

## REPORT TO INFRASTRUCTURE SERVICES COMMITTEE – 29 NOVEMBER 2018

### A96 DUALLING INITIAL ROUTE OPTIONS

#### 1 Recommendations

The Committee is recommended to:

- 1.1 **Note the progress that has been made to date on the A96 Aberdeen to Inverness dualling project by Transport Scotland;**
- 1.2 **Agree that Appendix 4 forms the basis of Aberdeenshire Council's feedback to Transport Scotland, subject to comments by this Committee;**
- 1.3 **Confirm to Transport Scotland that this Council still has a strategic preference for route options to the north-east of Inverurie; and**
- 1.4 **Reiterate to Transport Scotland the importance of further proactive, meaningful and early engagement with officers, Members of the Council, communities and stakeholders.**

#### 2 Background/Discussion

- 2.1 In December 2011, the Scottish Government published its first Infrastructure Investment Plan, which contained a commitment to dual the A96 between Inverness and Aberdeen by 2030, thus completing the dual carriageway network between all Scottish cities. As roads authority for the Trunk Road network, Transport Scotland has responsibility for delivering this programme of work.
- 2.2 Transport Scotland appointed the AmeyArup Joint Venture team in July 2017 to take forward the A96 Dualling East of Huntly to Aberdeen scheme, which is to provide a dual carriageway from the tie-in with the existing A96, east of Huntly, to the A96 junction with the Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route (AWPR) at Craibstone.
- 2.3 The starting point for the consultants were three very broadly defined "Route Improvement Strategies", which had been defined during an earlier phase of work. These were:
  - 1) Option B, online improvements, with options of bypasses to north-east and south-west of Inverurie;
  - 2) Option C, which directly linked Kintore to Huntly to the south-west of Inverurie, potentially impacting upon the Bennachie area; and

- 3) Option D which directly linked Pitcaple, Durno and Colpy to the north-west of existing A96.
- 2.4 During Spring 2018, an A96 Position Statement was considered by relevant Area Committees, prior to being approved at the meeting of Aberdeenshire Council on 26 April 2018 (See **Appendix 1**). Key themes within this Position Statement were confirmation of Aberdeenshire Council's desire to see all viable route options as far north as the A920/A947 to be continued to be assessed, including a re-examination of a previously discarded Route Improvement Strategy Option Q. The Position Statement also stressed the key issues of addressing development pressures in Inverurie and Oldmeldrum, addressing the linkages between the A947 and A96, and a request to see Transport Scotland and its officers work openly and transparently with Aberdeenshire Council officers in order to identify the optimum route alignment.
- 2.5 As a result of this feedback, and wider community pressure, Transport Scotland agreed that Route Improvement Strategy Option Q would also be assessed alongside the other route strategies during this stage of work.
- 2.6 During the week of 8 October 2018, initial route options under consideration for the A96 Dualling East of Huntly to Aberdeen Scheme were presented by Transport Scotland at a series of public exhibitions, as per the table below.

Date	Location
8 October 2018	Inverurie Town Hall
9 October 2018	Inverurie Town Hall
10 October 2018	Stewarts Hall, Huntly
11 October 2018	Kinellar Community Hall, Blackburn

- 2.7 Information was also published on-line, and can be viewed at the following link:

<https://www.transport.gov.scot/media/43257/leaflet-october-2018-east-of-huntly-to-aberdeen-a96-dualling.pdf>

The public exhibitions gathered significant press interest, and the public events at were all very well-attended.

- 2.8 On 13 November, Transport Scotland and its consultants hosted events for members of affected Community Councils, to explain progress with the route selection process.
- 2.9 Transport Scotland are now seeking comments on the initial route options. Transport Scotland have been advised that the Council's formal response to the consultation will be provided following this meeting of the Infrastructure Services Committee, and accordingly will be received later than their published cut-off date for comments, which was 22 November 2018.

## Proposals

- 2.10 The initial route options being considered are detailed in **Appendix 2**. It is important to note that the route standard proposed for the upgrade is a wholly stand-alone dual carriageway with grade separated junctions, with local

access being provided by a parallel all-purpose single carriageway, which for many segments could be provided by the existing A96. The lines showing the route options plans are not necessarily fixed and do not yet represent the actual width of the road footprint required in any particular location. The location, number, and form of junctions connecting the new dual carriageway to the local road network will be considered further as the design process continues and are indicative only at this stage.

