

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee
Wednesday 23 April 2025
7th Meeting, 2025 (Session 6)

PE1610: Upgrade the A75 and PE1657: A77 upgrade

Introduction

PE1610: Upgrade the A75

Petitioner Matt Halliday

Petition summary Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to upgrade the A75 Euro-route to dual carriageway for its entirety as soon as possible.

Webpage <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1610>

1. [The Committee last considered this petition at its meeting on 2 April 2025](#). At that meeting, the Committee heard evidence from –
 - Fiona Hyslop, Cabinet Secretary for Transport
 - Nicola Blaney, Head of Strategic Transport Planning, Transport Scotland
 - Alasdair Graham, Head of Design, Procurement and Contracts, Transport Scotland
 - Lawrence Shackman, Director of Major Projects, Transport Scotland
2. The petition summary is included in **Annexe A** and the Official Report of the Committee's last consideration of this petition is at **Annexe B**.
3. [Written submissions received prior to the Committee's last consideration can be found on the petition's webpage](#).
4. [Further background information about this petition can be found in the SPICe briefing](#) for this petition.
5. [The Scottish Government gave its initial position on this petition on 17 October 2016](#).
6. Every petition collects signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 2,871 signatures have been received.

PE1657: A77 upgrade

Petitioner Donald McHarrie on behalf of A77 Action Group

Petition summary Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to dual the A77 from Ayr Whitlett's Roundabout south to the two ferry ports located at Cairnryan, including the point at which the A77 connects with the A75.

Webpage <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1657>

7. [The Committee also considered this petition at its meeting on 2 April 2025](#). At that meeting, the Committee took evidence from the Cabinet Secretary for Transport and Scottish Government officials.
8. The petition summary is included in **Annexe A** and the Official Report of the Committee's last consideration of this petition is at **Annexe B**.
9. [Written submissions received prior to the Committee's last consideration can be found on the petition's webpage.](#)
10. [Further background information about this petition can be found in the SPICe briefing](#) for this petition.
11. [The Scottish Government gave its initial position on this petition on 19 October 2017.](#)
12. Every petition collects signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 3,309 signatures have been received.

Action

13. The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take.

Clerks to the Committee
April 2025

Annexe A: Summary of petitions

PE1610: Upgrade the A75

Petitioner

Matt Halliday

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to upgrade the A75 Euro-route to dual carriageway for its entirety as soon as possible.

Previous action

A previous petition was running on Change.Org and an action group has been set up on social media to fight for this cause. A meeting was arranged with Joan McAlpine MSP who recommended lodging a petition with the Scottish Parliament.

Background information

The A75 is not only the road to Stranraer and the ferry ports of Cairnryan but, as such, is also the road to Belfast, one of the UK's capital cities.

Due to the current design of the road and previous fact, it is a road where many differing vehicle types are thrown together often at highly differential speeds. The volume of HGVs in convoy travelling east when the ferries dock combined with the 40mph limit for those vehicles causes very high level of congestion upon the A75, a volume of traffic that was never envisioned when the current road was designed.

Throw in even slower moving agricultural vehicles, faster moving traffic, such as cars and motorcycles, and a large amount of tourist traffic unfamiliar with the vagaries of the A75, and it is easy to see how frustration can brew carelessness on the road. A change to dual carriageway would help negate the causes of this while also preventing a conflict between vehicles travelling east with those travelling west.

For the same reasons, the local economy would benefit by being more accessible to tourists, commerce and improved links with Northern Ireland and England. This is not to mention the benefits to the local populace in improved safety and reduced journey times, especially when there is more centralisation of health services to Dumfries resulting in journeys of up to 90 miles for some in the west of Dumfries & Galloway.

I have come to these conclusions as a regular user of the A75 and I know for a fact that I am not alone in holding these opinions.

PE1657: A77 upgrade

Petitioner

Donald McHarrie on behalf of A77 Action Group

Date Lodged

18 June 2017

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to dual the A77 from Ayr Whitlett's Roundabout south to the two ferry ports located at Cairnryan, including the point at which the A77 connects with the A75.

Previous action

The A77 Action Group has been formed on Facebook and we have now had a number of public meetings. The group has contacted Mr Brian Whittle MSP for advice on how to go forward with a petition.

Background information

The A77 is the main arterial route from the central belt to the south west of Scotland. On the way it also provides connections to a number of towns and villages. It also provides the road connection between our capital city Edinburgh via Glasgow to Northern Ireland's capital city Belfast and the Republic of Ireland's capital city Dublin beyond that. So from an economic perspective, as well as a cultural view point, the A77 is a strategic road, nationally and internationally.

