

CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

FOR DECISION

Title: APPROVAL OF PROPOSED CNPA RESPONSE TO TRANSPORT SCOTLAND INFORMAL CONSULTATION ON THE A9 DUALLING, PROJECT 8 DALWHINNIE TO CRUBENMORE

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Purpose

This paper provides an overview of Transport Scotland's proposals for dualling the section of A9 between Dalwhinnie and Crubenmore 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 Dalwhinnie and Crubenmore; and
- b) approve the proposed CNPA response to the informal consultation.

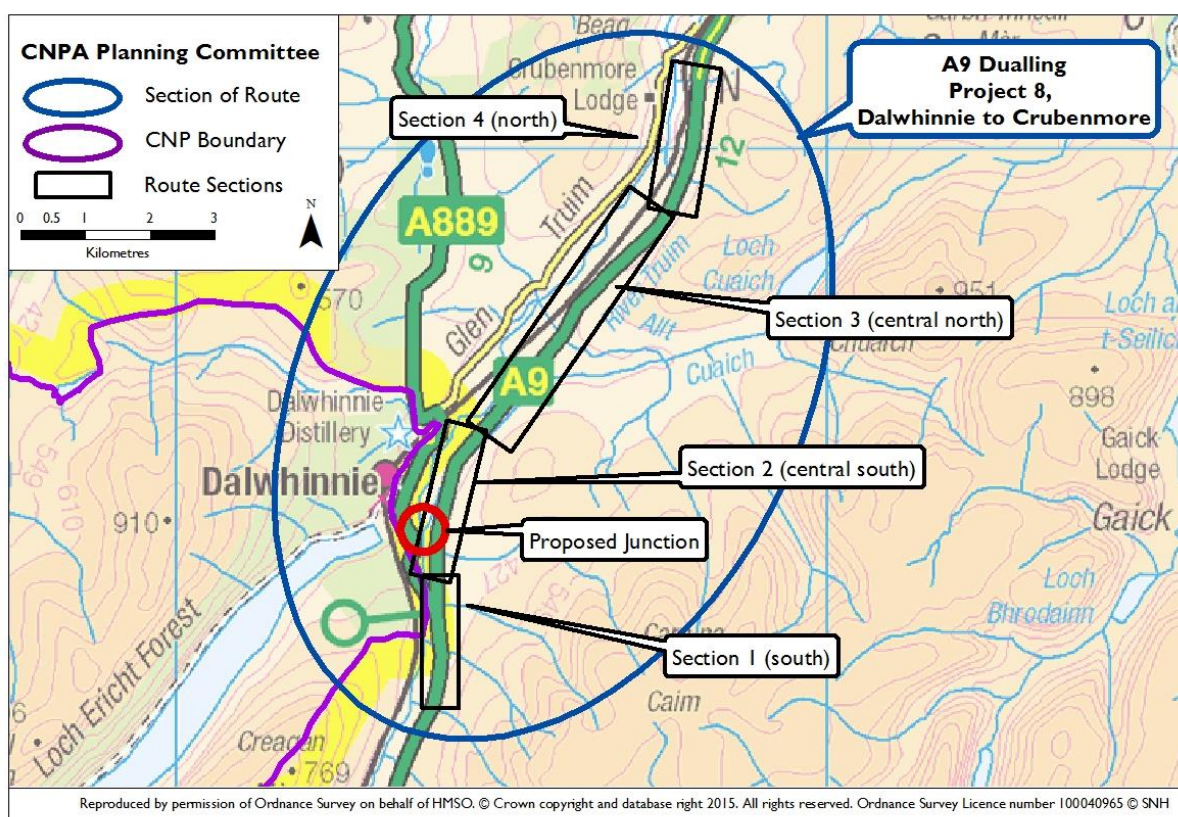
Background

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 and 6. This third consultation is for Project 8 which covers the section of the A9 between Dalwhinnie and Crubenmore. It includes junction options at Dalwhinnie. A location map of Project 8, Dalwhinnie to Crubenmore 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 & 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. 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

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 8 Dalwhinnie to Crubenmore

Route alignment

10. This project is split into four sections between Dalwhinnie and Crubenmore:
 - 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. For the majority of the options, the widened road will follow the existing route. This is referred to as 'online' widening. The majority of 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 2 and 3 there are multiple options proposed alternating between widening to the east or west of the road. For these sections 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.

