

10 Summary

Scott Wilson was commissioned by Transport Scotland to prepare an Environmental Statement to provide supporting information for the publication of statutory orders and to comply with the Scottish Minister's determination that the Scheme should be subject of an EIA.

Scoping studies have been carried out, leading to the preparation of this Environmental Statement.

In recent years there have been a number of serious road traffic accidents on this section of the A96, and as a result of the Scheme there will be significant benefits to road users. The recommended Scheme increases safety at Threapland junction by improving visibility along the A96 and upgrading the junction itself to comply with current DMRB standards. This introduces safer traffic movements through the junction and also enhances provisions for non-motorised road users.

Key environmental issues that have been examined in detail as part of this ES included:

- Conformance with current policy;
- Cultural Heritage;
- Effects during construction;
- Ecology and nature conservation;
- Landscape and visual effects;
- Land use; and
- Water Resources.

Many of the potential temporary effects of the Scheme will arise as a result of construction. Applying best management practices as recognised through industry standards will mitigate the majority of construction disturbance. In assessing the environmental effects of construction, it has been assumed that best practice methods will be adopted and adhered to, therefore reducing the temporary negative impacts of construction vehicle activity, noise and vibration, and impacts on air quality.

The impacts due to construction will mainly relate to nearby residential properties, which will experience an increase in noise levels and possible dust and mud during construction. Residential receptors may be subjected to utilising temporary property access and increased vehicle journey times due to the construction activity. Other impacts will relate to the provision and operation of construction compounds during the entire construction period. There will be disruption to traffic on the A96 carriageway and affected side roads due to traffic management measures necessary to ensure the safety and operation of works on those roads. The construction of embankments, cuttings and structures will lead to noise intrusion and the risk of dust in the air and mud on the road will be present. There is a potential for construction operations to cause damage to localised soils and water, if appropriate mitigation measures are not implemented.

Six cultural heritage sites were identified by the assessment. The sites are a scheduled stone circle, four Listed Buildings, and an unscheduled cropmark site. The proposed junction improvements has been predicted to have a neutral direct effect on a Category B Listed AA Sentry Box, which would be relocated approximately 1km to the east, to an appropriate roadside setting similar to its current setting. The effect on this site is judged to be not significant.

Loch Oire SSSI is the key ecological receptor within close proximity to the Scheme. Although no landtake or direct impacts should occur, detailed mitigation measures are proposed to minimise the risk of any impacts upon the notified features of the site. During construction safeguards will have to be in place to prevent the release of soils, sediment or construction chemicals into the Loch. During the operational phase, mitigation measures have been proposed and designed into the Scheme to prevent potentially pollutant-laden runoff from entering the Loch. A limited area of long-established woodland of plantation origin at Sleepieshill Wood will be directly affected by the Threapland Junction improvements on the north side of the A96. Other habitats will also be directly impacted during construction, as limited areas of semi-improved grassland, dense gorse scrub and other woodland / scattered trees areas will be removed to allow the improvements. Significant impacts are not anticipated for otters, bats, water voles, red squirrels or breeding birds, or any other features of ecological interest, subject to the implementation of specific mitigation measures such as pre-construction checks and methods to avoid disturbance during construction and operation.

The landscape within the vicinity of the route corridor is within a gently undulating area rising from the coastal plain, which forms a transition between the coastal plain and the uplands. There are no landscape designations. The SNH National Landscape Character Assessment identifies established communication routes becoming increasingly dominant as linear features within the open, flat landscape. There will be a negligible change in the landscape character when the Scheme is completed and mitigation measures have taken effect. The road will become a slightly more engineered and prominent feature in the landscape with the loss of some enclosure and local distinctiveness and a new access road and attenuation pond will be introduced into the rural landscape. The magnitude of landscape residual impacts will be slight adverse and the significance to the overall landscape character of the area will be negligible adverse. The Zone of Visual Influence is relatively restricted owing to the topography and the presence of woodland and as the scheme is in a rural area there are relatively few receptors. The largest receptor group is the road users who will experience minor changes to their view. There are a small number of highly sensitive residential receptors located adjacent to or very close to the scheme who will experience moderate changes to their view. The magnitude of overall visual residual impacts will be slight adverse and the significance will be minor adverse.

The permanent acquisition and use of land required for the Scheme will have isolated effects on the environment and some small areas of agricultural land (2.17ha) and plantation woodland (1.33ha). There will be impacts to agricultural land as the proposed route alignment of the A96–Loch Oire connector road will cross part of an existing field causing potential diversion of access and resulting in permanent landtake. The location and construction of the proposed retention pond would also result in the permanent loss of arable agricultural land. A number of trees would also require felling on either side of the A96 in order to improve the sightlines from the upgraded junctions and accommodate the new section of the Loch Oire connector road. This landtake would impact upon an area of Sleepieshill Wood, due to the work on the north leg of Threapland Junction. There would be limited permanent landtake from two other areas, with

79m² of land acquired from the garden of the Tilhill residential property, and 105m² of land acquired from the area of hardstanding within the Threapland Garden Centre.

During construction a number of control measures should be put in place to reduce the potential for significant quantities of sediment or other typical construction pollutants being discharged into the surrounding water bodies. These measures are considered to be current best practice within the industry, and when implemented with good site management, no significant adverse effects are predicted. During operation, road run off from the revised A96 will be collected and passed to primary treatment using filter drains alongside the road and then to a retention pond beside the road before being discharged to the Loch Oire outfall drain downstream of the A96 and Loch Oire SSSI. Based on the inclusion of these treatment measures, there is not predicted to be any significant adverse effects on the existing water quality of the outfall drain as a result of the proposals.