- 2.11 Three route sections can be identified, with three distinct route options being provided for each section.
- 1) Between Huntly and Colpy, the three route options are Lime (L), Cyan (C), and Red (R). The Cyan options broadly along the existing alignment of the A96; the Lime option runs to the north of the current A96; and the Red option runs to the south.
  - 2) From Colpy to Pitcaple, the three route options are Blue (B), Pink (P), and Brown (Br). The Brown option runs west of the existing alignment between Colpy and Old Rayne and north-east of the alignment between Old Rayne and Whiteford. The Pink options run to the north-east of Colpy and Old Rayne; and the Blue option runs further north, running close to the alignment of the A920.
  - 3) Between Whiteford and Kintore, there are four route options, three of which go to the north-east of Inverurie, and one of which goes to the south-west of Inverurie. The Orange (O) option ties into the existing A96 at Thainstone. The Violet Option (V) connects Whiteford to the Tavelty Junction to the north of Kintore and is the closest to Inverurie on the north-east. The Green option (G) connects Whiteford to Tavelty but runs closer to Oldmeldrum. The Blue option (B) continues from the A920 alignment to the west of Oldmeldrum with options to intersect with either the Green or Violet routes.
- 2.12 Route options which would have seen an online improvement of the existing Inverurie bypass between Thainstone roundabout and Blackhall roundabout have been discarded (Sub-option of route Improvement Strategy B).
- 2.13 Route options which ran to the south west of Inverurie, in close proximity to Bennachie, have also been discarded (Route Improvement Strategy C).
- 2.14 Despite further analysis by Transport Scotland, specific route options along the alignment of the A947 between Oldmeldrum and Dyce have not been taken forward, albeit options between Colpy and Oldmeldrum have been retained (Route Improvement Strategy Q).
- 2.15 No proposals for the improvement of the existing dual carriageway, and at-grade junctions, between Kintore and the AWPR junction at Craibstone were presented at the recent public exhibitions. Transport Scotland have however confirmed that improvements for this section are being considered as part of the further development of route options, with the Scottish Government's commitment to complete the dualling project by 2030.

## Policy Position

- 2.16 The A96 project touches upon a raft of Aberdeenshire Council Strategic and Regional partnership policies. Strategically the Council's broader economic and regional transport policies support infrastructure improvements which address congestion issues and where infrastructure improvements will make significant connectivity gains especially for industry and freight. The Council's transport policies also strongly support the requirement for effective infrastructure to encourage use by Non-Motorised Users and active travel. These need to be balanced with the Council's other objectives in respect of environmental protection, and carbon reduction.
- 2.17 The Council Plan identifies one of the elements of the Strategic Focus to be "Maintain or improve our infrastructure, facilities, and services", while Council Priorities include "Support a strong, sustainable, diverse and successful economy", "Have the best possible transport and digital links across our communities", while also prioritising "Protect our special environment, including tackling climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions".
- 2.18 The A96 dualling project, and potential wider impacts, accords with and is specifically identified in the key transport priorities of the Regional Transport Strategy, Local Transport Strategy and the Strategic Development Plan, of which the A96 forms the spine of one of the three main strategic growth corridors.

## Area Committee Consultation

- 2.19 Those Area Committees where the route options pass through or who have a significant interest in the routes chosen (Formartine, Garioch, Marr and Banff & Buchan) have been asked for comments on the proposals, and their comments are presented in **Appendix 3**. Due to timescales for final reports to this Committee, the comments of Banff and Buchan Area Committee will be presented verbally.
- 2.20 Garioch Area Committee noted a preference for the route to be as close as possible to the current alignment of the A96 as this was felt to be the least disruptive option. They also noted concerns regarding the Pink option in relation to splitting the communities of Whiteford and Durno, and further requested that provision of necessary supporting infrastructure for active travel is delivered.
- 2.21 Formartine Area Committee stressed that effective communication and consultation with affected communities by Transport Scotland is essential. They requested that the route option on the A947 between Oldmeldrum and Dyce should continue to be pursued, or opportunities to link into the A947 pursued if this were not taken forward. The Committee also requested the needs of Non-Motorised Users should be fully taken into account. Finally, the Committee sought assurance regarding the status and timing of the upgrade of the Kintore to Aberdeen section of the route.
- 2.22 Marr Area Committee noted that all route options would have impacts on people and sensitivity and recognition of this would be needed. The deselection of the option with most impact on Bennachie was welcomed, and

concerns regarding the issue of winter driving/winter maintenance at Glens of Foudland were highlighted.

