Welcome

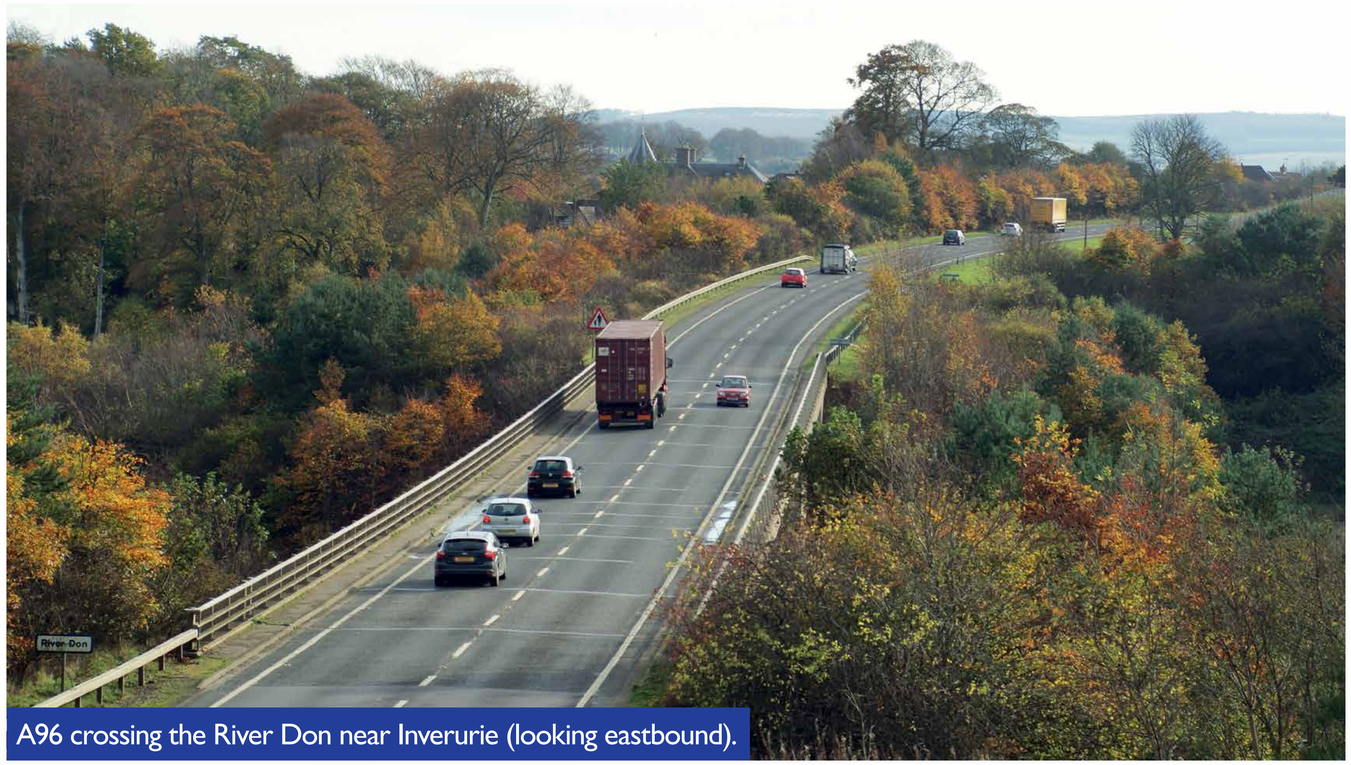
In November 2013, we started our programme of public engagement for the A96 Dualling Programme with a series of public exhibitions.

This allowed us to share information on the assessment, design and development process we need to undertake before providing a dual carriageway between Inverness and Aberdeen by 2030.

Since then, we have been progressing the preliminary engineering and environmental studies, expanding our knowledge of the various challenges associated with providing a dual carriageway between Inverness and Aberdeen, and developing key strategies to achieve this goal.

This exhibition seeks to provide the public the opportunity to see and comment on the outcome of the preliminary engineering and strategic environmental assessment work Transport Scotland has been taking forward for the route east of Nairn to Aberdeen.

Transport Scotland officials and its representatives will be happy to assist you with any queries you may have.



A96 crossing the River Don near Inverurie (looking eastbound).

Background

Transport Scotland is progressing the programme to upgrade the A96 between Inverness and Aberdeen to dual carriageway standard by 2030.

The route is approximately 160km long, of which 138km is currently single carriageway.

We have been examining the strategic aspects of dualling the route through the Preliminary Engineering Assessment and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA).

