**Briefing Note for the Transport Committee**

**A83 Rest and Be Thankful**

**Twenty Years of Policy and the Decision Facing the New Scottish Government**

## Purpose

This briefing summarises the history of the Rest and Be Thankful (A83) over the past two decades and highlights the key issues that now face the Scottish Government following the appointment of a new Transport Secretary.

## Background

The Rest and Be Thankful is widely recognised as the most vulnerable section of Scotland's trunk road network to landslides. Since Transport Scotland first identified the route as Scotland's highest debris-flow risk location in 2004, successive Governments have acknowledged both its strategic importance and the need for a long-term solution.

During this period, substantial public investment has been made in monitoring, slope stabilisation, drainage, catch pits, engineering studies and the development of alternative route options. More recently, the Scottish Government has progressed a preferred scheme comprising improvements to the nearby Old Military Road used under convoy as a temporary route while construction of a debris flow shelter on the main road takes place.

## Key Findings

A review of Government actions over the past twenty years suggests three broad conclusions.

1. The Scottish Government has not ignored the problem. Significant resources have been committed to engineering investigations, environmental assessment, design development and landslide mitigation, with expenditure exceeding £80 million over the last decade. Ministers have repeatedly described the delivery of a permanent solution as a strategic priority.
2. Despite this investment, no permanent resilient route has yet been delivered. Successive Governments have progressed studies, consultations and statutory processes but have not reached a final construction commitment supported by an agreed budget.
3. There has been disruption caused by landslides over the last 20 years but in 2020 the biggest landslide to date closed the road completely for 200 days and it has not re-opened to 2 way traffic since. Transport Scotland have consulted on a number of options but despite representations from business leaders, elected representatives and community organisations have selected the least favoured option with the biggest impact on the economy and communities in Argyll.
4. Draft Orders including Compulsory Purchase Orders and Environmental Impact Assessments were published in December 2024 for both the Debris Flow Shelter, and the use of the Old Military Road these did not include an economic assessment of the impact of 4 years under convoy of using this road. A set of road table sessions were set up in 2025 with business leaders estimating £543m–£673m of cumulative economic exposure and potential losses over four years of restricted access.
5. Transport Scotland have reassessed alternative 2 way options which were published in February 2026, and we await the decision of the Cabinet Secretary. The RABT business campaign group have a meeting with the cabinet secretary on the 29th of October to discuss these issues.

In our opinion the requirement to use the OMR under convey for the duration of the construction period and the devastating economic impact on the businesses and communities of Argyll and Bute should have precluded the debris-flow shelter from being selected as a viable long-term solution. The economic impacts of this decision were inadequately assessed during the selection process.

**The Decision Now Facing Ministers**

Unlike previous Transport Secretaries, the incoming Minister inherits a project that is approaching a delivery decision rather than an early feasibility stage.

Two priorities for our meeting with Stephen Flynn on 29 October

1. Reconsider the current OMR convoy proposal and select one of the alternative solutions presented to the Cabinet secretary in February 2026 that provides reliable, resilient two-way access, including during construction and periods of heavy rainfall.
2. Commit to a funded programme for delivering the agreed solution, with the objective of completion within this Parliament, with clear milestones, and ministerial oversight to ensure action is taken.

The principal questions are no longer whether a permanent solution is required, but whether the preferred scheme should proceed unchanged, or include consideration of the alternative two-way access into Argyll.

**Matters the Committee May Wish to Examine**

Given the national importance of the A83, the Committee may wish also to consider how the Scottish Government intends to move from more than twenty years of planning and mitigation to delivery of a permanent resilient route that fully assessed the economic and social consequences of the solution.

Over the past decade, responsibility for the transport portfolio has passed between 7 Ministers and each change in political responsibility losses momentum. To help maintain momentum we would like the committees support:

- Consider supporting the two priorities above being put to the Cabinet secretary on the 29th October.
- Write to the Cabinet Secretary seeking a response to the two priorities, a decision timetable and budget available to deliver it.
- Request periodic progress reports so that commitments can be evaluated against delivery.

Our request is not to reopen years of work indefinitely. It is to secure a defensible, time-limited decision based on the full transport, social and economic consequences.

**Conclusion**

As the project reaches a critical decision point, Parliamentary scrutiny could help ensure that future decisions are informed by a comprehensive assessment the economic and community impacts, and that Scotland finally secures a resilient long-term solution for one of its most strategically important transport corridors.

**Rest and Be Thankful (A83) Timeline**
**Twenty Years of Government Decisions and Key Milestones (2004–2026)**

## 2004–2012: Recognition of the Problem

### 2004

- Transport Scotland identified the Rest and Be Thankful as the highest debris-flow risk location on Scotland's trunk road network.
- The need for long-term resilience was formally recognised.

### 2007

- A major landslide closed the A83 for several days, demonstrating the vulnerability of the route and increasing pressure for a permanent solution.

### 2010–2012

- Early mitigation measures were introduced, including improved drainage, culverts, fences and debris barriers.
- In August 2012 the A83 Task Force was established to coordinate stakeholder engagement and advise on improvements.

## 2013–2019: Engineering Studies but No Construction Decision

### July 2013

- Transport Scotland published the A83 Route Study.
- Five long-term engineering solutions were identified, including:
    - debris flow shelter;
    - tunnel;
    - viaduct;
    - replacement route on the opposite side of Glen Croe.
- Despite identifying alternative permanent solutions, the preferred approach remained continued landslide mitigation using catch pits and slope management.