### **Impact on Individual Properties, Landowners and Communities**

- 2.23 It is recognised that an immediate consequence of publishing more specific route options, is that individual property owners, landowners, and communities will for the first time become aware if they are either potentially directly or indirectly impacted by the alternative route options being considered. This is clearly a difficult period for those affected, due to the level of uncertainty of potential impacts, and in all probability their unfamiliarity with the route assessment and subsequent design and delivery processes. Officers note that route options appear to have been selected which seek to minimise on a whole route level individual property impacts as far as possible at this stage. The Council would encourage the A96 project team to continue to effectively engage and clearly communicate with all affected parties, communities, and their elected representatives.
- 2.24 It is highlighted that the statutory process associated with land acquisition for the project will only commence at the point at which draft orders are published, and that would be possibly be 2021.

### **Option Q**

- 2.25 The A920 corridor between Colpy and Oldmeldrum (which formed the western element of Option Q) is being considered further as part of the DMRB Stage 2 Assessment on the basis that it follows an existing road corridor, facilitates a connection to a northern bypass of Inverurie and performs well against the scheme objectives. In essence this is represented by the Blue option.
- 2.26 However, Transport Scotland have set out their position that the south-eastern element of Option Q, represented by the A947 corridor between Oldmeldrum and Dyce, is not being considered further on the basis that it does not perform well against the scheme objectives, in particular highlighting the following issues:
- 1) Traffic modelling indicates that the majority of A96 traffic will continue to use the existing route, rather than transfer to a new route in the A947 corridor;
  - 2) Existing A96 operational performance issues between Aberdeen and Inverurie would not be addressed, with the existing A96 dual carriageway being de-trunked without improvement despite it carrying the majority of the traffic;
  - 3) Side roads, accesses and existing settlements limit opportunities for online dualling of the A947;
  - 4) Dualling in the A947 corridor will induce impacts in an area unspoiled by dual carriageway, with no compensatory benefit generated along the existing A96 dual carriageway;
  - 5) Significant junction amendments to the new AWPR Goval junction would be required to facilitate a dual carriageway connection; and

- 6) The A947 route through Dyce towards Aberdeen is longer and of a poorer standard than the existing A96.

### **Inverurie**

- 2.27 The existing network in Inverurie experiences peak period congestion, particularly at the Port Elphinstone and Blackhall roundabouts, and on key routes such as Burghmuir Drive and High Street/West High Street. The extent of this traffic congestion currently constrains options for the future development of the town, as well as constraining the realisation of town centre strategies.
- 2.28 During 2017, the current road layout accommodated 29,300 vehicles each day (A96 East of Port Elphinstone), with 10,600 vehicles continuing to the north of A96 Blackhall roundabout. 19,300 vehicles accordingly have destinations in either Inverurie, or on key routes to Oldmeldrum (B9170), Rothienorman (B9001) and beyond. The traffic re-distribution provided by a north-eastern alignment would potentially assist in removing a significant proportion of this traffic from Inverurie Town Centre. By contrast, a new alignment of the A96 to the south west of Inverurie would typically only relieve from the existing network the strategic trips routing to the north of Inverurie.
- 2.29 If options to the north-east of Inverurie are taken forward, this would likely provide an attractive route to access the trunk road network into and around Aberdeen for existing users of the A947 who have origins or destinations to the north of Oldmeldrum. This in turn may provide some traffic relief for users of the A947 to the south of Oldmeldrum. Such a re-distribution of traffic may also indicate a requirement to consider improvements to the B9170 linking Oldmeldrum and Inverurie, due to the consequential change in strategic importance of this link.

### **Environmental Impacts**

- 2.30 In relation to landscape impacts, the gradient and exposure of some routes (Lime, Red, Green, Violet, and Orange) will mean that they could be very visible in parts.
- 2.31 Direct impacts on listed buildings and scheduled monuments have been avoided by the routes chosen, however some impacts arise on the setting of some historic assets. Key locations are the confluence of Pink, Brown, Green, Violet, and Orange routes where the setting of the scheduled Pitscurrie Cairn at Whiteford may be prejudiced. The Red route may impact on the Scheduled Colpy Cottage Pallisade Enclosure.
- 2.32 Impacts on the settings of a number of listed buildings can be identified including a listed Parish and the Church C listed Mort House at the Cyan (C2), Red (R1) and Blue routes at Culsalmond. Listed Buildings at Bourtie House and Fingask House may be impacted upon by the Blue route (B2).
- 2.33 Natural heritage issues resolve into impacts on the Glens of Foudland site of local nature conservation interest, prime agricultural land and "ancient woodlands". Again specific interest is provided by the confluence of Pink, Brown, Green, Violet, and Orange routes at Whiteford. The Green route (G2)

in particular passes through land identified as prime agricultural land class 2 which is relatively rare.

