

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

3rd Meeting, 2021 (Session 6), Wednesday 8 September 2021

PE1610: Upgrade the A75 and PE1657: A77 upgrade

Note by the Clerk

PE1610: Lodged 13 July 2016

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 petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1610

PE1657: Lodged 19 June 2017

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 Whittlet's Roundabout south to the two ferry ports located at Cairnryan, including the point at which the A77 connects with the A75.

Webpage petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1657

Introduction

1. The Session 5 Public Petitions Committee (PPC) agreed to consider these petitions together given their similar nature.

2. The PPC last considered these petitions at its meeting on [24 March 2021](#). At that meeting, the Committee agreed to include this petition in its legacy paper for the successor committee in Session 6 to consider, along with a suggestion to seek updates from the then Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity on the Strategic Transport Projects Review 2, and the First Minister on when a response will be received to the PPC Convener's letter of 19 December 2019.
3. A summary of past consideration of the petition and suggested areas for future investigation is provided for the Committee's consideration

Committee consideration

4. The A75 is a trunk road linking Gretna, Dumfries and Stranraer. As with all trunk roads, the A75 is owned by Scottish Ministers and managed by Transport Scotland.
5. The petitioner (PE1610) is concerned that this road experiences a high volume of slow and fast moving traffic including HGVs, agricultural vehicles, tourists and commuters. He considers that upgrading this road would improve a strategically important road connecting Northern Ireland to the rest of the United Kingdom, benefit the local economy and the safety of road users.
6. The M77/A77 trunk road links Glasgow with Stranraer. The M77 section runs for approximately 16.4 miles between junction 22 of the M8 and Fenwick, with the A77 section running for approximately 67 miles between Fenwick and Stranraer. The A77 trunk road is dual carriageway between Fenwick and Ayr. The sections of the A77 between central Glasgow and junction 22 of the M8 and between Stranraer (from its junction with the A75) and Portpatrick are not part of the trunk road network.
7. The SPICe briefings for [PE1610](#) and [PE1657](#) provide further background.

Minister for Transport and the Islands evidence

8. At its meeting on [23 November 2017](#), the PPC took evidence from the Minister for Transport and the Islands. This evidence session covered topics including:
 - A75/A77 investment;
 - Maybole bypass;
 - South West Transport Study;
 - 50mph speed limit; and
 - Economic Profile of Dumfries and Galloway.
9. The Minister clarified a number of points made during this evidence session in a written submission of [11 December 2017](#).

Roundtable discussions

10. On [28 June 2018](#) the PPC agreed to hold a round-table discussion with relevant stakeholders at a future meeting following repeated concerns it had heard including—
 - the heavy goods vehicle speed limit not being appropriate, particularly on the A77;
 - the quality of the road being poor, and;
 - competition from ports elsewhere in the UK threatening the long-term economic future of the ferry ports in the area.
11. It was later drawn to the clerks' attention that Scotland's Futures Forum was undertaking work in September 2019 that would be relevant to the issues raised in both petitions.
12. At the committee meeting on 27 June 2019, the Committee agreed to defer holding a round table discussion with relevant stakeholders until after the Scotland's Futures Forum event "Our Future Scotland: Dumfries and the South West" has taken place.
13. The Futures Forum event was originally postponed due to availability of speakers. It was eventually cancelled as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. At present the Futures Forum does not have any plans to run the event in the future.
14. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic the PPC agreed to delay the roundtable discussions.

Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity submission

15. The then Cabinet Secretary's written submission of [September 2019](#) highlights that since 2007, the Scottish Government has invested over £50 million in six road improvement projects along the length of the A75, and around £35 million in four road improvement projects along the A77.
16. The submission also advises that further planned investment for a bypass at Maybole with estimated construction costs of £30 million will provide better journey time reliability for motorists and businesses accessing Cairnryan. This is in addition to over £151 million invested in the maintenance and upkeep of the A75 and A77.
17. The response raised a number of points, including:
 - Transport Scotland has a process for monitoring the condition of trunk roads such as the A75 and A77 through inspections and testing. Inspections and repairs are fully funded by the Scottish Government.