Junctions

14. This project includes five proposed junction options at Dalwhinnie. The first four options are sited in a single location to the south of Dalwhinnie. The fifth option is a staggered junction. The southbound exit would be located in the same place as the previous options to the south of Dalwhinnie whilst the northbound carriageway would be served by a 'left-in/left-out' junction close to the existing A889 junction.
15. The first junction option requires a bridge over the road and the other options require an underbridge. The second option includes a roundabout either side of the road which would require lighting.
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 & 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. The report identifies the potential impact on these both in terms of the route itself as well as potential severance.
19. All proposed options will have an impact on existing features which support outdoor access, particularly parking provision at or near Cuaich and south of the northern Drumochter snow gates at the established setting-off point for Carn na Caim and A'Bhuideanach Bheag. Junction options one, two, three, and four will have a potential impact on National Cycle Route (NCR) 7.
20. In terms of outdoor access there is no preference for any of the route or junction options.

Landscape and Ecology

21. From Dalwhinnie to Crubenmore the landscape is characterised by its openness, its landforms both subtle and dramatic, and long views to the hills. In this context, fit with land form (or potential to fit with land form) is crucial to reducing the landscape impact on all sections. Mitigation planting and habitat enhancements along the Crubenmore Dalwhinnie 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 likely to be insignificant. 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.

22. The offline options with the 'split' carriageway mean 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.
23. The impacts of the options are broadly similar in terms of landscape and ecology and there is no overall strong preference between them. However, as indicated above, the split carriageway options for each of the two central sections offers the best potential long term mitigation. Junction 3 (27) is the preferred junction option because of the potential for medium and long-term landscape mitigation and a slightly less urbanised form that would least detrimental to the character of the landscape.
24. In terms of landscape and ecology, route options for 2b, and 3c are the preferred combined with junction option 3(27).

Community & Private Assets

25. The consultation report identifies impacts on Community and Private Assets. It shows no loss of development land, community facilities, or community owned land associated with this project and there are no properties proposed for demolition. Any agricultural land to be lost is identified as being of low value (rough grazing). There may be some impact on estate activities and also on private accesses for both residential and commercial properties including Crubenmore Lodge.
26. Based on the issues identified in the consultation report, there is no preference for any particular route or junction option in terms of Community and Private Assets.

Proposed Response to Consultation

27. 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

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

Key concerns with regard to residual impacts

29. Section I has only one option presented which will result in some loss of the existing woodland edge on the east. This is a thin strip of non-native woodland used to manage snow drifting onto the current road. This strip is already subject to an enhancement scheme for a retained track which includes native broadleaved planting along a 5m strip on the eastern edge.
30. For Section 2, the route options to the east of the road are preferred as they will have a lesser impact on the river than the option to the west. There is an overall

preference for route option 2c as this presents a good opportunity for long term local enhancement and strategic enhancements in terms of planting and habitat connectivity.

31. For Section 3, the preferred option is 3b. As for the previous section, this presents the best opportunity for enhancement in the long term.
32. Section 4 has only one option presented which will bring the road very close to the railway necessitating the construction of a retaining wall. This will make the road more visible from the Truim road, NCR7 and Crubenmore Lodge.
33. Habitat permeability allows the free dispersal of species across the road. This prevents the road becoming a barrier which can limit population robustness and the adaptation of species to climate change. This should be a key consideration in this area.
34. 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.
35. Junction Option 1 includes an overbridge which will create a horizontal barrier in the landscape. Junction Option 2 includes two roundabouts which will require lighting and therefore impacts upon dark skies. Junction Option 5 will create two 'urban' zones in the landscape. These three options are the least preferred.
36. Junction options 1, 2, 3, and 4 will have a potential impact on NCR7 as a result of the existing Dalwhinnie junction being stopped up and the subsequent configuration of the A889 at this point. Mitigation will be required.
37. The preferred Junction Option is number 3 as it presents the greatest opportunity for enhancement planting and integration into the landscape. Other options will create a more urban effect and have limited scope for ecological and landscape enhancement.
38. It is proposed that CNPA respond with a preference for route options 2c, and 3b and Junction Option 3 provided that mitigation can be achieved for NCR7 and NMU interests.

Suggestions for consideration in more detail at DMRB Stage 3

39. 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 and also present opportunities for enhancement, in particular for mammal permeability, 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. In particular parking provision at or near to Cuaich and south of the northern Drumochter snow gates at the established setting-off point for Carn na Caim and A'Bhuideanach Bheag. The

principle of utilising enhanced laybys to better facilitate safe NMU access and improved visitor experience is also supported and advocated including 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) 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;
- f) 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;
- 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; and
- 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.

Recommendation

- 40. That Members approve the proposed CNPA response to Transport Scotland Consultation on the A9 Dualling, Project 8 Dalwhinnie to Crubenmore**

Next Steps

- 41. 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 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.
- 42. The next DMRB Stage 2 consultation response will be for Project 7, Glen Garry to Dalwhinnie, it is likely to come to Committee in March or April 2016.

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