

PE1657/F

Petitioner submission of 14 November 2017

The Minister - Thank you for your letter of 20 September to the Cabinet Secretary for the Economy, Jobs and Fair Work, Keith Brown MSP regarding the A77. As the clarifications sought fall within my portfolio your letter has been passed to me to respond.

We feel that the Public Petitions Committee Convener made a fair and extremely valid point in her decision to write to the Cabinet Secretary for the Economy, Jobs and Fair Work, Keith Brown MSP to answer them. Therefore we are disappointed that he has chosen to side step the bigger picture and hand it down to the Transport Minister when the picture is much wider than the need for a new road. To quote The Convener “The issues are the environment, the economy and safety. My only question is whether those issues go beyond the transport minister’s remit because the economy goes beyond simply transport issues. We could ask the Scottish Government who would be the most appropriate person to come to the committee.”

What should also be noted is that the Welsh Government are looking at a third lane on key stretches of the A55, a second Penmaenbach tunnel, average speed enforcement and a new A55 diversion road are on a list of future options to transform the road network of North Wales. They are already planning major schemes like the Deeside Corridor, Third Menai Crossing and roundabout removal at Llanfairfechan and Penmaenmawr in the coming years. But in April 2017 Economy and Infrastructure Secretary Ken Skates commissioned a major report to identify other possible improvements to further enhance the resilience of the A55 and other vital routes in North Wales. We feel the Scottish Government should be doing much more for the A77 & A75, and they appear not to be doing so.

The Minister - The Scottish Government recognises the important part that the A75 and A77 play in connecting the South West and Ports at Cairnryan with the rest of Scotland. This is why the Programme for Government makes a commitment to examining the case for transport improvements in the Dumfries and Galloway area, including improvements to the A77 south of Girvan, linking to the Cairnryan Ferry Hub and the A75 and improvements to connect Dumfries and the A74(M).

The problems on A77 extend further than just south of Girvan for the residents and businesses in the South of Ayrshire and West of Dumfries & Galloway. They go right up to the Whitlett’s Roundabout where the dual carriageway stops. If the Programme for Government was more comprehensive then the campaign groups of the A77 Action Group and Dual the A75 would not have to exist.

The Minister - The ports are not only important to the region but are of major importance to Scotland as a whole, operating as a direct link to Ireland with all the economic and social benefits that brings on both sides of the Irish Sea. The significant investment of upwards of £215m that both Stena and P&O have made in their respective ports infrastructure and vessels in recent years is much welcomed

by the Scottish Government. Their investment in Scotland firmly demonstrates an on-going commitment to services from the ports.

The collective investments by the ferry operators in the past ten years shows a spend of around £500m in the North Channel operations. A huge investment in these routes by any standard. The geographical advantage of the North Channel provides a short sea crossing, giving a more reliable and frequent quality service than other more exposed routes serving Ireland and vital for the retail supply chains in the age of "Just in time" market delivery". Our Scottish Ports are in direct competition with better connected routes in both England and Wales. These routes have had significant improvements to their road infrastructures, giving them a more competitive edge. Scottish routes from the ferry ports in Dumfries and Galloway are of a poor standard and are subject to serious landslips and flooding. Add to that, drivers' frustration at meeting 40mph, 30mph and 20mph stages on the road north and we have two major reasons to seriously consider dual carriageway from Ayr to Portpatrick. It is unnecessary to list all the reasons at this time.

The Minister - With regards to clarifications sought on the A77, the Scottish Government remains committed to delivering the 5.2km A77 Maybole Bypass. The procurement process for the main works contract commenced in August, with contract award anticipated in Autumn 2018.

Once complete the scheme will help separate local traffic from traffic travelling further afield, including to our key ports which will lead to improved road safety for local communities and road users, and provide better journey time reliability for motorists and businesses along the full length of the A77.

We note from your response that work on the Maybole Bypass will begin in 2019. This is a missed opportunity by the Transport Minister. By not recommending a dual carriageway indeed, starting a dual carriageway, we feel that the problems of frustration will only move onto the next pinch point. Travelling north that will be Minishant and going south Kirkoswald, etc.

The Minister - In terms of your query regarding action being taken to address the traffic lights at Marchburn, Scotland TranServ, on behalf of Transport Scotland, is planning essential repair works to the A77 Cairnryan Landslip which will involve a full weekend closure commencing on 3rd November 2017. This weekend closure will allow the installation of temporary works following which repairs to the downslope embankment will take place. Temporary traffic lights will remain in place until completion of these works, which is programmed for early 2018. A consultation document will be issued to all key stakeholders well in advance of the proposed road closure, including the A77 Action Group, providing further details on this proposal. The monitoring of areas at risk of landslip is documented in the South West Landslide Action Plan.

We certainly welcome the announcement on this particular long- standing problem on the southern section of the A77. However looking at the same Transport Scotland document on the South West Landslide Action Plan we note that most of the sites actually sit on this southern section of the A77 that we seek improvement on.

The Minister - You may be aware that in August 2016, I announced that the National Transport Strategy (NTS) and Strategic Transport Projects Review (STPR) will be subject to a comprehensive review. The new strategy will establish the strategic direction for transport in Scotland for the next 20 years and will be based on collaborative working, establishing the evidence base and ensuring Transport Scotland engages widely with stakeholders and communities across Scotland.

We wish to be consulted on the NTS and STPR review.

The Minister - Upwards of sixty stakeholder organisations are now represented on the various National Transport Strategy working groups and National fora. Transport Scotland has set up dedicated national working groups to look specifically at tackling inequality in Transport and promoting greater accessibility, at Transport as an enabler of sustainable and inclusive economic growth; at how Transport can be 'greener and healthier'; and at how we can build an even safer and more resilient transport network. A National Partnership Group, comprised of a wide range of key external stakeholders in a position to offer specialist insight and knowledge as the review progresses, is up and running and will ultimately sign off on the conclusions of the working groups.

The South West of Scotland is contributing to the reduction of our carbon footprint, eg windfarms, Improving the road structure would mean movement of traffic in the area would be at optimum efficiency if travelling along modern engineered roads. In providing that type of road, we could also add safe cycle lanes to encourage tourism into the area which gave birth to cycling, playing our part in promoting a healthier Scotland.

The Minister - The 2017-18 Programme for Government re-affirmed the commitment to commence work this year for the second Strategic Transport Projects Review (STPR2) in the Dumfries and Galloway area. This work will consider the rationale for improvements to road, rail, public transport and active travel on the key strategic corridors including the A75, A77 and the railway corridors to Stranraer and Carlisle via Kilmarnock / Dumfries. The study will have a particular focus on access to the ports at Cairnryan. Transport Scotland will commission consultants this year and in the meantime, is undertaking a programme of data collection on the major road routes in Dumfries and Galloway and South Ayrshire as well as at the ports themselves to enhance understanding of trip making patterns on the major road routes across the SW region.

We wish to be consulted on the findings made by the commissioned consultants. However, given the providence of the ports we cannot help but wonder why it has taken so long for Transport Scotland to decide now that this of national importance. The ports on Loch Ryan have been in existence since the mid-1800s with services to Northern Ireland.