The line of the road often reflects its design history harking back centuries to the days of coach and horses. From Edinburgh to the notorious Whitlett's roundabout at Ayr the journey is relatively straight forward on motorway or dual carriageway. From this point south the road not only narrows to a single carriageway, it also passes through eight communities all with urban speed limits ranging from 40mph to 20mph. It has very few dedicated safe passing places to overtake slower moving vehicle types that use this road.

We as a country need to build on the investments already implemented in the area, such as the £77 million, spent on the A77 & A75 from 2008 (the A77 improvements being the Symington and Bogend Toll improvements relating to safety improvements and on sections of dual carriageway north of Ayr). The design work and planning of Maybole's bypass that is scheduled to commence August 2018 is also included in this figure.

Existing pressure on the road

- The pulse of vehicle numbers associated with the HGV traffic coming off the ferries results in long convoyed queues in a platoon effect travelling along the road, making passing these vehicles dangerous.
- There is a large proportion of tourist traffic, which is unfamiliar with the snaking, twisting nature of the road.
- There is a mix of slow (agricultural vehicles) and fast-moving traffic (cars and motorcyclists), which can cause delays and lead to driver impatience in the form of rash and often near fatal errors of judgement.

- In some places the road width does not allow two HGVs to safely pass each other without one giving way to the other.
- The road width also does not allow road work to be carried out in a safe way without closing the road (eleven closures occurred for this reason in 2016/17), which results in lengthy diversion routes on even more unsuitable roads.
- There is increased traffic travelling south via the A77 south of Ayr to get to the North Channel ferries operating out of Loch Ryan as a result of the withdrawal of the Troon to Larne ferry service.

Potential benefits of an upgrade

The National Planning Framework Strategy Map unequivocally demonstrates the economic and social significance of both A77 and that of A75 to Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom in equal measure. The local and national economy would benefit by being more accessible to tourists, commerce and improve the links between Scotland and Northern Ireland and its neighbour and EU country the Republic of Ireland.

The A77 Truck Road had nine road closures south of Whitlett's roundabout at Ayr in 2016/17 alone due to road traffic incidents. If the road was wider and upgraded, then these closures would be less frequent, so the communities along the diversionary routes could be left without the thundering traffic disturbing their idyllic settings.

The bypasses and improvements we seek are not that dissimilar to the project benefits of the A737 Dalry bypass in that these upgrades it would serve to separate local from strategic traffic. This in turn would encourage improved economic & employment opportunities through better journey time reliability for both motorists and businesses along the length of the A77.

An independent study commissioned by South Ayrshire Council stated that the benefit to Scotland of events, such as the 145th Golf Open that was held at Royal Troon, was £110m as a whole. The world famous golf course and holiday complex at Turnberry owned by President Trump is being starved of such events due to the lack of investment in the road structure. The action called for in the petition could therefore have positive economic implications for Scotland as a whole.

Conclusion

South West Scotland needs a fit for purpose road infrastructure in order to sustain and grow with the greater community of Scotland, the United Kingdom and within whatever relationship it has with Europe.

The A77 Action Group is not alone in holding these opinions, as many people use the A77 every single day for work, or for social and domestic purposes, and have supported this campaign.

Annexe B: Extract from Official Report of last consideration of PE1610, PE1657, PE1916, PE1967 and PE2132 on 2 April 2025

The Convener: Agenda item 2 is consideration of existing petitions, beginning with an evidence session on a compendium of petitions with the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Fiona Hyslop. I am delighted that she is with us along with Transport Scotland officials: Lawrence Shackman, the director of major projects, whom I think we have had the pleasure of meeting before at some point; Nicola Blaney, the head of strategic transport planning; and Alasdair Graham, the head of design, procurement and contracts. I warmly welcome you all. Thank you very much for attending the meeting.

The committee recognises that we are moving into the last year of the parliamentary session, so, in order to expedite a number of petitions, we hope to meet with cabinet secretaries in different disciplines to try to work our way through the petitions. Otherwise, we will not be able to do justice to them in the time that we have left.

PE1610, which was lodged by Matt Halliday, calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to upgrade the A75 Euro route to dual carriageway for its entirety as soon as possible.

PE1657, which was lodged by Donald McHarrie on behalf of the A77 action group, calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to dual the A77 from Ayr's Whitletts roundabout south to the two ferry ports located at Cairnryan, including the point at which the A77 connects with the A75.

PE1916, which was lodged by Councillor Douglas Philand and Councillor Donald Kelly, calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to instigate a public inquiry into the political and financial management of the A83 Rest and Be Thankful project to provide a permanent solution for the route. The petition has stretched across various parliamentary sessions and, in a previous session, I and, I think, David Torrance paraded around the ground ourselves to see what was what.

