

# Inquiry into A9 Dualling Project – Killiecrankie, Fincastle and Tummel Community Council submission

Our Community Council, in its previous incarnation as the Killiecrankie & Fincastle Community Council, is in the unique position of having participated in a Public Local Inquiry (PLI) into the dualling of the A9 over the Inventory battlefield of Killiecrankie. We engaged fully with Transport Scotland throughout the planning of what became the Killiecrankie to Glen Garry section of the A9. As a result, we have a wealth of knowledge about the process which, though difficult to share via your engagement website, may be useful to the Committee.

Our objection to Transport Scotland's scheme was not because we were or are opposed to the dualling project. We objected to the proposal at Killiecrankie because Transport Scotland's preferred route will obliterate the area where the fighting was concentrated at the Battle of Killiecrankie. This is a designated site on the Inventory of Historic Battlefields, but the core battleground is not listed as a feature worthy of special protection. Scottish Ministers therefore accepted Transport Scotland's plan without modification.

I will follow the format of your questions in the following response.

## **Strategy for dualling the A9**

It appears from your consultation website that the aspect that most concerns the Committee is the question of timescale and the possibility of dualling multiple section of the road simultaneously instead of dualling one section at a time. This is what I will address.

The project to dual the entire A9 from Perth to Inverness has been divided into 11 sections. All of these are subject to numerous planning stages, each of which takes years. The Killiecrankie timeline was:

- 2011 Scottish Government confirmed its commitment to dual the A9
- 2012 – 2014 Transport Scotland (Jacobs) completed the DMRB Stage 1 assessment
- 2014 – 2016 Transport Scotland (Jacobs) completed the DMRB Stage 2 assessment

- 2016 – 2017 Transport Scotland (Jacobs) completed the DMRB Stage 3 assessment
- 2018 Objections received to proposal
- 2019 PLI proposed
- 2020 PLI held
- 2022 Scottish Ministers agree to accept Transport Scotland's proposal.

Killiecrankie's experience was unusually long and we are not near the construction stage. After planning, comes preparation of the tender documents, competition for the construction contract, awarding the contract and hand over to a contractor. Only this week Transport Scotland updated its contract strategy for A9 dualling and re-invited tenders for the Tomatin to Moy section after failing to attract more than one bid the first time. It is worth noting that the contract for this section of 6 miles is likely to be awarded mid-2024 and it is expected to take around 3 years to build.

Following the debacle of the first tender for Tomatin to Moy, presumably it was thought the most expedient way forward was to continue to treat the section as a stand-alone, single entity. How many sections could realistically be built simultaneously? The design for the section at Dunkeld has yet to be revealed. Construction on two sections has been completed. Tomatin to Moy is underway. That leaves seven sections.

The head of the A9 Project told our PLI back in January 2020 that Transport Scotland was exploring ways of packaging schemes as they completed the statutory process. That meant looking at how each section could be funded. Accordingly, we heard that Transport Scotland was looking at capital funding or private finance. A new model would also allow Transport Scotland to join adjacent sections to make longer sections of road more attractive to contractors.

We were told that Killiecrankie to Glen Garry would continue to be considered a single section because at 13.4 miles (thanks to an earlier extension from the original Killiecrankie to Pitagowan) it was the second longest section in the project. Presumably the longest section, 16 miles from Dalraddy to Slochd, would be ruled out also. So perhaps there are five sections that could be considered for some sort of repackaging.

It was apparent at the PLI that Transport Scotland was aware that its procurement process was not working and that the timetable for completion of any section of the A9, let alone the entire project, was far removed from the published dates.

Besides the question of the construction contract and funding, there is the matter of driver inconvenience while construction is underway. Before the PLI, Transport Scotland was quite open about wanting to avoid constructing 2 schemes simultaneously. After all, one of the original reasons given for dualling the A9 was to reduce journey times between Inverness and Perth by approximately 20 minutes. Another was to reduce driver stress and frustration. While the Community Council has limited information about the disruption caused by construction of the 4.7 miles from Kincaig to Dalraddy, we know the disruption caused by the construction of 5.9 miles from Luncarty to Birnam. Repackaging schemes into long sections would result in years of even longer journey times and increase driver frustration. How many years will it take to shave 20 minutes off the drive from Inverness to Perth?

