

Transport Scotland submission of 12 February 2024

Inquiry into A9 dualling Project

At our committee attendance on 24 January 2024 Mr Ewing MSP asked whether we would consider a local office as part of our future plans for the A9 Dualling. As part of our response, I committed to write to the Committee to set out the local presence we have had in place as part of the A9 Programme to date.

I recognise the issue that Mr Ewing MSP has raised and it has been a particular focus for Transport Scotland during the development phase of the programme, where community and landowner engagement is so critical to shaping the design work. This local presence takes many forms, as I set out below, and it has been this engagement that has helped secure 92% of the required statutory decisions for the programme to proceed.

Local Staff

To date we have taken the approach to secure local services from residents along the corridor who have been able to strengthen our local knowledge and communication. Our consultants employ stakeholder staff who are local to Perth, Carrbridge, Ardersier and Inverness. They have also employed a Health and Safety advisor based in Blairgowrie, Engineers based in Aviemore and Inverness, and an Administrative Assistant to run the ground investigation office in Dalwhinnie.

Transport Scotland has employed a retired senior official from Highland Council to lead our stakeholder and community engagement. He has brought extensive knowledge of the local area, community, estate and agricultural issues and has been widely welcomed by residents and landowners.

Undoubtedly the programme has benefited from the greater empathy that this local knowledge has brought to the development process.

Local Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs)

As part of our wider public sector procurement duties, we place great value on supporting local SMEs to undertake work on our behalf. Our advanced work framework was specifically designed to create suitable

opportunities for SMEs and one of our framework providers is a Perth based company who have already undertaken tree felling and property demolition as part of the programme employing around five people on each contract.

We have also used archaeological and ecological survey companies based in Inverness and Perthshire throughout the development stages of the programme to date.

Site Offices

In terms of fixed offices, between 2012 and 2018 our consultants had a small presence in an Inverness office. We have also established site offices as part of the construction works to date with around 12 staff based at Bankfoot near Luncarty, around 7 staff based in Kinraig and around 2 based at Tomatin Distillery for the advanced works undertaken there.

This presence will obviously increase considerably as the remainder of the programme is delivered.

Community support more generally

Academy9

Building a strong relationship with communities and local business is important to us. Our award-winning Academy 9 programme has been developed in partnership with all the schools along the A9 corridor in addition to wider communities across Scotland, educational professionals, educational consultants and industry professionals.

Recognising the power of partnerships between industry and education, Academy9 is building a legacy of Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics (STEM)-related skills and achievement through a series of progressive STEM activities and experiences, providing future generations with the opportunity to learn both hard and soft skills and consider STEM-related careers.

To date we have run nearly 200 events in local schools with around 7000 pupils participating in the 700 hours of learning activity that represents.

Events cover both teacher and pupil learning from primary to apprenticeship level and are run by A9 Engineering and Environmental staff. The programme is designed for mutual advantage – to increase

STEM awareness in schools and to increase the visibility of the potential careers that the A9 and construction in Scotland more widely can offer.

In 2018, Academy9 won the award for 'Skills Impact Initiative of the Year' at the British Construction Industry (BCI) Awards. This was followed up with the "Best Practice – Knowledge Sharing" award at the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) Awards 2023.

Highland Discovery

We have also partnered in the development of the "Highland Discovery" app to support local business in the corridor. This work was subsequently extended to cover partnering with Cairngorms National Park Authority and other local stakeholders to support the Badenoch Great Places Programme and in particular to develop the supporting local "Great Places" app.

The apps are designed to work in-car to link drivers on the A9 with local places of interest.

Construction related community benefits

We would envisage our community benefits programme to substantially increase during the construction stages of the programme. Of the many community benefits delivered throughout the construction projects so far, a high-level summary of what these community benefits provided include:

Luncarty to Pass of Birnam:

- 50 days volunteering in the local community
- 77 engagements with schools, colleges and universities
- 1,800 days worked by apprentices
- 200+ meals provided to Stanley Lunch Club
- 65 new jobs created
- 65 work placements delivered

Tomatin to Moy:

- A sub-contract to a social enterprise.
- Economic benefits to the local areas through award of sub-contracts to local SME sub-contractors, variety of workplace and training opportunities, with 14 qualifications achieved by site staff during construction phases including a four-week placement for an apprentice and an onsite role to an individual from an identified priority group.
- Support to the Strathdearn Community Development Trust with their work on a community housing project to prevent flooding.
- Donations of tree stumps and logs to local sawmills,
- Donations of peat for a local mushroom farm, embracing a circular approach to construction materials on the project.
- Delivery of a replacement pedestrian bridge over the Allt na Frithe, which is part of a path primarily used by schoolchildren for accessing public transport services to the local school.
- Early career site visits for young people and outreach sessions with schools in the local area involving analysing objects and samples that had been taken from the site, and learning about the work of archaeologists on site through video interviews.

Kincraig to Dalraddy:

- Employment for 26 people who live within the area, in a wide variety of roles, from cleaners and catering staff to site operatives.
- Vocational training opportunities for three people.
- Many of the remaining workforce lived within local communities during the project, boosting the revenue of the local amenities such as shops, accommodation, and leisure facilities.
- Support for the local economy with the award of subcontracts and employment for local people.
- The award of eight subcontracts worth a total of £1.4m to local businesses.
- Provision of new playground facilities for Alvie Primary School alongside bug hotels and planter boxes.
- Improvements to a potholed track leading to the school.

- Provision of public welfare facilities in Kincaig village during the summer months.
- The donation of £800 by project partners to the local Community Fund, to go towards the Community Fireworks Night 2016.

As I said to the Committee, we will look again at how we shape a local presence during the next phases of the programme, noting the length of corridor. This will include consideration of local offices along with scaling up the approaches I have set out above to make sure we deliver this national programme alongside local people and communities.

I hope that this is helpful.

Alison Irvine
Interim CEO of Transport Scotland