PE1967, which was lodged by John Urquhart on behalf of Helensburgh and District Access Trust and the Friends of Loch Lomond and the Trossachs, calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to reconsider the process for selecting the preferred option for the planned upgrade of the A82 between Tarbet and Inverarnan, and to replace the design manual for roads and bridges-based assessment with the more comprehensive Scottish transport appraisal guidance.

Finally, PE2132, which was lodged by the Inverness Courier, calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to publish a clear timeline for the dualling of the A96 between Inverness and Nairn and the construction of a bypass for Nairn, and to ensure that that timeline is made public by Easter 2025. We would be going some, I suppose, to achieve that.

My eyesight is never quite clear, but I think that we are joined by petitioners in the public gallery. We are also joined by two of our parliamentary colleagues, Jackie Baillie, who has had an on-going and particular interest in PE1916 and PE1967, which is on the A82—

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): The A83.

The Convener: Which one?

Jackie Baillie: The Rest and Be Thankful.

The Convener: That is the one.

We are also joined by Emma Harper, who has an interest in PE1610, on the A75, and PE1659, on the A77.

Members who join us have no automatic right to ask questions, but I will invite them to follow on and ask questions at the end, if everybody is agreed. It has been my practice to encourage as much active participation and engagement from MSPs on petitions in which they have a constituency interest. I am less interested if they are coming as party spokesmen, but if they are here because of a constituency interest, I am keen to hear from them.

Cabinet secretary, in the light of all that, I understand that you would like to say something to us in advance of our beginning our questions. Rather than the meeting becoming a free-for-all, one colleague will lead a discussion about each of the different petitions, and I know that you will bring in your colleagues as and when you think that would be most helpful.

The Cabinet Secretary for Transport (Fiona Hyslop): Thank you, convener. Good morning. I have opening remarks to provide a bit of context, which might be helpful. I thank the committee for inviting me to discuss the petitions relating to the A75, the A77, the A83 Rest and Be Thankful, the A82 between Tarbet and Inverarnan, and the A96 Inverness to Nairn bypass.

The Scottish Government recognises the crucial role of transport infrastructure in supporting sustainable economic growth and access to essential services, and we are committed to improving transport infrastructure across Scotland. The Scottish Government has a strong record of delivering major infrastructure projects, including the £745 million Aberdeen western peripheral route and the £1.34 billion Queensferry crossing on the Forth estuary, which was a complex engineering feat that put our workmanship to the front and centre of global engineering. We have also delivered the Borders railway and electrified the rail route between our two largest cities through the Glasgow to Edinburgh improvement programme. In addition, since 2012, we have invested more than £475 million in the A9 dualling programme, which has enabled statutory processes to be completed for 10 out of the 11 projects, delivered the first two projects into operational use and supported procurement on the third and fourth contracts.

On the A82, a new viaduct has been built at Pulpit Rock on the side of Loch Lomond, which has helped to remove traffic signals that had been there for nearly 30 years, and a much-needed bypass at Crianlarich has reduced traffic in the town by half. Both improvements benefit road users and local communities along the A82.

At a total cost of £64 million, we have completed five major improvements on the A77, including the £29 million Maybole bypass. We have also completed six major roads improvement projects on the A75, with a total value of more than £50 million.

Following an initial meeting with the A77 campaign team in November, I met A75 and A77 campaigners, including the two petitioners, on Friday 21 March. I am happy to report that my offer to establish a regular six-monthly meeting to bring them together with Transport Scotland and Amey was accepted.

Although the United Kingdom autumn budget marked a step in the right direction, it did not make up for 14 years of underinvestment—austerity cannot be undone in one year. We still face significant pressures on our capital budget, which are significantly affecting our ability to maintain investment in all Scotland's transport infrastructure.

Despite the significant pressures on our capital budget, we continue to progress improvements to the trunk road network. That includes dualling the A96 from Inverness to Nairn—including the Nairn bypass—and the procedural steps for the acquisition of land have now been concluded, which has delivered a further key milestone for the scheme. We continue to progress work to determine the most suitable procurement option for delivering the scheme, after which a timetable for delivery can be set.

Development work on the A83 Rest and Be Thankful continues at pace, with draft orders having been published last December for medium-term and long-term solutions. In addition, following the allocation of funding from the UK Government, we have wasted no time in progressing the design and assessment work to consider the options for realigning the A75 trunk road at the villages of Springholm and Crocketford, with almost 180 people having attended the meet-the-team events that were held three weeks ago.

I thank the committee for giving me the opportunity to make those opening remarks, which provide a bit more current context, and I will be happy to answer any questions that committee members have on the petitions.

The Convener: Thank you very much. It has been a while since I have been up the A82—has the 30-year-old traffic light finally gone?

Fiona Hyslop: That is my report to the committee.

The Convener: That is very exciting news from my point of view, although I have not been up that road in a while.