The A96 Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass) scheme is currently at a more advanced stage of development and is not specifically covered at this exhibition. The preferred option for this scheme was announced in October 2014.

A96 Dualling Programme Objectives:

- **To improve the operation of the A96 and inter-urban connectivity between the cities of Inverness and Aberdeen and their city regions through reduced journey times, improved journey time reliability, and reduced conflicts between local and strategic journeys;**
- **To improve safety for motorised and Non-Motorised Users through reduced accident rates and severity, and reduced driver stress;**
- **To provide opportunities to grow the regional economies on the corridor through improved access to the wider strategic transport network, and enhanced access to jobs and services;**
- **To facilitate active travel in the corridor;**
- **To facilitate integration with public transport facilities; and**
- **To reduce the environmental effect on the communities in the corridor.**

Purpose of the Exhibition

The preliminary engineering and environmental work we have been taking forward has identified emerging strategies for the dualling.

Those strategies are presented in this exhibition and include the standard of dual carriageway, the approach to the Non-Motorised User facilities, how we will locate lay-bys and rest areas, and how we will plan junctions and accesses.

A96 Alexandra Road, Elgin (looking eastbound).

A range of broadly defined improvement strategies that could provide a dual carriageway between Inverness and Aberdeen have also been considered and assessed.

This exhibition displays the various options, the option sifting process that has been undertaken, and the options recommended to be taken forward to the next stage of the design process.

Improvement strategies are different high level approaches to providing a dual carriageway between Inverness and Aberdeen, for example a bypass north or south of towns along the existing A96. It is important to note that the improvement strategy options on display do not represent specific corridors or route alignments. These will be developed further as the design work is progressed.

Literature available at this exhibition:

- A96 Dualling Inverness to Aberdeen Engaging with Communities;
- A96 Dualling Inverness to Aberdeen Preliminary Engineering Assessment;
- A96 Dualling Programme Strategic Environmental Assessment; and
- Feedback form – where we welcome your comments.

Engaging the Community

The work Transport Scotland is progressing on the dualling programme includes a rolling programme of regular engagement with local communities and other stakeholders to ensure businesses and individuals affected by the work over the next decade and beyond are kept fully informed. Importantly, this will ensure vital feedback is taken into account as the project is designed, procured and constructed.

As well as bringing benefits, road construction comes with impacts for those living along the route, which is why communities lie at the heart of Transport Scotland's planning.

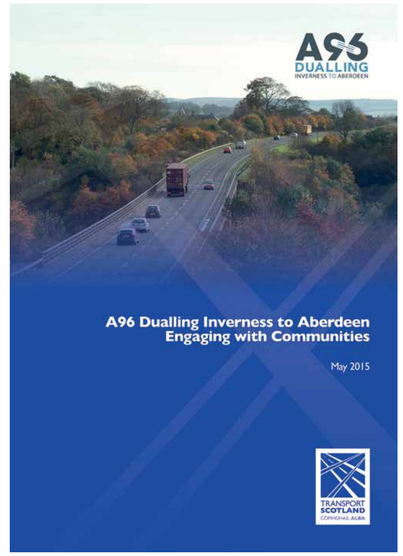
Meaningful engagement with directly affected communities and businesses will be a key part of our work as we develop our plans to dual the A96 between Inverness and Aberdeen, and we have produced a document, A96 Dualling Inverness to Aberdeen: Engaging with Communities, which outlines:

- **how Transport Scotland and our appointed consultants and contractors will engage with the public during the design and development phases;**
- **how you will be able to take part; and**
- **how you can contact us for information or advice.**

A96 Dualling: Engaging with Communities

In addition to meeting all statutory requirements, Transport Scotland will ensure that:

- **arrangements for participation are inclusive, open and transparent;**
- **a wide range of participants are encouraged to get involved at the appropriate time;**
- **information is provided at key stages to allow for full consideration;**
- **communication is facilitated through a range of methods in a range of appropriate locations; and**
- **all representations are fully considered and feedback provided.**