### **Operational Resilience and Deliverability**

- 2.34 The routes to the south and north of the A96 in the Glens of Foudland (R1, R2 and L1) will all require major earthworks whilst also significantly increasing the elevation of the route at that point. Both aspects will require careful design to build in the proper resilience, if these routes are taken forward.
- 2.35 All routes are considered to be deliverable. However, a major challenge will be where the routes to the north of Inverurie re-join the A96 to the west of Kintore. The junction position and layout will be severely constrained by the cemetery, new station site, railway, business park and especially the River Don and its flood plain. Transport Scotland's project team will be required to meet SEPA and local authority requirements that any structure over the River Don at this location does not impact on the flood plain, and that there is no associated increase in flood risk within the river system.
- 2.36 Whichever offline route is chosen there will be an impact on the future road maintenance and management requirements for this Council, as the current A96 will then become a local road. This would add over 25km to the existing network that Aberdeenshire Council would be responsible for, depending on the route option chosen. This could also include a short section of high-speed dual carriageway between Kintore and Port Elphinstone. It is also highly likely that there would also be some additional side roads lengths that would become part of our network. Our experience with AWPR would suggest that we will have to take a significant role in the designs where the local and trunk road meet. In particular we will require to be fully satisfied as to how the local links for pedestrians and public/school transport will be designed all along the routes and especially at junctions.

### **Public Transport and Non-Motorised Users**

- 2.37 Recent experience from the implementation of the A90 Balmedie to Tipperty trunk road scheme confirms the importance of early consideration of the impacts of alternative routes on mainstream conventional public transport, and aspects such as school transport and cycle/walking routes.
- 2.38 The requirement for early consideration of the requirements of Non-Motorised Users is also highlighted across all routes, and that this should include not only opportunities for crossings of the new route, but also for the contribution towards meaningful and attractive local networks where appropriate. It is not clear whether the overall strategic approach to Non-Motorised Users provision as set out for the A96 Dualling project has been applied at this point in the design process. It is worth noting that the preferred options for the A96 bypass of Nairn/Auldearn includes specific online active travel infrastructure as part of the designs and the same approach should be adopted for this section of the route.

### **Impacts on Development Opportunities**

- 2.39 Very little land zoned for existing development is impacted upon by the proposals. The Orange route (O3) at Crichie passes through an employment

land designation. As this has not been brought forward, it is probably compensated for in the Thainstone Mart development sites.

- 2.40 Land that could be made available for development is promoted by the creation of a junction at Pitcaple and Durno. Both settlements would become more accessible and could grow over time. Oldmeldrum and points north could benefit from development facilitated by the Green or Blue routes, although constraints exist due to proximity to national battlefields.
- 2.41 For Inverurie, a national battlefield and the Keithhall estate may constrain development directly associated with routes to the north-east. However, the resultant traffic redistribution achieved by these routes could facilitate wider development opportunities, including sites to the south-west of Inverurie. Development in this area would also be facilitated by the Orange route.

### **Aberdeenshire Council Position Statement**

- 2.42 At its meeting on 26 April 2018, Aberdeenshire Council agreed a Position Statement on the A96 Dualling East of Huntly to Aberdeen. The agreed Position Statement is outlined in **Appendix 1**.
- 2.43 It is considered that the options presented by Transport Scotland partially address the comments raised by Aberdeenshire Council as part of the Position Statement of April 2018, provided that the preferred option is one to the north-east of Inverurie (Blue, Green or Violet, as opposed to Orange). Based on the information available to officers, the options presented:
- 1) Alleviate concerns about the effects of the project on the landscape around Bennachie;
  - 2) Could aid economic development opportunities associated with enhanced access to the strategic road network for communities and businesses to the north and north-east of the current A96;
  - 3) Could relieve traffic pressure in Inverurie by enabling businesses in the Oldmeldrum catchment area and beyond to access the trunk road network without having to pass through Inverurie;
  - 4) Could potentially relieve traffic pressure on the A947 and improve the commuting experience for northern communities located along the A947 corridor including Banff, Macduff, and Turriff by improving safety and reducing journey times between Oldmeldrum and Aberdeen; and
  - 5) Afford the opportunity to enhance active and sustainable transport provision along the current A96 for the benefit of residents of Port Elphinstone and Inverurie.
- 2.44 Concerns still remain that:
- 1) The Violet option does not alleviate concerns about the effects of the project on Keithhall and Gardens Designated Landscape;
  - 2) Options would not improve access to the A96 for population centres in Newmachar, Dyce or Bridge of Don; and

- 3) Options would not improve access to Dyce Station.