I will ask some general questions first. It is interesting to note that Scotland's trunk road network is the single biggest asset that is owned by the Scottish Government. It is 2,179 miles long and is worth about £20 billion. It includes a 10-lane section of the M8 and rural carriageways through the west to the Highlands. It is an extraordinary thing.

There is no single document that sets out the Scottish Government's programme of trunk road upgrades or the delivery milestones and associated budgets. Current plans, such as the second strategic transport projects review and the infrastructure

investment plan, provide only a partial picture of the planned improvements. Is there a reason for not having all that in a single document, or is there an argument for having a single document that could pull all that together?

Fiona Hyslop: There is the matter of action versus bureaucracy. There is that tension for everybody in producing reports—we can get criticised for producing too many reports.

We do regular asset management, and there are two issues in that regard. First, members and constituents are probably more interested in the additional improvements and enhancements, but a lot of what we do involves running the basic system and ensuring care and maintenance. Despite the pressures on capital budgets, I have worked hard to improve the maintenance budget. Why is that important? It is important for safety. You are right about the roads being assets. People take them for granted until something happens, and then there is obviously concern.

Secondly, climate change is here. There are real issues about the stability of land and in ensuring that we maintain all our assets—that applies to rail as well as to roads. Across Transport Scotland, I am taking forward analysis of climate change impacts.

We are developing work on roads in vulnerable locations—we had done some work on that previously, but we are paying it more attention now. For example, on 21 March, I visited Carlock wall and Carlock hill, on the A77. The hill was subject to landslips. People thought that they could put up wires and catch pits a bit like what has been done on the A83. However, following ground investigation, they realised that they would have to drill in and have nailing for more security. We have to be aware of the increasing need to take care of our major assets.

On bringing all that together, I see an asset assessment annually. I might bring in Lawrence Shackman on that. I regularly see material that tells me the state of the assets. However, because people are interested, there is an issue around what we make more public in relation to enhancements, improvements, additional drilling and so on. You are, I think, asking whether we bring all that together. That might be a big effort, but we could probably signal where everything is if people wanted to find it.

Lawrence Shackman (Transport Scotland): An annual asset management plan is published. Yearly, it summarises what has happened on the trunk road network in relation to maintenance and operations and what will happen in the year to come. It sets out where the pressures are and where the investment has been targeted.

When it comes to projects, we have the infrastructure investment plan, which is a published document that is due to be refreshed in the coming year. It is an excellent summary of the status of the projects that will come into the programme or are already in the programme. Between those two documents and others—the Transport Scotland website, for example, has a plethora of information on maintenance, operations, projects that are currently on the books and projects that have been completed—a host of information summarises maintenance, operations and the projects.

The Convener: The process for authorising trunk road developments is long established—it is 40 years old. Some would argue that the pace of some recent approvals for projects has been slower than it might have been. Is there any plan to change the process—in particular, if a project has broad public and political support—in order to expedite things?

Fiona Hyslop: The Scottish transport appraisal guidance is central. It was published for consultation in July 2001 and formally published in 2003. A major update was made in May 2008, and the next major update involved a refresh of the guidance in January 2022, so there has been progress during that period. When it comes to that provision, a balance needs to be struck in relation to people's legal rights. Does the majority view prevail over the minority—perhaps landowner—interest?

A lot of the variation happens at the stage of our issuing draft orders. The existence of any objections makes a major difference in how things can progress. On some issues, we are trying very hard. An awful lot of input goes into trying to ensure that there are no objections, because a public local inquiry can obviously take a lot of time. For example, there has been a huge number of responses and enormous public input in relation to the Sheriffhall roundabout. If landowners or others have key interests, there is a balance to be struck. Even though everybody and their granny might want something, if a few individuals do not—for good and understandable reasons—we have to carry out due process.

The reason for the difference in the speed of how things have progressed is that there can be objections. As I have said to officials, we have had some success, particularly with some of the more recent proposals, such as on the A9, to which there have been no objections, which has allowed us to move to completion. It is key to complete that statutory process, because, once we do that and avoid a public inquiry, if we can, we can move to action through procurement and delivery.

The Convener: I can understand that. I seem to recall that, when you had responsibility for culture, you and I had a similar discussion about the Pentland film studios—at the end of the day, a single landowner was, potentially, frustrating a major project that could have proceeded at that point.

What is the Government's current thinking about the mutual investment model as a method for funding trunk road improvements?

Fiona Hyslop: We have been very clear about that. Indeed, my predecessor Màiri McAllan made a statement announcing that we would actively consider the mutual investment model, particularly in relation to the A9. We are currently discussing that model through a market consultation, which started on 24 February.