- Transport Scotland, with the support of the Performance Audit Group, routinely review the Operating Companies' performance, taking appropriate contractual action if standards are not met.
- The Operating Company has a resurfacing programme in place for the areas of carriageway showing the greatest signs of deterioration.
- The South of Scotland Enterprise Act received Royal Assent on 12 July 2019 and South of Scotland Enterprise (SOSE) will be operational from April 2020. The new agency will operate across the local authority areas of the Scottish Borders and Dumfries and Galloway, "and will focus on the needs of the area, driving inclusive and sustainable growth, supporting communities and capitalising on its people and resources."
- In 2019, the Cabinet Secretary signed Heads of Terms agreements for both the Borderlands and Ayrshire Growth Deals, which he advises confirm that the Scottish Government is prepared to invest up to £85 million and £103 million respectively.

The Scottish Government Strategic Transport Projects Review 2 (STPR2)

18. The Scottish Government gave a commitment in the 2017/18 Programme for Government to commence work for the second Strategic Transport Projects Review (STPR2) in the Dumfries and Galloway area. Consultants AECOM and Peter Brett Associates (PBA) were appointed by Transport Scotland to research the case for investment in transport interventions in the South West of Scotland through the "South West Scotland Transport Study Initial Appraisal: Case for Change. (SWSTS)". The then Cabinet Secretary's [submission of 10 September 2019](#) advises it is the intention that the final report will form part of the evidence base for STPR2.
19. The Cabinet Secretary states the key aim of the work was to consider the rationale for improvements to road, rail, public transport and active travel on key strategic corridors in the South West of Scotland, including those served by the A75 and the A77.
20. Stakeholder engagement is noted as being a key element of the study. It was anticipated the study would be completed in winter 2018/19, with the draft report to be provided in the first quarter of 2019. However, this was extended slightly to enable thorough analysis.
21. The SWSTS was published on 27 June 2019 for an 8 week period of review by stakeholders and anyone with an interest in the outcomes of the study. The original date for the online response was 23 August 2019, however the submission advises it was agreed to extend this by 4 weeks until Friday 20 September 2019.

- 22. The [South West Scotland Transport Study - Initial Appraisal - Case for Change](#) report was published on 28 January 2020.
- 23. The delivery of the wider STPR2 project has been running in parallel and the submission notes it is on track to complete in the course of this Parliament as scheduled.
- 24. An update and Phase 1 recommendations for STPR2 were [published](#) on 3 February 2021. Phase 2 is due to be published later in 2021.

First Minister correspondence

- 25. At the Convener's Group meeting with the First Minister on [13 November 2019](#), the Committee Convener raised these two petitions with the First Minister. The First Minister advised she would respond to the Committee in writing and “*use these petitions as a case study to describe the process that the Government goes through in reaching decisions*”.
- 26. Despite repeated requests for this information since December 2019, including a letter sent to the First Minister in January 2021, no response has been received.

North Channel Partnership submission

- 27. The North Channel Partnership (The Partnership) submission of [3 February 2021](#) advises it was re-established in January 2020 by Mid & East Antrim Borough Council and Dumfries & Galloway Council. The two Councils signed a terms of agreement document with seven objectives.
- 28. The Partnership notes it is working with a range of key stakeholders, including ferry companies, to progress a number of common interests, including those of ports and the associated infrastructure. It advises the significance of the need to upgrade the A75 and A77 routes was highlighted by both Councils in their submissions to the recent UK Union Connectivity Review.
- 29. The Partnership is concerned that lack of investment in the A75 and the A77 will encourage the growth of alternative travel routes to and from Northern Ireland, and impact on business and tourism in both areas.
- 30. The submission highlights the roads have a number of difficulties, including safety concerns, a lack of facilities and longer journey times compared to competitor ports. It notes there are also road infrastructure issues such as classification and carriageway quality; the roads suffer from HGV platoons and limited overtaking opportunities; and there are long diversionary routes in the event of road closures.
- 31. The principal road link (A8) between Larne and Belfast has recently benefitted from a £120 million upgrade. The submission notes the benefits of the A8 upgrade included access to a complete high-speed dual carriageway between

the Port of Larne and Belfast, reducing journey times by up to 25 per cent. This has created the potential for better access and connectivity with commercial markets across the UK.

