

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

## PE1967: Protect Loch Lomond's Atlantic oakwood shoreline by implementing the High road option for the A82 upgrade between Tarbet and Inverarnan

### Introduction

**Petitioner** John Urquhart on behalf of Helensburgh and District Access Trust and The Friends of Loch Lomond and The Trossachs

**Petition summary** Calling 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 replace the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (DMRB) based assessment with the more comprehensive Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance.

**Webpage** <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1967>

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 24 October 2022.](#)
6. Every petition collects signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 912 signatures have been received on this petition.

## **Action**

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

**Clerks to the Committee**  
**April 2025**

## **Annexe A: Summary of petition**

### **PE1967: Protect Loch Lomond's Atlantic oakwood shoreline by implementing the High Road option for the A82 upgrade between Tarbet and Inverarnan**

#### **Petitioner**

John Urquhart on behalf of Helensburgh and District Access Trust and The Friends of Loch Lomond and The Trossachs

#### **Date Lodged**

22 September 2022

#### **Petition summary**

Calling 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 replace the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (DMRB) based assessment with the more comprehensive Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance.

#### **Previous action**

We have held face to face meetings with Ross Greer MSP and Jackie Baillie MSP.

A campaign has been conducted aimed at informing officials, politicians and the public about the issues posed by the A82 upgrade proposal. This has included letters to the press, an article in the Glasgow Herald's 'Agenda' column and a deputation to the board of Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park.

We have also submitted Freedom of Information (FOI) requests, which revealed that route selection was made without full and comprehensive cost benefit analysis of all options.

#### **Background information**

Reflecting Loch Lomond's National Park status and outstanding natural beauty as well as taking into account wider long term environmental, recreational, economic and social benefits, we feel that pursuing the high road option would offer the following advantages:

- Oak woods and shoreline preserved, allowing wildlife and people to reconnect;
- Old road could continue to carry traffic during the construction period and afterwards would be available as a walking and cycling route;
- The existing road would continue to be available for access to property and for occasional use as a diversion when necessary;

- The Three Lochs Way Great Walking Trail could be linked to the West Highland Way at Inverarnan;
- Tarbet and Ardlui would be by-passed by heavy traffic, improving quality of life for residents and alleviating road safety issues at Arrochar Primary School;
- The higher, straighter route would be faster and safer than any loch side route could ever be;
- Alleviating visitor management pressures along whole length of old road and in the congested Tarbet Bay area;
- A high road would give stunning views of Loch Lomond.

## **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 Whitellets 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.

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

**The Convener:** That brings us to petition PE1967, which relates to the A82.

**Maurice Golden:** We move slightly closer to home, I suppose. The petition calls on the Scottish Government to protect Loch Lomond's Atlantic oakwood shoreline by implementing the high road option for the A82 upgrade between Tarbet and Inverarnan, which is one of three options that Transport Scotland considered during early project assessment.

In correspondence to the committee on 19 March this year, the petitioners stated:

"We are demanding Transport for Scotland conducts a full STAG Appraisal of the A82 Tarbet to Inverarnan Project as required by Law."

Cabinet secretary, what assurance can you offer that Transport Scotland has fully complied with its legal obligations?

**Fiona Hyslop:** The point that you raise about the petitioners' request for a STAG process to be applied is central to the petition.

You are looking for reassurance. Concerns regarding the application of the STAG process to the A82 Tarbet to Inverarnan scheme were raised separately with Audit Scotland, in similar terms to those that were put forward in the petition. Audit Scotland investigated and confirmed to Transport Scotland on 15 November 2022 that it had considered the requirements of the STAG process and reviewed relevant evidence. The auditor concluded that the STAG process had been applied in the initial stages of the work on the A82.

**Maurice Golden:** Thank you—it is useful to get that on the record.

Earlier, you mentioned the existence of different views, and that is one aspect of PE1967, which supports the high road option. I note the correspondence from the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority about that.

Could you take us through the timeline for the upgrade? Is there anything that you would like to put on the record in relation to the high road option?

**Fiona Hyslop:** Clearly, this proposal has completed certain of the phases. There are still issues as to whether, in the next phase, there will be any objections or, indeed, a public inquiry. There are strong feelings about the proposal, but there are strong feelings about most roads in most places. The issue probably relates to the landscaping and the loch's natural environment.

