

Maureen Watt MSP
Convener, ICI Committee
Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP



12 September 2013

Dear Maureen

You may be aware of the recent media coverage of plans to introduce an average speed camera system on the A9. I thought it might be useful to set out some basic points to provide context on this issue and wider plans to improve the A9.

Firstly, the Scottish Government remains committed to dualling the A9 between Perth and Inverness – the biggest transport infrastructure project, by cost, in Scotland's history. Although this work is progressing, it will require a massive effort and will not be fully complete until 2025. In the meantime, the Government cannot tolerate continued serious accidents and fatalities and has therefore asked the A9 Safety Group to agree a package of measures to improve road safety by tackling poor driving behaviour.

The A9 Safety Group includes representatives from public and private sectors who regularly drive the A9 and share a strong interest in its safe and efficient operation. Members include Transport Scotland, Police Scotland, Safety Camera Partnerships, the Highland Council, Perth & Kinross Council, the trunk road operating company BEAR Scotland, the Road Haulage Association, the Freight Transport Association, the Confederation of Passenger Transport and Stagecoach.

These cameras will cost around £2.5m and will pay for themselves as a result of casualty savings within the first year. It has been suggested that the camera system is being introduced to raise revenue for the Scottish Government. This is factually incorrect as all of the monies from fixed penalty speeding notices go directly to the Treasury at Westminster. Such cameras have already proven their worth on the A77 and other schemes in the UK. There have also been suggestions that the money would be better spent on dualling. However, this expenditure will not delay, by a single day, the dualling of the A9, not least given the savings referred to above. We need accident reduction now.

The introduction of average speed cameras is just one of a package of measures being considered for the A9. Other solutions that have been delivered and are being considered include:

- safety barrier improvements;
- adding more variable message signs to inform motorists;
- improving speed limit signs, road markings and road studs;
- Police Scotland deploying a new road policing strategy; and
- education programmes (for example, an overtaking safety campaign).

Much comment has been made about raising HGV speed limits on single carriageway sections of the A9 to 50 mph. This was considered by the Group. The available research shows that average speed cameras will improve safety for all users, whether HGV speed limit is retained at 40 mph or increased to 50 mph. However, our evidence suggests most accidents will be reduced if the 40 mph limit is retained. The Group has not dismissed raising HGV speed limits to 50 mph but will undertake further work to better understand the suitability of a pilot speed limit increase.

The A9 Safety Group believes that average speed cameras, in combination with the other measures outlined above will have positive effect on road safety, save lives and reduce serious accidents ahead of dualling the route. Subject to its further development and procurement, they aim for the system to be operational by Summer 2014.

As part of their plans for wider engagement, I have asked the Group to attend Parliament next month to explain the rationale behind the scheme, progress so far and answer any questions you may have. I have also asked that this presentation be supported by an update on the other investments being made on the A9 corridor, including the work on-going to dual this vital route.

I would be grateful if you could indicate whether you will attend. In the meantime you can learn more about the A9 Safety Group, its work and the evidence base at the website:

www.a9road.info

Further information on the A9 dualling work can be found at the Transport Scotland website:

www.transportscotland.gov.uk/road/projects/a9 .

I have written in similar terms to all MSPs with an interest in the A9.

Kind regards



KEITH BROWN