

Minister for Transport submission of 13 June 2022

PE1916/C: Request a public inquiry into the management of the rest and be thankful project

Thank you for your letter dated 16 May 2022 regarding the above named petition. The committee have asked three questions which I have responded to below.

Whether there is currently a viable proposal in place to provide a permanent solution to the issues at A83 Rest and Be Thankful

As outlined in the initial response letter to this petition from Transport Scotland dated 23 December 2021, the Scottish Government is committed to an infrastructure solution to address the A83 Rest and Be Thankful landslip risks. Delivery of a permanent and resilient solution is a priority and we continue to seek ways to achieve that as quickly as possible, noting all of the options require complex civil engineering.

Following completion of an assessment of 11 route corridor options for a long term solution to improve access to Argyll and Bute a preferred route corridor was announced on 18 March 2021.

This announcement also provided details of five possible route options that are being assessed within the preferred route corridor. These options range from traditional roads with localised structural protection, to full tunnel options. The range of engineering structures reflects the challenge of building resilience into the route.

The design of the route options within the preferred corridor are being progressed, and as with other projects to improve the trunk road network, there will be a need to complete the necessary engineering and environmental assessments and statutory process to allow any land to be acquired and the project constructed.

I can also confirm that we recently awarded a £1.8 million ground investigation works contract to best inform the design process. These works commenced on site in February 2022 and were completed in mid-May.

The timescale associated with this process

As outlined in Transport Scotland's letter dated 23 December 2021, timescales to complete a new permanent solution would be approximately 7 to 10 years, as detailed in the Preliminary Assessment Report published on the Transport Scotland website ([Preliminary Assessment Report - March 2021 - A83 Access to Argyll and Bute | Transport Scotland](#)). It is worth noting those timescales include design, assessment, completion of statutory process, procurement of a contractor and construction.

As was discussed with the A83 Taskforce members in September 2021, Transport Scotland anticipate announcing a preferred route option for a permanent solution by Spring 2023.

The committee may also take comfort from our recent benchmarking of the process and timescales for the project against those undertaken by the Norwegian Public Roads Administration. Norway is often quoted by third parties as providing examples of fast, effective tunnel construction. The process and estimates being adopted for the Rest and be Thankful work align well with those used in Norway and the parties have agreed they form a reasonable expectation.

We recognise that the timescales for developing an alternative to the current route and finding a long-term solution to the challenges created by the Rest and Be Thankful section of the A83 are frustrating for the local community. However, this scheme is technically challenging and the landscape is dynamic so it is vital we understand the terrain we are working in, in order to develop a suitable solution of the correct standard in the correct place.

In recognition of the urgency to find a solution Transport Scotland is also progressing work to look at a medium term resilient route through Glen Croe to include consideration of the Forestry Track, improvements to the Old Military Road and other options on land already owned by Scottish Ministers. We will bring forward our proposals for this by late 2022.

We are focussed on developing a proportionate, resilient and safe route for all road users that may be able to be delivered quickly if we are able to work with the land or rights we already hold.

Transport Scotland continues to explore methods to reduce the timescales to bring forward both the medium term and long term routes as soon as possible, whilst continuing to maximise the availability of the A83 and the Old Military Road diversion route.

Why a viable proposal has not been forthcoming until now.

As outlined in Transport Scotland's letter dated 23 December 2021, the Scottish Government is aware of the A83's importance as the primary route into Argyll and Bute and in 2012 an A83 Route Study was commissioned by Transport Scotland to identify and appraise potential options for the A83 trunk road to minimise the effects of road closure from landslides. The Study objectives were:

- Reducing the impact on journey times by reducing the frequency and duration of road closures caused by landslides; and
- Reducing the economic impact to the A83 Study area by reducing the frequency and duration of road closures caused by landslides.

The final A83 Route Study and associated consultation feedback paper were published in February 2013 ([Transport Scotland's A83 Improvements Project](#)) with the decision to progress with the Red Option which maintained the existing alignment of the A83 and included a range of landslide mitigation measures such as: additional debris flow barriers at locations where the landslide hazard is considered highest; improved hillside drainage adjacent to and under the road; and, introduction of vegetation and planting on the slope.

The Red Option was taken forward at that time as it offered the best performance against the assessment criteria, providing a cost effective way of meeting the Study's objectives (i.e. reducing the impact on journey times and the subsequent economic impact of a road closure due to landslide). Since the installation of the Red Option suite of mitigation measures over 2013 and 2014, it is estimated that these measures have helped keep the A83 open for at least 48 days when it would otherwise have closed.

Since the completion of the Red Option in 2014, as noted in Transport Scotland's letter of 23 December 2021, and given the change in circumstances at the Rest and Be Thankful, mainly the landslide events in August 2020, one of which was the largest recorded in the area, the then Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity announced on 23 September 2020 that Transport Scotland would be taking forward the development and assessment work required to deliver a long term resilient infrastructure solution to the existing A83 in tandem with progressing substantial shorter term investment in the existing A83.

I hope this is of assistance.