There are obviously value-for-money issues. We understand that the project will be revenue costly, and I have relayed the constraints on our capital budget, but there is an opportunity to find a balance. I have ensured that the market consultation that is taking place for the A96 project from Inverness to Nairn includes the potential for that model, although I am not saying for definite that it will be used.

My officials are working actively with exchequer colleagues on the A9, and the mutual investment model is actively being pursued as the mechanism for that

project. I am working very closely with the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government on that—it is live and active. That is for just two of the sections of the A9. We are actively looking at that. Of course, private investment and different models have been involved in road projects previously, including those for the Aberdeen western peripheral route and the M8.

The Convener: I have just a final thought. In response to my first question, you referred to the fact that a large part of the responsibility is the care and maintenance of the existing estate. I am interested in those cases where something goes wrong. For example, there is suddenly a need for a major injection of capital to resolve the issue at the M8 Woodside viaduct, and we have had, and considered, petitions suggesting that it be grassed over and various other things. What impact might that have on the other projects that you are seeking to pursue?

Fiona Hyslop: It has a big impact. We can plan as well as we can, but we also have to try to manage the budget across a whole range of projects while not necessarily knowing how long they will take. For example, there might or might not be a public inquiry delaying us from our original intention, but that is part and parcel of the process.

I am glad that you have mentioned Woodside. When I went to see it, the engineering aspect of it was explained to me; my colleagues could probably give you more of an explanation, but the erosion of the steelwork within the pillars is really problematic. People do not see it, because obviously the pillars are propping up the M8 as it goes through the city centre, but it is an issue that clearly had to be addressed. I ensured that local councillors and MSPs were invited to see the work to understand what was happening.

People do get frustrated at the lane reductions and so on, but it is all about safety and ensuring that the weight is reduced while the work gets done. An important issue, as those of you who are familiar with Glasgow will know, is the subway that runs underneath and, potentially, mines, too. It is a serious piece of work that needs done, and we therefore have to stage and manage it—and to do so within a budget, which is very problematic.

Things can happen in different areas, as is clearly the case with the A83, for example, in relation to landslips. Thank goodness we put in the catch pits there. You saw the major closure that we previously had, and work was done to address issues arising from the warm, wet weather there. We have to react as well as maintain, and we have to improve, too. That is the balancing act that we have to perform with all our budgets—we have to try and spread them over time.

The Convener: Committee members have gone out to see these things, and we understand the geological challenges that sometimes present themselves, as well as the safety issues, as you have said. It is perfectly apparent from bridge collapses elsewhere what happens without a proper care and maintenance programme. It is essential.

Thank you for all of that, cabinet secretary. We will now move on to discuss the various roads. Maurice Golden will speak to petition PE1657 on the A77. Emma Harper, if you want to ask a question, I will invite you in after colleagues.

Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con): On the A77 trunk road between the Whittleys roundabout in Ayr and the Cairnryan ports—approximately 44 miles of single-carriageway road—how do you respond to the concerns highlighted by the petitioners that the current state of the A77 is detrimental to trade with Northern Ireland and has left residents of the south-west feeling “abandoned” by the Scottish Government?

Fiona Hyslop: I do not think that they have been abandoned. The level of investment that I recounted in my opening statement, including, significantly, the Maybole bypass, which had been requested for a long time, has brought major improvements. I am very familiar with the area because it is where I grew up. There are current attempts to improve the junction around Corton Road and Doonholm Road; I learned to drive on Corton Road and know exactly where that is. There is signalisation there as well as improvement work for people who are crossing at Kirkoswald.

There is also the issue of strengthening bridges, especially where there is heavy traffic, and the Ballantrae bridge is being improved and strengthened, although that is taking a little longer than people wanted. One issue that I addressed when I met the petitioners was the importance of communication, because when, for understandable reasons, road works take longer, it is important that that is communicated appropriately.

I fully understand your central point about the importance of the A77, and the A75 to Cairnryan, as arteries. I am meeting the south-west alliance of ferry companies on a ferry tomorrow, because I will be travelling to the British-Irish Council. I have also been clear in my interministerial meetings with United Kingdom ministers that I want to see an understanding that those roads are important not only within Scotland but as arteries to elsewhere. I should also declare an interest, because I represent West Lothian where we have a number of supermarket warehouses, and Schuh has its warehouse in a neighbouring constituency in order to access the Irish market. A lot of traffic uses that route to move from the central belt to Northern Ireland.

We are working with the Welsh Government and others to review the resilience of ports and harbours. There have been pressures on Holyhead, because of the impact of storms, and Cairnryan had to react by absorbing a lot of traffic at short notice for a number of days in order to help resolve that situation. I see the A75 as an artery and an economic issue, not just a local road, and the same is the case for the A77. There are challenges with its width in certain areas.