As part of the process, environmental and economic issues have to be addressed not only at the strategic outline business case stage, but at all five stages. One of the key things to relay is that, although the petitioners do not like the route that has been chosen, consideration is being given to the feasibility and attractiveness of

combining with adjacent schemes to make sure that the tree line and other environmental aspects are considered. There is still time left in the process to address that point.

There is an important point to be up front and candid about, which is that, because of the interaction between the A82 and the A83—in particular, the A82 being used when there are problems with the A83—we do not think that it would be appropriate to do work on the A83 and the A82 at the same time. Because of the safety issues and the road's importance to the economy and the people of Argyll in particular, we would prioritise the A83 over the A82. It is probably important to put that on the record.

**Maurice Golden:** Thank you, cabinet secretary.

**Jackie Baillie:** I may have slightly more to say about the petition.

**The Convener:** Within reason.

**Jackie Baillie:** Okay—I hope that you will indulge me.

To date, the consultants who have been employed by Transport Scotland have spent something like £19 million. Are you aware that work package 1 of the contract requires a STAG appraisal to be carried out? That has not been done. Are you also aware that a design for the promised active travel route alongside the A82 has not been produced? In addition, it has been suggested that some of the cost estimates might be slightly inaccurate. Therefore, it might be useful for the petitioners, Transport Scotland and the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority to have a meeting to understand some of those issues.

While I am talking about the national park authority, I will add a second question. If there have been any discussions with the national park authority, on what date did those take place? I ask that because of how sensitive the bit of the A82 that we are talking about is, as it borders Loch Lomond. You will appreciate that, as you know the area. There are plans for the national park authority to regenerate and extend the Atlantic oak woodlands and the natural habitat corridors that exist there. It strikes me that the low road option is probably the least sensitive when it comes to respecting that environment.

I rolled two questions into one, convener.

**Fiona Hyslop:** There was a lot in that.

**Jackie Baillie:** Sorry.

**Fiona Hyslop:** I will ask Nicola Blaney to respond in a second. I reassure the member that I have had more general meetings with the national park authority. I am impressed by what it is trying to do on active travel, and I understand its interests. Clearly, it has a statutory planning role, so I can understand where it sits in the process.

By and large, people want road improvements to happen, as opposed to not wanting them to happen. People will want the A82 to be improved, but it is a question of

which improvement. I understand and appreciate the sensitivity on the matter; people feel very strongly about it.

I dealt with the question of whether a STAG appraisal has been carried out, which is what the petition is about, in my answer to Maurice Golden. That has been assessed by Audit Scotland and confirmed. That does not mean that there will not be continuing interest in the road, which will probably continue into the next session of Parliament. I appreciate the strength of feeling on the part of the petitioners. However, I think that, from a technical point of view, the petition has probably been dealt with.

On the specific point about costs, I do not know what your sources are for that—

**Jackie Baillie:** A freedom of information request.

**Fiona Hyslop:** All right.

**Jackie Baillie:** You are the source.

**Fiona Hyslop:** Thank you very much—we are very open, and we provide lots of information all the time.

Communication is really important. People understanding what we have done, how we have done it and what the process is can go a long way. We can then focus on what the real points of difference are. Sometimes those can be resolved, but sometimes they cannot be. It is helpful to be open about that.

On the point about the active travel route, in general, we try to ensure that there is such provision. We will need to address that, but that will depend on the timing and sequencing of what happens. Nicola Blaney might have more technical detail on that, which is probably what Jackie Baillie was looking for with her question. Nicola, are you able to help with that?

**Nicola Blaney:** The Scottish transport appraisal guidance and the design manual for roads and bridges are both pieces of guidance that, when adhered to, represent good practice in the development of transport projects in Scotland. However, they are not applied at the same time or for the same reasons, as I mentioned earlier.

An appraisal is undertaken to look at a geographical area, and that informs the strategic business case. We look at the problems and opportunities that an area is facing, which helps to determine what we call a case for change. We then consider a long list of options—often across all modes—against multiple criteria. That list is refined until there is an intervention or a package of interventions that can be implemented.

