

Minister for Transport submission of 30 June 2023

PE1916/G: Request a public inquiry into the management of the Rest and Be Thankful project

Thank you for your letter of 19 May 2023 concerning the Petitioners' submission of 14 March 2023.

Firstly, you are **“seeking an update on when the Scottish Government expects to announce a preferred route option for the permanent solution on this project.”**

The Scottish Government is committed to an infrastructure solution to address landslip risks at the A83 Rest and Be Thankful and shares the urgency communities and businesses place on maintaining and improving connectivity of this vital route. Delivery of a permanent and resilient solution is a priority and we will continue to seek ways to achieve that as quickly as possible.

The Scottish Government has been working tirelessly to find a long-term solution to the landslip risks at the A83 Rest and Be Thankful. I can confirm that the identification of the preferred route option through the Glen Croe Valley was announced on 02 June 2023 and is a very important milestone in finding a solution to this long-standing problem.

Following detailed design and assessment work on the options under consideration, a debris flow shelter has been identified as the preferred option for the long-term solution. This option involves constructing a debris flow shelter over a length of approximately 1.4km with an additional 180m of catch pit and protection wall to protect the road and road users from future debris flow events.

Further details on the preferred route option is available from the Transport Scotland website at [Access to Argyll and Bute \(A83\) \(transport.gov.scot\)](https://www.transport.gov.scot/argyll-and-bute-a83).

Addressing each of the concerns raised in the Petitioners submission of 14 March 2023, they ask **“If the old military road improvements work well will this kick the permanent solution into the long grass?”**

It is not the intention that the medium term solution will replace the long term solution if the improvements work well. The proposed medium term solution is a temporary solution which will add further resilience and

operational benefits to the temporary diversion route for when the A83 is closed due to landslides or a risk of landslide.

The improvement works include debris catch fences, temporary bunds, drainage improvements and widening and discrete realignment to improve bends and avoid flooding. A detailed programme for the proposed improvements is now being developed. It is expected that these works will be carried out on a phased basis starting later this year with realignment of the southern end of the route.

The concern that “The selection criteria for improving resilience considered the environment, topography alignment, structures, drainage, flooding, safety, operational considerations, and finance. The selection criteria for the Medium-Term Solution did not consider ensuring we have a two way road which stays open when it rains and is free from traffic lights, road closures, and convoys - a fundamental requirement of the people who actually use the road, and we would have assumed is the role for which Transport Scotland exists - why was this the case?”

In response to this query, I can confirm that the aspects you refer to did not form part of the selection criteria for the preferred option of the medium term solution. As announced by the then Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport in March 2021, the purpose of the medium term solution is to deliver a safe, proportionate and more resilient diversion route for use if the A83 is closed. It should be noted that the medium term solution is a temporary solution which would improve resilience of the diversion route until the permanent solution is constructed. The medium term solution never committed to being a two-way road and guaranteeing unrestricted access all year round, that is what the permanent, long-term solution aims to do.

I can advise that an option was considered that provided full two-way working along the line of the existing Old Military Road over its full length, adopting the existing horizontal and vertical geometry. The widening required to achieve two-way working resulted in major engineering challenges, particularly extensive earthwork cuttings, resulting in substantial additional costs and making it extremely difficult to keep the Old Military Road available as an emergency diversion route. This was not considered a proportionate response for a medium term solution and would align more with the long term solution.

A report which summarises the assessment of each of the options for the medium term solution, one of which includes a two-way road, can be found on the Transport Scotland website at the following location:

[Medium term strategy - Options assessment report - January 2023 - A83 Access to Argyll and Bute | Transport Scotland](#)

“What is Transport Scotland’s timetable for a permanent solution?”

The Scottish Government recognises that the timescales for developing an alternative to the current route and finding a long-term solution 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.

Following the announcement of the preferred route option for the long term solution on 02 June 2023, work is now underway on the next stage in the assessment process which is the detailed development and assessment of the preferred option. This stage will culminate in the publication of draft road Orders, compulsory purchase Orders and an Environmental Impact Assessment Report for formal consultation.

I would like to reassure the Committee that Transport Scotland will continue to look to expedite the programme where possible, as we take forward the next stage in the process with a view to publishing draft Orders by the end of 2024 for formal consultation. Progress thereafter will depend on the level and nature of any representations, including objections, to the published draft Orders.

Any potential construction start date for the long term solution will be subject to completion of the statutory processes, which may include a public local inquiry if objections are received which cannot be resolved, and the procurement of a contractor. It is estimated that construction will take three to four years.

Whilst there is always a desire to deliver proposed improvements to the trunk road network in a timeous and efficient manner to provide the associated benefits to the affected communities and population, it is vital that all due processes are followed and individuals have their statutory right to have their say on the proposals.

I hope you find this information useful.

Kind regards,

FIONA HYSLOP