When I had my meeting about the A77 and A75 at Girvan library with the petitioners, we worked through what they saw as the priorities. At the convention of the south of Scotland, which was on transport, I met Gail Macgregor, the leader of Dumfries and Galloway Council, and last week I met Martin Dowie, the leader of South Ayrshire Council, and I know that they are comfortable with what we are trying to do in looking at improvements.

I know that this is a long-standing petition and that the petitioners want dualling. However, there are challenges in ensuring that we deliver the dualling that we have said that we will deliver, and I want to be open with the committee by saying that it is

not going to be realistic to promise any new dualling. What we can do is ensure that we are working systematically through the issues.

I am struck by the fact that, south of Ballantrae, there is an adverse camber, which could be important for big lorries. I have worked closely with the Road Haulage Association to look at how we can help the industry by understanding its needs and then working systematically through what is required. I have asked for that to be done for the A75 and the A77.

Maurice Golden: Picking up on the issue of improvements and upgrades and your point about facilitating what might be called internal trade, I note that we already have major choke points when drivers get to the M77, particularly around junctions 1 and 2, and that is before drivers access either the M8 to get to West Lothian or the M74. What assessment of positive developments downstream is made of the impact of connectivity beyond that? Do you see what I mean?

Fiona Hyslop: I am not sure. You are saying that—

Maurice Golden: The increased traffic flow into the M77 will be problematic, if you are up in Newton Mearns, and it is already clogged around Silverburn and those areas. There might then be a petition saying that we need to upgrade the M77. I wonder how you model, or look at, the impact beyond the upgrades at hand, if you like.

Fiona Hyslop: I might ask one of my officials to help me out with that, but I am very familiar with Silverburn and know that there is traffic at certain times. However, I think that that is more to do with commuting—it is not necessarily about hauliers in particular, as you have mentioned. It is about road and traffic management more generally, and trying to manage those things. It is quite an extensive piece of road. In fact, I remember when the work was done through Pollok Park; you might remember, too, although I am not sure—you might be too young.

Maurice Golden: Jackson Carlaw remembers. [Laughter.]

Fiona Hyslop: You will remember the protest.

The Convener: I perhaps do not want to dwell on that this morning.

Fiona Hyslop: Okay. That was a major project in the not-too-distant past, and an example of how long it can sometimes take to do major road extensions.

The traffic tends to dissipate after Silverburn—as I know, having family in Ayr, and regularly travelling up and down the route—so it is more an issue of traffic management in the greater Glasgow and East Renfrewshire area.

Does anybody want to say anything about how we monitor that for the implication downstream? Is there anything else to say, or not?

Lawrence Shackman: Nicola Blaney might be better placed than me to answer that, but as part of the strategic transport projects review, a lot of modelling of transport issues across Scotland is undertaken to try to identify pinch points and where particular parts of the trunk road network, or other parts of the transport network in

general, should be improved. There will be a good basis for making those improvements, whether it be to deal with an environmental issue, tackle congestion in particular areas or try to encourage people to leave their car at home and use the train or bus.

Those types of things are tackled through the strategic transport projects review, which should identify the main areas where improvements are warranted. The STPR has been undertaken twice now, and it will no doubt will be undertaken again as transport trends and travel patterns change through time.

Fiona Hyslop: But the petitioner in this case is actually south of the Whitletts roundabout, and not far from there is the junction at Doonholm Road and Corton Road, to which I referred, which is currently subject to roadworks with signalisation. Why is that increasingly important? I remember coming out of that road once to ferry traffic, even though it is quite a long distance from Cairnryan. You would be stuck on that road for a long time with that traffic, and you had to wait until everybody was through before you could pull out.

There has been major housing development in that area, and more is proposed, so that is a pinch point, and that is why there is signalisation. However frustrating that is for people while it is on, it means that the traffic is being managed by traffic lights, although that does frustrate people, too. When work is being done, there is a delay, and the delays are often perceived as major, but they can be 10 or 15 minutes at most; sometimes they are much less. However, people like to keep moving, and if they are stopped, they get frustrated.

That is an example of a pinch point that has been identified, but that is further downstream, and south of Whitletts, which is the area in which the petitioner is interested.

The Convener: Emma Harper, have you a follow-up question in relation to the A77?

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): I have follow-ups that are kind of linked to the A75 and the A77, so I can wait.

The Convener: That is fine. I will bring you in after we have heard from Foyso Choudhury, who will take us on to the A75.

Foyso Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab): Good morning, cabinet secretary. What reassurance can you offer the petitioner that the upgrade of the A75 as outlined in STPR2 will be delivered in a timely manner and will be sufficient to meet the needs of road users and local communities?

Fiona Hyslop: Again, in my initial remarks, I identified some of the significant improvements that have been made on the A75. I am not saying that that is work done—it is not. It is part of our systematic working through of, and our sharing and communicating, what is happening.