32. The submission advises it is acknowledged that improvements to the routes should be future proofed ensuring a lasting benefit for both the local economies and to support green transport and connectivity. They believe this supports both local authorities' commitment towards tackling the climate emergency and ambitious targets for carbon reduction.
33. It notes the opportunity to develop digital roads which improve air quality and providing sufficient access to green energy or charging points can enable a greater use of the routes by low or zero emission vehicles for both tourism and trade. It is stated that this would contribute to Scotland's net zero ambition and support the Partnership's ambitions to bid for a Greenport to be established.
34. In closing, the submission confirms that "the North Channel Partnership is supportive of the need for infrastructure investment on the A75 and A77 routes".

Sir Peter Hendy's Union connectivity review: interim report

35. Sir Peter Hendy's [Union connectivity review: interim report](#), published on 10 March 2021, considers the current state of transport connectivity within the UK and the case for future investment.
36. The report notes:

"...road connectivity to Stranraer on the west coast is of key strategic importance, specifically the A75 and A77 with the former being particularly important and carrying twice as many freight vehicles than the latter."
37. As part of an interim report a number of projects have been identified to "jump-start" connectivity across the UK. The UK Government has committed £20m to the development of these projects.
38. UK Transport Secretary Grant Shapps said the UK Government would spend this money on "exploring the development of projects", including upgrading the A75 between Gretna and Stranraer.

Petitioner submission

39. In their most recent submission, the petitioner for PE1657 reiterates the requirement for modernisation of the roads from safety, fairness and environmental perspectives.

40. The petitioner highlights research conducted for the Strategic Transport Projects Review 2 (STPR2) which highlighted that the current A77 is behind the current required standard.
41. The submission notes that in the week commencing Tuesday 24th August there were 2 fatalities and 2 casualties between the A77 and the A714 diversionary route causing the South West corner of Scotland being cut off to traffic to the North.
42. On the issue of fairness and the environment, the petitioner highlights the impact on small communities that traffic passes through on the A77, noting that towns and villages experience high levels of carbon emissions.
43. The submission notes that disruption lasting over 2,500 days has taken place since November 2014 as a result of the carriage way being reduced to single lane with traffic management due to serious landslides.
44. The petitioner calls for the Committee to hold a roundtable in Stranraer, as discussed by the Session 5 Committee, in order for members to hear first hand about issues raised in this petition.

Action

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

Clerk to the Committee

Annexe

The following submissions are circulated in connection with consideration of the petition at this meeting—

- [PE1657/V: Catherine Branson submission of 31 January 2021 \(62KB pdf\)](#)
- [PE1657/W: Councillor Willie Scobie submission of 1 February 2021 \(64KB pdf\)](#)
- [PE1657/X: Dual the A75 Group submission of 2 February 2021 \(11 KB pdf\)](#)
- [PE1657/Y: North Channel Partnership \(Dumfries and Galloway Council and Mid and East Antrim Council\) submission of 3 February 2021 \(107KB pdf\)](#)
- [PE1657/Z: Allan Dorans MP submission of 4 February 2021 \(11KB pdf\)](#)
- [PE1657/AA: A77 Action Group submission of 5 February 2021\(103KB pdf\)](#)
- [PE1657/BB: A77 Action Group submission of 18 March 2021 \(124KB pdf\)](#)
- [PE1657/CC: A77 Action Group submission of 18 March 2021 \(104KB pdf\)](#)
- [PE1657/DD: A77 Action Group submission of 18 March 2021 \(256KB pdf\)](#)

The Scottish Parliament launched a new website at the end of Session 5.

All written submissions received on the petitions before May 2021 can be viewed on the petition on their archive webpages ([PE1610](#) and [PE1657](#)). Written submissions received on the petitions after May 2021 can be viewed on their new petition webpages [PE1610](#) and [PE1657](#).