

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

PE2132: Publish a timeline for the dualling of the A96 between Inverness and Nairn by Easter 2025

Introduction

Petitioner The Inverness Courier

Petition summary Calling 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, ensuring that this timeline is made public by Easter 2025.

Webpage <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE2132>

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 14 January 2025.](#)
6. Every petition collects signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 502 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

PE2132: Publish a timeline for the dualling of the A96 between Inverness and Nairn by Easter 2025

Petitioner

The Inverness Courier

Date Lodged

13 December 2024

Petition summary

Calling 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, ensuring that this timeline is made public by Easter 2025.

Background information

For decades, people in Nairn and surrounding areas have called for a bypass to take traffic from the A96 trunk road out of its town centre.

In 2011 the Scottish Government pledged to complete the dual carriageway network between all of Scotland's cities – including the dualling of the A96 and Nairn Bypass, with a preferred route published in 2014.

In March 2024, Made Orders were published and the process for the acquisition of land required for the scheme started in May 2024.

At present there is no timeline for when the project is set to be delivered.

After more than a decade of delays, local communities continue to face worsening traffic congestion, pollution, and road safety risks.

With significant developments set to bring thousands of new residents and workers to the area, urgent action is needed to address these growing challenges which will further impact the livelihoods of communities affected.

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.

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

The Convener: That brings us to PE2132, which might be the final one, but it is in no sense less important. It deals with the dualling of the A96 between Inverness and Nairn. I invite Fergus Ewing to take forward the questions on the petition. He has sat very patiently through our consideration of all the other roads before getting to the one that he would say is most important.

Fergus Ewing (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP): We now travel from Loch Lomond up to the inner Moray Firth as I speak to PE2132.

In her introductory remarks, the cabinet secretary said that orders have been issued, that the compulsory purchase process will be completed and that, thereafter, the procurement will be determined and a timetable will be set. The petitioner asked for a timeline and a completion date for the dualling of the Inverness to Auldearn section of the A96, including the Nairn bypass, to be published by this Easter. Although I do not want to dwell on what is now classified as ancient history, the pledge to deliver a Nairn bypass was first made—by our party, cabinet secretary—in 2009 and became a Government pledge in 2011. As far as I know, it has been repeated at seven elections, which must make it the daddy or the granddaddy of all pledges and the longest extant undelivered promise by the Scottish Government.

I have one very simple question for the cabinet secretary. Will she today provide a clear and unambiguous assurance that a ministerial statement will be made before the end of this session of Parliament to set out a detailed timetable for the delivery of the dualling of the road between Inverness and Auldearn, including the Nairn bypass, and will that statement include a firm date when the work will be completed?

Fiona Hyslop: The petition asks specifically for a timetable to be declared before Easter. As long ago as last summer, I was openly and publicly making it clear that a timetable could be determined only once we had completed all stages of the process. The final stage is the acquisition of land and we cannot progress until we have made that acquisition, which will take place from 21 April. That is a definitive point, after which we can move to the next stage.

I have been quite clear and open that the timetable will be determined by the type of procurement that we progress. The ideal would be the use of capital, which gives us more control of the timescales.

I have been open about another aspect, which is the issue of whether we do all the work in one package, aligning it with the work on the Inshes to Smithton section, which we are also looking at, or whether we progress the bypass on its own. It was quite clear that there is a real need to get the bypass work done early.

I do not know where the Easter date came from: the first that I heard of that date was from Mr Ewing himself. I do not know whether Mr Ewing has been involved in determining the content of the petition, but that Easter date has come from somewhere else.

Fergus Ewing: With respect, cabinet secretary, we know all that and you have said all that. We are not on “Just a Minute” but with repetition, deviation and hesitation allowed. We are in Parliament, and we want an answer. The question was, will the statement be issued before the end of this session of Parliament? Yes or no?

Fiona Hyslop: I am here to answer on the petitions specifically, which is why, in relation to all the roads that we have discussed, I have tried to focus my remarks on the petition that is in front of us.

On the determination of the timetable, I assure the member that the potential to use the mutual investment model for the A96 from Inverness to Nairn, including the Nairn bypass, is being consulted on as part of the engagement with industry. That started on 24 February. At the conclusion of that engagement, we will be able to identify the proposal.