The road is not always the issue. It is difficult for people to hear this, but driver behaviour is an issue too, which is why some local MSPs have asked for average speed cameras. There are currently 18 speed enforcement spots. Driver frustration

and overtaking can, sadly, cause fatalities and serious casualties; I should say that I have managed to increase the budget for road safety, and we will have a serious and enhanced look at that.

The impact, though, will not come from dualling. I have been up front about that, and the same has previously been reported to the committee in relation to the petition. The bypassing of Springholm and Crockettford was identified as a requirement not just by us, but in the “Union Connectivity Review”, by Sir Peter Hendy—as he was at the time—who is now Minister of State for Rail in the new UK Government.

Prior to the election, there was a bit of a delay by the previous Government, which I can understand, and then another delay after the election with the new Government, before the promised funding could be given. However, I am pleased to say that we were prepared to do the required work and have moved very quickly to start the first phase of what is required to design and build. Indeed, there was a good turnout at the public meeting on the matter three weeks ago.

The A77 and the A75 are connected, which I will come on to talk about, if it is helpful. Obviously, when there are problems on either the A77 or the A75, people have to use alternate routes, including local roads, as diversions. Some of the issues are to do with communication and suitability. A danger nowadays is that people do not use the diversion, and instead look at their satellite navigation system; there are issues with sat nav, particularly for heavy goods vehicles, which go down roads that they should not go down because of their width and height.

We have agreed with the A75 and A77 group that we will consider diversions. Amey is currently reviewing the diversion route along with Police Scotland, which leads in that area, and local intelligence can be very helpful, too. I will systematically work through the actions that I took from the meeting with the group and identify and share where improvements need to be made on those roads and when that can happen. We also need to get local insight and see whether it marries with the other priorities. Not everything will be done at once, but if people see a plan and know the order in which things will be done, they can take comfort from that.

That was just an overview of what we are trying to do on the A75.

Foyso Choudhury: You have answered part of my next question, but can you give us an indication of when residents of those villages can expect to see the bypass completed?

Fiona Hyslop: That will come down to the process. In that respect, we have begun the design manual for roads and bridges process. We are at stage 1 of that; we will then move to the stage at which there are draft orders; and if anyone objects, there might be a public inquiry. Therefore, I cannot tell you when the work will be done, because it depends on a number of factors that are outwith our control, such as whether there are objections to the draft orders. Work on that will be done over a number of years, as is normal, but Nicola Blaney might want to say a bit more about what the process will look like, if all goes well.

At my first meeting with the first UK Government Secretary of State for Transport, and at my meeting with the current secretary of state, Heidi Alexander, I raised the

issue of the importance of funding for the A75. Heidi Alexander has asked about costings et cetera for future years, which is understandable. We need to consider the road's strategic importance of the road as an artery; indeed, Maurice Golden asked about trade links, and I can provide some assurances in that respect.

Nicola, is there anything that you want to add—without, of course, promising something that we cannot deliver, given that we are not in charge of the timescales of a public inquiry?

Nicola Blaney (Transport Scotland): The appraisal stage has been undertaken through the national transport appraisal as part of STPR2, in which recommendation 40 identified the improvements to both the A75 and the A77.

With the Springholm to Crocketford project, we are undertaking the design manual for roads and bridges—or DMRB—process, which is undertaken at a different stage from the appraisal stage and generally focuses on informing the outline business case. That is where we are at the minute, and we have another two stages to go through in that process, which, as the cabinet secretary has said, can take a number of years, because we are essentially assessing route options as well as undertaking statutory assessments, including the strategic environmental assessment.

At that point, we take a look at whether we have the outline business case, and a decision can be made. If the decision is made to progress, we then go into the full business case stage, where the focus is much more on the commercial and financial aspects of the five-case model. At that and each stage, we recheck across all five cases to ensure that everything remains relevant.

Foyso Choudhury: Cabinet secretary, what other assurance can you give to ensure that such a project will not cause any further delays or significant inconvenience to A75 road users?

Fiona Hyslop: Clearly, traffic management is an issue when you are doing the work, because there will be disruption when it happens. I should say, though, that bypasses are easier, because, obviously, they are off-road and do not go along the same way as the traffic or on roads that people use regularly.

We can also try to do things at the same time as opposed to sequentially, if possible. With the ground investigation works that we referred to, different things can potentially happen in advance. That is a risk, because you are doing work and investing and spending public money in advance of decisions being made, but it allows you to try to do work simultaneously, where possible.

The Convener: I call Emma Harper.

Emma Harper: Thanks, convener, and thank you for again giving me a wee bit of time to ask a couple of questions. Obviously, I am interested in both the A75 and the A77; I have asked questions in the chamber about them. I am really pleased to hear that so many people turned out for the village hall meeting at Crocketford—they will be happy that progress is being made.