### 2014–2019

- Successive Transport Ministers maintained the strategy of mitigation.
- Landslides and road closures continued, with the Old Military Road increasingly used as a diversion.

## 2020–2022: Landslides Change the Debate

### August–September 2020

- Two major landslides closed the A83 for approximately 200 days.
- Convoy operation on the Old Military Road became the principal means of maintaining access to Argyll for the next 6 years.
- The events demonstrated that mitigation alone could no longer provide a resilient transport corridor.

### 2021

- The Rest and Be Thankful Business Campaign Group was established to represent businesses and communities seeking a permanent two-way road that remains open when it rains.
- Transport Scotland revisited the alternative route options originally identified in 2013.
- The campaign group supported the "Green Route" as a potentially quicker off-line solution.

### September 2021

- Transport Minister Graeme Dey announced that a medium-term solution would be "shovel ready" by Christmas 2022.

**2023–2024: Preferred Route Selected**

**First half 2023**

- Transport Scotland announced its preferred medium-term solution to upgrade the Old Military Road as the diversion while a permanent solution was built.;
- Questions remained over whether the Old Military Road would operate as a two-way road or continue under convoy control during construction.
- The Rest and Be Thankful was identified as a strategic national infrastructure priority within National Planning Framework 4.

**Second half 2023**

- Transport Scotland formally selected the debris flow shelter as the preferred long-term solution despite calls from many on the A83 Task Force that this will have the worst economic and community impact of all the options considered.
- Survey work, environmental assessment and statutory procedures commenced.
- The First Minister publicly confirmed a "firm commitment" to delivering a permanent solution.

**2024**

- It became clear that the Old Military Road would remain under convoy operation for an estimated four-year construction period.
- The campaign group opposed this approach, arguing that prolonged convoy operation would significantly affect businesses, tourism and population retention in Argyll.

**2024–2026: Progress in Process, Delay in Delivery**

**December 2024**

- Draft Orders were published for both the medium-term and long-term schemes.
- Statutory objections were lodged.
- A challenge raised about the lack of economic and social impact assessment within the draft orders.
- As of mid-2026 these objections remained unresolved and no decision had been made regarding a Public Local Inquiry.

**September 2025**

- A roundtable chaired by Jenni Minto examined the likely economic consequences of prolonged convoy operation.
- Participants estimated approximately **£500 million** in direct economic impact; and a similar amount of in investment risk if restrictions continued during construction.

**October 2025**

- Fiona Hyslop requested that Transport Scotland, and the campaign group jointly reassess options capable of providing free-flowing two-way access during construction.

**March 2026**

- Updated appraisal work on two-way options was presented to the A83 Task Force.
- Fiona Hyslop confirmed that the appraisal should be considered by the incoming Government before a final decision was taken.

**Overall Observation**

Across more than twenty years and nine successive Transport Ministers, the Scottish Government has consistently recognised the strategic importance of the A83 and invested heavily in studies, mitigation and design. However, while technical development has progressed steadily, a permanent engineering solution has yet to move into construction. The new administration therefore inherits a project that is no longer at the feasibility stage, but at the point where decisions on funding, delivery and implementation are required.

TRANSPORT COMMITTEE BRIEFING

28 OCTOBER 2026

## A83 REST AND BE THANKFUL

# A lifeline for Argyll’s communities

A reliable two-way road. Open when it rains.

## COMMUNITIES AND BUSINESSES NEED RELIABLE ACCESS

**1,500**

**businesses represented**
by the campaign group

**£543m-£673m**

**four-year economic exposure**
and potential losses*

**£13bn-£15bn**

**proposed investment**
over the next decade*

*Campaign-reported estimates: potential losses are not confirmed losses; proposed investment is not committed funding.

**HEALTHCARE / JOBS / EDUCATION / ESSENTIAL SUPPLIES**

Brendan O’Hara MP’s petition calls on the Scottish Government to reject four years of single-lane convoy working on the Old Military Road.

## TWO DECISIONS NEEDED NOW

### 1 CHOOSE THE GREEN ROUTE

Our preference is a two-way Green Route, providing reliable access during construction and heavy rainfall instead of four years of convoy working.

### 2 DELIVER THE LONG-TERM FIX

Then progress work on the long-term solution at the Rest and Be Thankful, with a funded programme, clear milestones and ministerial oversight.

## PUBLISH DATES FOR THESE DELIVERY MILESTONES

**01**
**DECISION**
Select the two-way Green Route.

**02**
**FUNDING**
Confirm budget and delivery responsibility.

**03**
**TWO-WAY ACCESS**
Set construction and opening dates.

**04**
**LONG-TERM FIX**
Set start and completion dates for the permanent solution.

## WHAT THE COMMITTEE CAN DO

**01**
**BACK THE PRIORITIES**
A two-way Green Route.
Then the long-term solution.

**02**
**SEEK A DECISION DATE**
Write to the Cabinet Secretary.
Require named accountability.

**03**
**TRACK DELIVERY**
Publish dated milestones.
Report regularly on delivery.

**Committee scrutiny 28 October | Campaign meeting with Stephen Flynn 29 October**

Source: Rest and Be Thankful Campaign Group briefing for 28 October 2026. Economic exposure estimate from the 2025 business round-table process. Investment pipeline identified by the campaign group. Petition: Brendan O’Hara MP, 38 Degrees (linked above). Milestone dates are requested, not agreed.

**therestandbethankfulcampaign.com**