### **Next Steps**

- 2.45 Transport Scotland and its consultants are continuing to progress the development and assessment of route options for the A96 Dualling East of Huntly to Aberdeen Scheme.
- 2.46 The initial route options presented will be subject to further design and development as part of the DMRB Stage 2 Assessment process, and will take into account:
  - 1) Detailed dialogue with landowners and stakeholders directly affected by the published route options;
  - 2) Continued consultation with key organisations such as the Council, other statutory stakeholders such as SEPA, and community organisations;
  - 3) Continued environmental assessment, including specific site walkover surveys along the identified route options;
  - 4) Development of the potential form and location of junctions using traffic modelling;
  - 5) Preliminary structures, earthworks and drainage design;
  - 6) Flood modelling; and
  - 7) Consideration of the needs of Non-Motorised Users.
- 2.47 Transport Scotland have stated that they will provide updates during the process and further public exhibitions will be held when the preferred option is announced, to provide an opportunity for vital comment and feedback from stakeholders, local communities and members of the public. A preferred option is expected to be selected during 2019. Given the information available at this stage and the level of further work to be done, eg on the section of the route from Kintore to the AWPR, Transport Scotland should be asked to carry out a further formal engagement exercise in 2019 prior to confirming their preferred route.
- 2.48 Following confirmation of a preferred route, Transport Scotland and their consultants will work on the specific engineering, environmental and traffic impacts of this route, aiming to publish draft orders for this route within 2 years of a preferred route being announced. The publication of draft orders for the route signals the commencement of the statutory process for land acquisition for the Trunk Road and side roads.
- 2.49 The Head of Finance and Monitoring Officer within Business Services have been consulted in the preparation of this report and had no comments to make and are satisfied that the report complies with the Scheme of Governance and relevant legislation.

### **3 Scheme of Governance**

- 3.1 The Committee is able to consider this item in terms of Section F1.1 of the List of Committee Powers in Part 2A of the Scheme of Governance as it relates to policy issues and resource matters (within budget) related to Transportation.

### **4 Implications and Risk**

- 4.1 An equality impact assessment is not required as the scheme is being promoted by Transport Scotland and a preferred option has not been identified at this stage therefore there is no differential impact on those with protected characteristics.
- 4.2 There are no direct staffing and financial implications arising from this report. Officers will continue to engage with Transport Scotland and Amey Arup as assessment processes continue, as they have done to date. Officers are currently considering the resources required to fulfil the statutory duties of this Council as the A96 Dualling proposals progress.
- 4.3 No Risks have been identified at Corporate or Strategic Level.
- 4.4 A Town Centre Impact Assessment has not been undertaken as the scheme is being promoted by Transport Scotland and a preferred option has not been identified at this stage.

**Stephen Archer**  
**Director of Infrastructure Services**

Report prepared by Paul Finch, Strategic Transportation Projects Manager  
19 November 2018

## Appendix 1: Position Statement

The Position Statement on the A96 Dualling East of Huntly to Aberdeen as agreed by Aberdeenshire Council on 26 April 2018 is as follows:

- 1) It is the view of Aberdeenshire Council that, due to the range of competing pressures and constraints along and around the corridor that require to be considered (including the importance of the Bennachie special landscape area; the availability and quality of agricultural land north of Inverurie; and the presence of two nationally important battlefields, high quality Listed Buildings, significant areas of ancient woodland, Keith Hall House and Gardens Designated Landscape, and floodplains around the Rivers Don and Ury), it is essential that all viable route options as far north as the A947 and A920 remain under consideration at this stage and are included within the DMRB Stage 2 Assessment. This will allow as much information as possible to be gathered on the range of possible options, thus enabling sound and objective decision-making. In particular, route options to the north-east of Inverurie:
  - a. Alleviate concerns about the effects of the project on the iconic and protected landscape around Bennachie and the Keith Hall House and Gardens Designated Landscape;
  - b. Could aid economic development opportunities associated with enhanced access to the strategic road network for communities and businesses to the north and north-east of the current A96 and A947 corridors;
  - c. Could facilitate the future development of Inverurie as much of the future growth planned for the town is to the east and south of the settlement;
  - d. Could relieve traffic pressure in Inverurie by enabling businesses in the Oldmeldrum catchment area and beyond to access the trunk road network without having to pass through Inverurie, which would not be the case if the new road went to the west of Inverurie;
  - e. Could potentially relieve traffic pressure on the A947, improving safety and reducing journey times between Oldmeldrum and Aberdeen;
  - f. Although further from Inverurie than other options, would improve access to the A96 and the wider strategic road network for other population centres in Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City such as Newmachar, Oldmeldrum, Dyce and Bridge of Don;
  - g. Although the trunk road would be further from Kintore Station it would be closer to Dyce Station;
  - h. Provide an opportunity to develop other interchange locations such as the potential reopened railway line from Dyce to Ellon and beyond and an interchange between Inverurie and Oldmeldrum;

- i. Afford the opportunity to enhance active and sustainable transport provision along the current A96 for the benefit of residents of Blackburn, Kintore, Port Elphinstone and Inverurie; and
  - j. There may be different permutations of this option, such as re-joining the existing A96 somewhere west of Dyce, which provide additional or alternative benefits.
- 2) In addition, current and future assessment work should also take into account:
- a. Development pressure on Inverurie and the constraints on this that transport is imposing on the long term development;
  - b. Development pressure on Oldmeldrum and the willingness of the community to accept significant growth should issues with the A947 be resolved. Allied to this is the increase in attractiveness to communities such as Turriff which could also be served, in part, by this road;
  - c. Development pressure on Newmachar and the opportunity for further development that would be presented with a proximal trunk road;
  - d. The necessity of not imposing constraints on the positioning of the Huntly bypass due to the positioning of the Eastern Section;
  - e. The importance of Aberdeen City as an economic, social and educational hub served by a wide rural population and the importance of intermediate travel origins and destinations along the A96;
  - f. The scale of patterns of traffic distribution beyond Inverurie and Oldmeldrum;
  - g. The importance of the route for Heavy Goods Vehicles (HGVs), agricultural vehicles and vehicles servicing the energy sector and how these can be accommodated; and
  - h. Future aspirations for transport in the north east of Scotland, particularly the benefits of considering the A96 and A947 corridors together as part of a combined transport and accessibility strategy for the north-west of the region.
- 3) Aberdeenshire Council has asked officers to work openly and transparently with Transport Scotland and its consultants in their ongoing efforts to identify the optimum route alignment, in the expectation that they in turn continue to engage with Council officers in a similarly positive manner.



## **Appendix 3 – Feedback from Area Committees**

### **Formartine Area Committee – 30 October 2018**

The Committee:

1. Noted the progress that had been made to date on the A96 Aberdeen to Inverness dualling project;
2. Provided comments on route options for the Eastern Section of the A96 Dualling, for consideration at Infrastructure Committee on 29 November 2018:-
  - a. Effective communication and consultation with communities should be developed;
  - b. The route option which included the A947 corridor between Oldmeldrum and Dyce should be considered as a part of the discussion;
  - c. Consideration to be given to the opportunities to link the A947;
  - d. The needs of Non-Motorised Users should be taken into account;
  - e. A route North of Inverurie was favorable for wider economic benefits; and
  - f. The A96 improvements between Kintore and Aberdeen should be progressed in tandem with this section.

### **Marr Area Committee – 6 November 2018**

All route options would have impacts on people and sensitivity and recognition of this would be needed.

The deselection of the option with most impact on Bennachie was welcome.

The issue of winter driving/winter maintenance at Glens of Foudland was highlighted.

### **Garioch Area Committee – 13 November 2018**

The Committee agreed to forward the following comments to Infrastructure Services Committee:-

1. the route should be as close as possible to the current route of the A96 as this would be the least disruptive option;
2. it should be noted that the pink section cuts a community in half in its current location (Whiteford and Durno);
3. need to ensure that, whatever option is progressed, that Aberdeenshire Council lobby Transport Scotland to fund the provision of the necessary supporting infrastructure for active travel.