I know that Belfast Harbour, P&O and Stena Line worked together on the “Safer, Greener, Better” document and looked at the facts and figures with regard to how the A75 and the A77 upgrades will benefit holidaymakers, hauliers and even commuters in relation to Cairnryan and Ireland. As we develop the two projects for Springholm and Crocketford, what are the next steps? Is there a hierarchy of or a priority for next projects—either the A75 or the A77, for example? Are teams continuously looking at what is next? I know Matt Halliday and I know Donald McHarrie really well, and I am sure that they will be happy to hear about current progress, but continuing to look to the future is part of that, too.

Fiona Hyslop: Rather than using the word “next”, I would say that things are happening at the same time. I do not think that we are waiting for the process for the bypasses—which we have just talked about—to happen before we make other improvements.

Other things can be done. Electronic vehicle activated signage can help in relation to speed management around Crocketford; we are looking, too, at short-term measures at the Haugh of Urr junction to modify roadway lines there. We know that junctions can quite often be problematic areas, so improvements at junctions and improvements of the layout signage, such as road studding can help the situation, and you do not have to wait until there is a bypass to make them, so that is the work that we are doing.

Police Scotland provides information on where the accident hotspots are, and it is currently determining whether average speed cameras should be deployed. There is also a point about the prioritisation of the regular work. The work that I mentioned is improvement work. You have care and maintenance work, improvement work and then what we might call project work. I would put the bypasses in project work. That is not next; it is at the same time.

Matt Halliday and Donald McHarrie were in the meeting that I had in Girvan. Checking off that work with them is important. However, sometimes, simple things can also make improvements. If there are road works—and there are, because we are making improvements—we need to ensure that the signage is appropriate so that people can still get direct access and do not go through long diversions when local access is okay but throughput is not. We also need to consider the timings of ferries before work happens. Often, work will happen overnight for safety reasons, but we need to ensure that it does not start until after the traffic is off the last ferry.

That is not necessarily a level of detail that I, as cabinet secretary, should get involved in, but we need to prioritise communication and ensure that the detail has been addressed locally to improve the situation, because those small things can make a difference to driver frustration, and we know that driver frustration is frequently what causes accidents and casualties, with, for example, distracted drivers overtaking at inappropriate places.

Emma Harper: The ferry crossing between Cairnryan and Larne or Belfast does not close due to weather as often as those from Holyhead or the other ports close. It is also the shortest crossing. For me, that is a good selling point for Cairnryan and emphasises its importance to the central belt economy, which you mentioned. I was not able to get the closure information—I was told that it was commercially

sensitive—but we need to value the fact that the Cairnryan to Larne or Belfast crossing stays open and is the fastest crossing.

Fiona Hyslop: You touched on an important point about how everything is connected and about resilience. Remember that the majority of our ports and harbours are privately run and owned. The operators are private commercial operators, so sharing information can be sensitive. That is why having the south-west alliance of ferry companies is helpful.

There are issues of mutual self-interest on ferries. We are keen to identify the economic mutual self-interest and what can be done to make improvements. Expanding has been talked about, but we also have to be protective to ensure that we maintain the traffic that we have. We must try to accommodate that and to identify possible improvements to road, rail and other aspects.

That is exactly the conversation that I have with other ministers in the UK. I talked to Ken Skates, the Cabinet Secretary for Transport and North Wales, about the consequences of Holyhead's temporary closure. The Welsh Government has asked for one of my officials to be part of its task force on resilience. I also want to take the opportunity of the British-Irish Council transport ministers meeting to advance the strategic importance of freight through our main arteries and our ports and harbours.

[a section of Official Report not related to this petition has been removed]

The Convener: We have covered a range of petitions, and it has been very helpful to the committee to take forward a number of them in the time that we have left. There might be some other petitions—there is still controversy ahead.

Would you like to add anything further, or do you feel that you have managed to convey everything that had to be said in the time that we have spent together?

Fiona Hyslop: I just want to say thank you. I know that everybody wants their part of the county to be seen as a priority. The south-west wants to be seen as a priority, as do other parts of the country. The challenge for any cabinet secretary, particularly the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, is that members feel passionately about their area and want to pursue the best for their constituents. I know that I cannot please everybody all the time, but I reassure the committee that, since becoming the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, I have given every attention to getting momentum and making progress in a number of areas, including the ones that you have identified in these petitions.

The Convener: I thank Lawrence Shackman, Alasdair Graham, Nicola Blaney and the cabinet secretary for their time this morning. I also thank Jackie Baillie and Emma Harper, who joined us to take forward the consideration of the assorted petitions.

I suspend briefly to allow the witnesses to leave.