Of course I want to make, and would be open to making, a statement on the A96 Inverness to Nairn bypass before the end of this parliamentary session. However, I want to be able to provide as much information as possible, so therefore it is related to—

Fergus Ewing: Okay. The answer is no, then—you are not giving that assurance, cabinet secretary, I am afraid.

Fiona Hyslop: Actually, I do not think that—

Fergus Ewing: You have not given it. I have asked you for it and you have not given it, so I will move on to the next question.

At the moment, the Scottish Government’s capital budget for 2024-25 is £6.2 billion, of which £4.7 billion comes from His Majesty’s Treasury. That is just one year’s budget. The cost of the work that I am talking about is considerably less than that.

There has not really been a substantial investment in major road improvements in the Highlands. We have seen welcome improvements in the rest of Scotland. I welcome that, as a Scot, and that is great, but we have not seen those improvements in the Highlands. Our argument—the excellent campaigning efforts of the Inverness Courier are exactly aligned with mine—is that it is the Highlands’ turn.

The Government has repeatedly promised that these roads will be delivered, including the A96, by 2030. So far, we have spent £100 million on the dualling of the A96 project but not one centimetre of tarmac has been laid. That is quite an extraordinary feat of profligacy—

The Convener: You need to ask the cabinet secretary a question, Mr Ewing.

Fergus Ewing: Surely, if we assume a capital budget of £4 billion to £6 billion for the years ahead—that is what it has been historically—there is more than enough money to fund the project from existing capital. Cabinet secretary, are you not able to say that, if the consultation concludes that public finance is not the right option, you will nonetheless be able to provide the assurance that the funding can come from the existing capital budget, which is plainly more than sufficient to do the work, provided that the Highlands are treated as a priority?

Fiona Hyslop: Clearly, a great deal of capital investment is being made in the Highlands and I am happy to write to the member to relay all of that. I am very pleased about the procurement of the third and fourth contracts for the A9, which I spoke about in my opening remarks. Indeed, the work is commencing on the Tomatin to Moy section of the road, and there will be further work on that.

On the investment in the Inverness to Nairn section of the A96, the member used the figure of £100 million. That is not the correct figure. I have recently written to Douglas Ross, who raised the same issue, and I am happy to share my response to him. I can advise that, to date, the spend for the Inverness to Nairn section is about £33 million. That is important because the costs are for the engineering design, environmental, traffic and economic assessments, stakeholder engagement, supervision of ground investigation works and topographical survey works. All those must be done.

I will give the recently approved £9 billion lower Thames crossing project as an example. It is the case that £1.2 billion has already been spent on planning but nothing has been built. Of course investment is needed in engineering and other works, and the cost of those elements for the Inverness to Nairn section of the A96 is £33 million.

It is always important to be accurate when we are reporting things to the Parliament, and I intend to be accurate. There is a lot—

Fergus Ewing: Can I just address that?

The Convener: Please pause until the cabinet secretary has finished.

Fiona Hyslop: The member raised a lot of issues. That is understandable, and I know that he has felt passionate about the matter for a very long time.

On investment from the transport budget, the vast majority of the capital budget, which is a big figure as the member mentioned, is on rail, on the maintenance of and investment in our ports and harbours, and on the maintenance of our roads to ensure that they are safe, which is the subject with which we started.

The vast majority of the capital investment on rail—not the running costs—is well over £1 billion. The idea of making available capital for any one particular road must be carefully budgeted for and calibrated. An investment for the A96 is available for this year; I will look to identify future investments. Again, we have been very public about what the costs were for that in 2014.

The member said that I am not prepared to give a statement. I said that I was open to giving one. However, anybody who has experience with this Parliament knows that it is not for me to decide whether I do so; it is for Parliament to decide who makes a statement and when.

Fergus Ewing: The figure of £100 million comes from adding the compulsory purchase costs, which you have estimated and mentioned, to Transport Scotland's figure of £90 million that applies to the whole A96 project and was valid last summer. However, that is a detail.

Has there not been, sadly, a delay in the processing of the various milestones of that project? I refer you to the Transport Scotland document of February 2016, which I have here. It states that the draft road orders and compulsory purchase orders were to have been issued in 2016. However, those were not finalised until 2024. The process took eight years, which in itself must be a record.