### **Banff and Buchan Area Committee – 27 November 2018**

To be provided verbally to the Committee

## **Appendix 4**

### **Proposed Response to Transport Scotland on Initial Route Options for Dualling of the A96 – East of Huntly to Aberdeen**

#### **Introduction**

Aberdeenshire Council are pleased to formally respond to the initial route options for the A96 Dualling project (East of Huntly to Aberdeen) presented by Transport Scotland and their consultant team AmeyArup in October 2018.

The Council recognises its role as a statutory body and significant stakeholder. Following consideration of the information made available at public exhibitions and online, discussions and debate at Committee level, this Appendix sets out its views to Transport Scotland, in order to help shape both the ongoing appraisal of route options being undertaken by the project team, but also the manner in which this process is undertaken going forward.

The response below has been shaped by consideration of the issue at the Council's Infrastructure Services Committee at their meeting of 29 November 2018, which in turn was informed by consultation with relevant Area Committees of the Council affected by the proposals (Garioch, Formartine, Marr and Banff & Buchan).

We thank you for agreeing to consider the Council's formal position beyond your requested cut-off date for responses of 22 November, which is a consequence of the Council's committee calendar.

#### **Progress to Date**

The Council has an established policy position that supports appropriate investment in the strategic transportation infrastructure of the area, and improvement of key external linkages. The proposed upgrade of the A96 supports this policy position, complementing recent investment in the AWPR, the Inverness to Aberdeen Railway, and investment in Kintore Railway Station. It also sits alongside the work on the previous Strategic Transport Projects Review (STPR) of 2008, the current review of the National Transport Strategy, the Strategic Transport Appraisal within the City Region Deal and the forthcoming STPR2. The proposed investment also aligns with the current and emerging policies of the Strategic Development Plan Authority, with the A96 recognised as a Strategic Growth Corridor.

Accordingly, the Council welcomes the progress that is being made within the DMRB Stage 2 process, noting that the establishment of initial route options is an important milestone to facilitate more detailed route appraisal work.

**The Council recognises that it is only through objective and evidence led appraisal, which is presented in a transparent manner, engaging all stakeholders appropriately, that the optimum route choice can be determined.**

### **Requirement for Effective Ongoing Engagement with Affected Parties**

The Council recognises that an immediate consequence of publishing more specific route options, is that individual property owners, landowners, and communities will for the first time become aware if they are either potentially directly or indirectly impacted by the alternative route options being considered. This is clearly a difficult period for those affected, due to the level of uncertainty of potential impacts, and in all probability their unfamiliarity with the route assessment and subsequent design and delivery processes.

It is noted that route options appear to have been selected which seek to minimise on a whole route level individual property impacts as far as possible at this stage.

**The Council encourages the A96 Project Team to continue to effectively engage and clearly communicate with all affected parties, communities, and their Elected Representatives, to help ensure that there is clear information on the route option selection process, clear answers to queries, and an openness to understand the various concerns and issues raised.**

### **Deselected Options**

The publication of the Initial Route Options confirmed the de-selection of previously considered route improvement strategies.

The Council welcomes the de-selection of Route Improvement Strategy C, due to the adverse impacts on the protected landscape and setting of Bennachie, and wider cultural and environmental importance of this area.

The Council notes the de-selection of Route Improvement Strategy D, on-line variant, on the existing A96 alignment between Port Elphinstone and Blackhall roundabouts. It is appreciated that this is due to both physical constraints imposed by the available width of the current road corridor, the high environmental impacts that would be imposed on the residential properties directly adjacent to the upgraded route and the significant difficulty of delivering a grade separated junction at Blackhall roundabout. The reporting of the deselection of this option may have benefitted from a similar approach to that taken to the partial removal of Option Q.

The Council is disappointed at the de-selection of Route Improvement Strategy Q (Oldmeldrum to Dyce sections) but notes the rationale presented at the public exhibitions and within supplementary technical information provided to Council officers. However, in terms of deliverability, we would wish to highlight that the costs and issues associated with crossing with River Don flood plain at Tavelty alongside

the scale of the junction required to re-join the current dual Carriageway to the West of Kintore and the works required to the existing A96 between Kintore and the AWPR would be worthy of comparison to the costs and benefits associated with the full Option Q as it allows the railway and River Don to be crossed using the AWPR. In doing such work there would of course have to be consideration of the additional length of new dual carriageway and the requirements to re-engineer elements of the AWPR Goval Junction. We would recommend that if Transport Scotland has not yet undertaken this work then they should consider doing so before selecting a preferred option.

