. 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. The main points are summarised below.

#### ***Significant omissions or errors in the Consultation Report***

32. The project is presented in only three options although it is in fact broken down into 13 sections. It appears that more options could have been developed using these individual sections as a basis rather than the two main options presented i.e. entirely to the east or predominantly to the west. Permutations other than those presented in the three options are possible and could minimise ecological and landscape effects in key areas. These may be harder to construct but would be worthwhile considering when developing final proposals and we would be keen to explore these.
33. All junction options provide for a 'road to nowhere' i.e. the priority of the traffic is to go straight on where in fact no road exists. All traffic must therefore 'turn-off' the access road to enable them to access the slip road rather than simply following the road around to the slip road. It is not clear why this has been done for every junction in this project when it has not been the case for previous projects. This may in some cases enable junctions to provide access for land managers and smaller housing groups as well as delivering a smaller junction foot print. It would have been helpful to have had the reasons for this explained within the consultation report, particularly as it is an issue that has raised concern with communities.
34. Properties on Station Road at Carr-Bridge are not identified as being significantly impacted upon. It would appear, however, that given the proximity of two of these properties to the road on either side they would be significantly impacted and as such the appraisal of impact should be revisited.
35. Slochd Mhor Lodge is noted as a holiday let only (Hostel/Bunk House) but the value of the property as a wider activity attraction has been omitted. Slochd Mhor Lodge also operates an activity business providing bike trails, ski trails and bike shop. The impact on this business of the loss of the Slochd junction and the potential implications of a restricted access junction at Black Mount needs to be revisited and impacts assessed accordingly.

**Key concerns with regard to residual impacts**

36. The proposed restricted junction options at Black Mount will have a potentially negative impact on local businesses at Slochd, in particular at Slochd Mhor Lodge. Customers travelling to this business from the south would be required to leave the A9 at the Granish junction and travel through Carr-Bridge.
37. The community at the Slochd would lose their current access to the A9 and be reliant on the Black Mount junction. The existing Slochd road has a narrow bridge and 3 tonne weight limit which will severely restrict the ability of larger vehicles such as service vehicles and estate vehicles to access the properties and wider area. Location of the snow gates in this area also requires careful consideration.
38. The Cairngorms National Park entry marker at Slochd will need to be relocated. There is an opportunity to create a strong visitor welcome experience combined with a viewpoint and enhanced layby in this area and we would welcome the opportunity to work with TS on this.
39. Craigellachie NNR is currently accessed by a tunnel under the A9 and is not obvious to visitors and residents and does not create a strong sense of place or visitor welcome and arrival. CNPA and SNH have been working with partners to make improvements to this over the years. This access should remain open throughout construction where possible and we would welcome the opportunity to develop and enhance the access to the NNR into an outstanding visitor arrival and experience.
40. There may be residual impacts for the junction on the A95 which provides access to the A9 at Granish. A high proportion of the traffic utilising this junction are Heavy Good Vehicles, including distillery traffic from Speyside and Morayshire, turning off the A95 to travel south on the A9. Careful consideration needs to be given to this junction with the A95 at Granish as well as the junction providing access onto the A9.
41. Impacts on General Wade's Military Road, NCR7 and paths in and around Aviemore and Craigellachie NNR must be carefully considered and alternative provision made (and improved where possible) both during and post construction.
42. The new Speyside Way extension from Aviemore to Kincaig utilises a pavement/cycleway which lies between the A9 and the B9152 as it heads south out of Aviemore. This line of this route and its development took some years to achieve and could be adversely impacted by all of the options. Careful consideration needs to be given to mitigation for this route and an alternative provided if necessary.
43. Option 1 has the lowest potential impact in both landscape and ecology terms although it has the highest impact on residential property. Option 1A goes some way to addressing this. Option 2 has the greatest impact on landscape and ecology. Given that the project has 13 separate sections but only 3 options given, we would wish to see alternative options developed for some of these sections in order to mitigate key concerns identified within the detailed response. Careful mitigation will also be required. The 'T' junction types are favoured over the cloverleaf shapes as they fit better with the landscape and provide better opportunities for mitigation planting.



**Suggestions for consideration in more detail at DMRB Stage 3**

44. 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. The entrance for the Park from Inverness is an important 'event' for NMUs and the design should ensure an appropriate entrance is experienced;
- 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) there should be detailed proposals to avoid detrimental impacts upon National Cycle Route 7 (NCR7) and its users, 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;
- f) 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;
- g) 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;
- h) 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;
- i) rock cuts at Slochd and other places will be very significant in this section and particular attention to the design of these is required. In particular the drama and very strong sense of place that the Slochd exhibits should be recreated by keeping cut faces as steep and as close to the road as safely possible but without the need for netting;
- j) landscape assessment should make greater reference to local landscape character effects as well as impacts on designations (NSA and wildland areas); and,
- k) mitigation in the area below the A9 may be particularly effective if current natural landforms and tree growth patterns are replicated.

**Recommendation**

**45. That Members approve the proposed CNPA response to Transport Scotland Consultation on the A9 Dualling, Project 11 Dalraddy to Slochd**

## **Next Steps**

46. 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 next 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.
47. This is the final DMRB Stage 2 consultation response for a Project within the National Park.

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**7 November 2016**

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