The design manual for roads and bridges is applied once the intervention for a road scheme has been determined. At that point, we assess route options, and that assessment principally informs the outline business case stage.

The STAG process is not a replacement for mode-specific design processes—those would follow on from the completed transport appraisal. I understand that the “A82 Tarbet to Inverarnan Upgrade: Strategic Business Case” was published, and that it

built on the evidence from the national transport appraisal, the first “Strategic Transport Projects Review Final Report”, which was published in October 2009.

I hope that that is helpful insight on the context and on where the differences are. There is not much else that I could add.

**Fiona Hyslop:** It might be helpful to add that—notwithstanding the current processes—I would expect there to be discussions with the national park authority. It would be helpful, from the point of view of openness, to meet the national park authority to go through where we are, what the implications are and any information on the active travel route.

**Lawrence Shackman:** There has been continuing dialogue with the national park authority on the detail and the make-up of the scheme. It is fundamental to consider the active travel facility throughout the whole scheme and to incorporate that in a sympathetic way. That is quite a challenge. The topography alongside Loch Lomond and in the surrounding hills is quite demanding. It is a difficult scheme to progress, but that has been done in a sympathetic manner, showing due regard to all the other environmental issues—including making sure that as much as possible is maintained of the trees, flora and fauna in the area, and looking at how that can be replicated in other parts of the route as we develop the scheme further and move towards draft orders.

**The Convener:** Jackie Baillie has a quick supplementary.

**Jackie Baillie:** I will try to be quick, convener.

The petitioners are in the public gallery; I think that they understand your reasoning, cabinet secretary, but they disagree with it. They were surprised to see reference in work package 1 to the requirement for a STAG appraisal. I do not know whether that was missed by officials.

I am interested in your views on whether the low road route is the best one in relation to traffic hold-ups. You will appreciate that the A82 is an extremely busy route. If you construct on the existing route, the hold-ups will be a nightmare. They will be catastrophic for the area. A high road is a better option. What analysis have you done of the resilience of roads and of the traffic disturbance that would be caused by sticking to the low route?

**Fiona Hyslop:** That level of detail on the traffic management and engineering is not within my capabilities, but I will ask officials to respond.

**The Convener:** Alasdair Graham, this is your debut—we should properly acknowledge your contribution at the start.

**Alasdair Graham:** Thank you, convener. As part of the design manual for roads and bridges stage 3 assessment, which is the detailed development assessment of the preferred option, constructability is one of the key issues that we are looking at, and we will continue to do so as the process evolves. As Lawrence Shackman has already highlighted, we are consulting with the national park authority. We are trying



to make sure that we minimise any disruption during the construction phases. That work is on-going, and we will continue to develop it.

At the end of the DMRB stage 3 assessment, reports will be published that will outline the developed preferred option and the impacts that it would have during construction.

**The Convener:** Jackie Baillie has a supplementary supplementary. Be very brief, please.

**Jackie Baillie:** As a local who uses that road, where are you going to divert people to? Are we going to have to go on to the loch to get around the construction? Frankly, that is the only way that it is going to work. It is the most challenging roads project.

**Alasdair Graham:** Yes, that is acknowledged.

**The Convener:** I thought that you were going to say yes, we would have to go on to the loch.

**Jackie Baillie:** Speedboats at the ready. [Laughter.]

**Alasdair Graham:** There will be closures on the road, but we will try to minimise those as much as possible during the work that we undertake. We will strive to keep one lane open for traffic to use during the construction phase.

**Fiona Hyslop:** That is done regularly. However challenging and difficult it is, that has happened. We acknowledge that the A82 is a major route, which is one reason why we will not be able to do the work on it at the same time as the work on the A83. Everyone is fully aware of that. It will be a case of handling and managing the situation. That will be very important indeed when the time comes. However, as I said in my general remarks, we cannot improve roads, or have new projects, without disruption. The issue is how that disruption is handled.

**Jackie Baillie:** Absolutely. My point is not that we are against road building but that there is a better alternative.

**The Convener:** That has been stated. I feel in my bones that a subsequent petitions committee will end up revisiting this issue in the next session of Parliament.

[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.