### **Strategic Benefits of Routes to the North East of Inverurie**

The publication of initial route options by Transport Scotland pulls into sharp focus the requirement to reconcile local and individual impacts, whilst seeking opportunities to maximise wider strategic benefit for the wider area and region.

**The Council considers that the greatest strategic benefits for the area can be achieved by pursuing route options that run to north-east of Inverurie.**

This due to:

1. Relief of traffic pressure in Inverurie by enabling businesses and households in the Oldmeldrum, Rothienorman and Uryside catchment areas to access the trunk road network without having to pass through the centre Inverurie, which would not be the case if the new road went to the west of Inverurie.
2. Consequential facilitation of the future development of Inverurie and its town centre;
3. Opportunities to aid economic development associated with enhanced access to the strategic road network for communities and businesses to the north and north-east of the current A96 and A947 corridors;
4. Respond to development opportunities in the Oldmeldrum area, and further to the north such as Turriff;

By contrast, a route to the south-west of Inverurie, will most likely only relieve Inverurie of the traffic travelling to north of Inverurie, representing a small proportion of the overall flow of traffic entering Inverurie from Port Elphinstone roundabout.

It is noted that only initial traffic modelling information has been included in the information made available through the public exhibitions and website.

## Deliverability of Options

The Council considers that all of the initial route options taken forward can be considered to be feasible.

At Tavelty, particular challenges are formed by the proximity of the soon to be constructed Railway Station, cemetery, existing grade separated junction and business park. Transport Scotland's project team will be required to meet SEPA and local authority requirements that any structure over the River Don at this location does not impact on the flood plain, and that there is no associated increase in flood risk within the river system and flood risk management area.

**The Council highlights the specific design requirement for any proposed crossing of the River Don, and at other locations, for there to be no adverse impact on the flood plain, and no associated increase in flood risk within the wider river system.**

## Operational Resilience

The routes to the south and north of the A96 in the Glens of Foudland (R1, R2 and L1) will all require major earthworks whilst also significantly increasing the elevation of the route at that point. Both aspects will require careful design to build in the proper resilience, if these routes are taken forward.

## Public Transport

**Whichever route option is taken forward, the potential impacts arising from changes to the provision of public transport services requires to be identified at an early stage, and this should be fully captured in the route selection appraisal process.**

As the design work continues, experience from the AWPR project, highlights the specific need to pay very close attention to the detail of where public transport stops are located, and how they are accessed, and how access for school transport and other non-conventional public transport services are provided.

## Non-Motorised Users

The Council and its partners continue to invest in provision for Non-Motorised Users across its communities, and on key links between its communities, including those along the existing A96.

**The Council urges Transport Scotland to fully consider the needs of Non-Motorised Users during the route assessment and route development work, fully mitigating against severance of any of these routes, but also realising opportunities to complete viable and networks. As a minimum the overall**

**Non- Motorised Users Strategy for the A96 Dualling should be implemented and the approach taken for the Nairn/Auldearn proposals replicated for this section of the route.**

### **Environmental Impacts and Opportunities**

**It is the expectation that the route option assessment work will continue to identify potential impacts on the natural and built environment, landscape and cultural heritage assets, and seek design solutions to minimise these impacts, and thereafter develop mitigation strategies as required, applying current best practice to realise opportunities for protection and enhancement.**

The Council is also concerned about the potential impacts on communities potentially split by the route options, and this include groups of settlements which share common facilities, such as Whiteford and Durno. Consultation with affected communities is essential in this regard to understand the nature of the connections.

### **Requirement for Further Interim Consultation**

The Council recognises that it is necessary to present the initial route options at an early stage to facilitate further detailed assessment work, including “on the ground” survey work and consultations with affected property and landowners.

A consequence of this is that very limited factual information has been to be presented or provided alongside this route options to enable more objective assessment by stakeholders including the Council. This includes future projections of traffic flows associated with the route options as well as the background to the deselection of all of the initial routes.

**The Council requests that as in the example of work undertaken by the A96 Project at Elgin, further consultation on route options, supported by more detailed information, is made available during the course of the refinement of route options. This must be prior to the announcement of a preferred route option and be built into the process.**

**Furthermore it is requested that for future public exhibitions and briefings Transport Scotland and their Consultants engage early with the Council in order to make best use of the extensive existing opportunities for engagement with communities and elected members.**