Has not the Scottish Government deliberately delayed the completion of the necessary statutory processes? It seems, even now, to be unwilling to give a categorical, unambiguous assurance that the promises that we have made collectively, as individuals and politicians, for the past 14 years will in fact be funded by the Scottish Government. Meanwhile, projects in other parts of Scotland are going ahead. Has that delay not been quite deliberate, cabinet secretary?

Fiona Hyslop: I do not think that it has been deliberate. Your question is interpretive and asserts an opinion—to which you are entitled.

I will run through the timescale. In November 2016, the draft orders and environmental statement were published. There were 154 representations—including, interestingly, 127 objections—following their publication, which led, at the end of 2018, to a public local inquiry to consider unresolved objections. I have already relayed, in relation to other issues, that the time that public inquiries can take up is necessary. That is the process, should there be significant objections. As transport secretary, I have been encouraging people to do as much work in advance with interested parties to try to avoid that.

In October 2019, the public local inquiry reporters' report was submitted to the Scottish Government. In February 2021—you will be aware that that was during the pandemic—the decision to proceed was announced, following consideration of the objections, along with, importantly, the reasoned conclusions and recommendations of the reporters.

This is where I recognise that there has been a delay. In March 2024, made orders for the scheme were published, which provided Scottish ministers with the powers to acquire the land to build the scheme. In March 2025, all the relevant landowners were communicated with, and procedural steps to acquire the land were taken, as those were required for the scheme to be completed. As I said, Scottish ministers will take title to the land on 21 April 2025. Our having completed those procedures helps us to identify the funding routes and the potential funding mechanisms.

Importantly, on the timetable—the focus of the petition—that is about determining whether it is a smaller project, which would start with the bypass itself, or a longer one, or which sections are done. That will help to determine the timetable.

I have been as open as I can be, and as I have been previously, in laying out what the procedures have been. The public local inquiry, with 127 objections, was a key issue in that process, which is not necessarily the case for the other projects that we are talking about.

The Convener: We are running out of time, but there is one small supplementary question.

Fergus Ewing: We can agree to disagree about that, but I will try to be helpful and make a suggestion. Ms Baillie might have an interest in this as well. I am thinking ahead to the work that we might do together in the next session of Parliament. We might want to take a leaf out of the book of the approach in Germany. In 2003, the German Government published a plan of all roads infrastructure projects that were to be undertaken by 2030. Laying out that plan had the benefit of giving certainty to the public and assurance to the contractors that the work would be available in a continuous stream over that period of nearly three decades. It also served to take the heat out of the political debate. Therefore, the nation came together to produce one plan.

We all support projects in our own part of Scotland. Whether it is you, cabinet secretary—or whoever happens to be the cabinet secretary; I no longer harbour such ambitions—or Ms Baillie, surely it would be sensible to do this better in Scotland, because the way that we are doing it means that every part of Scotland is disappointed to some degree. However, we all reckon that we cannot do everything at once, and a long-term plan would surely be a far better approach for the next few generations ahead.

The Convener: Thank you, Mr Ewing. That peroration is probably a fresh petition in its own right, but I will allow the cabinet secretary an opportunity to respond.

Fiona Hyslop: The member shows his spirit of positivity in making that constructive suggestion. He makes an important point. Of course, he will know that there is a distinction, as Germany is an independent country that controls everything, including what moneys it can raise. Why is that important? That is important because the recent fluctuations in our capital budget have caused issues—I am very open about that. It also causes issues for long-term planning. It is essential to have long-term infrastructure investment, whether that be in road or rail, because that helps to drive projects and gives certainty to investors. I know from the rail side of things that a regular pipeline of investment is important.

I think that you are suggesting that approach for the future. We could not do that immediately, because we still do not know what issues will arise from the UK Government's capital spending review. We are expecting that to report in the summer, and it will inform our infrastructure investment plan.

The infrastructure investment plan will provide a view. I think that is currently due in the autumn, but, again, the timing will depend on what the UK Government says and on its timings with regard to capital investment. That will have a multiyear timeframe.

You mentioned having a 30-year timeframe. I would want to do that if I had the full levers to raise capital, and an understanding of where I could get capital and of what I could do on borrowing—all the different aspects that you have less control over in a devolved Parliament. In principle, that is exactly what you should be doing on infrastructure and investment.

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.