In any case, the value of removing driver frustration has always been opaque. SPICe, the Scottish Parliament Information Centre, [published](#) its cost benefit analysis in February 2020. At 2010 prices, the estimated cost of the project is £3bn. The estimated return on every £1 spent was 78p in direct benefits. If we include Wider Economic Benefits such as increased productivity, the estimated return rose to 89p for every £1 spent. The project only produced a positive economic benefit after a value was added for removing driver frustration. Transport Scotland puts that at £430million though it has not explained how it arrived at that figure. Perhaps when we get details of its revamped construction contract, it will also provide more information on the expected impact on increased journey times and driver frustration during construction of repackaged longer sections together with the expected benefits after completion.

Constructing multiple sections simultaneously looks problematic on several counts. It also assumes that every scheme that has been through the statutory process is the best possible. We do not believe that and the longer the delay in implementing a flawed plan, the more chance there is of rectifying mistakes.

## **Comment on road safety measures that have been put in place**

Two road safety measures were introduced before the latest raft that you list. These were the HGV speed limit increase and the introduction of average speed cameras. Both of these made a positive impact on accident figures in the years following their introduction in 2014.

Fatalities increased in 2022 when life resumed after Covid. There was more traffic on the roads after two relatively quiet years and foreign drivers returned. Accident statistics are horrific anywhere but on the A9 it must be highlighted that some junctions are notoriously dangerous. Regular A9 drivers are wary of junctions at Dunkeld, Bruar and Ralia where a right turn on or off the A9 can be nightmarish.

Enhanced road markings, illuminated road studs, improved signage and more safety campaigns are all welcome. What we need are improved junctions that eliminate right turns. Look at the transformation at Ballinluig which used to be a terrifying experience before a grade-separated junction was built.

Eliminating lethal junctions now is not incompatible with the ambition to dual the entire A9 in due course. Indeed, improved junctions could be built in line with proposed A9 schemes but they don't come with the same price tag. Nor would it offend the Greens whose Bute House Agreement [with the Scottish Government] has effectively stymied new road construction. Eliminating right turns on or off the A9 would not induce more traffic but benefit safety.

Transport Scotland argued at the PLI that it must stick rigidly to DMRB standards. We think that for Killiecrankie this results in a hugely over-engineered plan. For instance, the scheme here includes 2 large lay-bys to be sited on the Inventory battlefield, a place where the land grab should be minimised if we are to respect our historic environment. In his conclusion the Reporter advised Scottish Ministers that they may wish to reconsider layby spacing so as to reduce the scheme footprint within the battlefield. In other words, he suggested a pragmatic approach could be taken.

Dualling the A9 to an overdemanding DMRB standard is not the only way of improving safety, but it is the slowest and most expensive. Dealing sensibly with accident hotspots right now would save lives.

## **Creation of a memorial to those who have lost their lives on the A9**

I have only discussed this idea with a limited number in the community. Everyone was opposed to it.

## **Impact on business and local economy**

We had a dedicated session at the PLI on the impact of construction on tourism in Killiecrankie. Local community members who were dealing with new visitors to the area during the construction of the Luncarty to Birnam section discovered that delays on the road affect the tourists' experience. The perception that visitors form on the journey can influence the decision about returning.

Transport Scotland's tourism expert said that he had found no evidence of negative impact on tourism during construction of the Luncarty to Birnam section but could only present figures for a period that preceded construction. He had no figures relevant to the construction period to prove his assertion.

All those involved in the tourism sector here (providers of accommodation, attractions, food & drink, events) were worried about the anticipated downturn during the construction phase. We rejected Transport Scotland's idea that the development of the Highland Discovery app would offset for the damage. It was our view that road construction here would negatively impact business and any extension of the duration of roadworks would worsen the impact.

Moreover, few in the tourism sector are in receipt of Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPO). The lack of a CPO renders business owners ineligible for compensation. This feature of the process is iniquitous.

Objectors at the PLI were aware that tourism was considered at the strategic level and was encompassed in the Environmental Statement's section on People and Communities – Community and Private Assets. That may be adequate for large, urbanised centres that have active backing of powerful agencies such as Visit Scotland or the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA). It is wholly inadequate for a destination like Killiecrankie. There is no tourism strategy within the A9 dualling project and – in spite of the reasons given for embarking on the project – there is no ambition to enhance tourism in Killiecrankie.

The vision for the “Electric A9” has also caused confusion. In September 2017, Nicola Sturgeon said, “We will make the A9, already a major infrastructure project, Scotland’s first fully electric-enabled highway.” However, the head of Transport Scotland told us in November 2017 that the A9 had been designed without any knowledge or influence of the political promise to make the road an electric highway. In fact, the A9 plan does not factor in any new technology. Charge hubs will have to be located within towns and villages adjacent to the A9. No charging point could mean that A9 drivers bypass small villages such as Killiecrankie entirely.