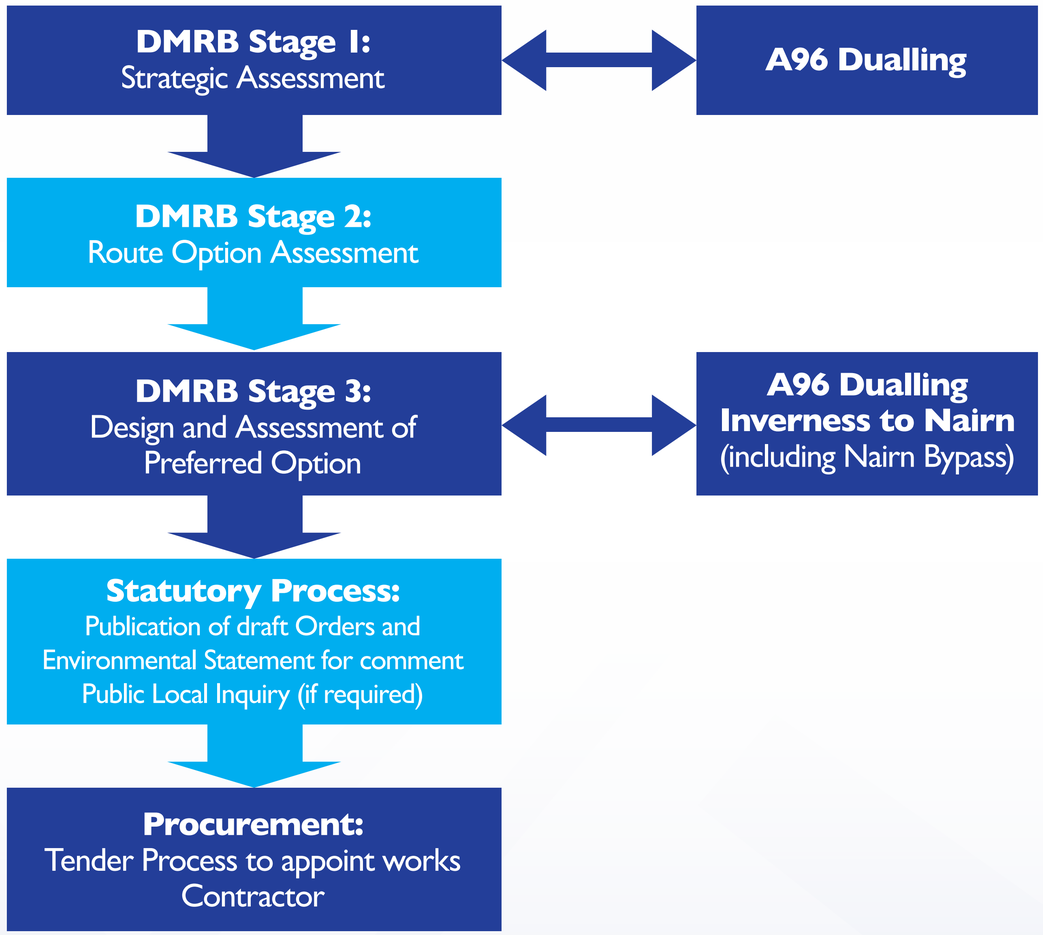
Scheme Assessment Process

Transport Scotland carries out a rigorous assessment process to establish the preferred line for a trunk road improvement.

The three-stage assessment process, based on the standard of good practice set by the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (DMRB), covers environmental, engineering, traffic and economics. Throughout this process, Transport Scotland consults with a large number of people and interested bodies.

Following the Strategic Assessment (Stage 1) of dualling the A96, the dualling programme will be divided into sections (i.e. individual projects within the overall dualling programme) for further assessment at Stages 2 and 3.

The A96 Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass) scheme is currently at a more advanced stage of development with DMRB Stage 2 complete and the preferred option announced in October 2014.



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Preliminary Engineering Assessment

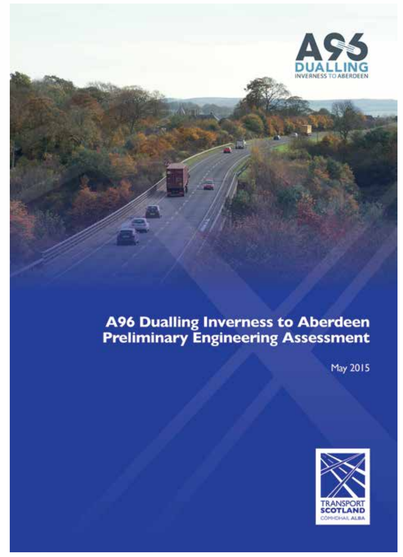
The Preliminary Engineering Assessment of providing a dual carriageway between Inverness and Aberdeen is being undertaken by Jacobs UK Ltd.

This work has been progressed in accordance with a Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (DMRB) Stage 1 assessment and involved:

- **Identification of baseline (existing) conditions and constraints;**
- **Developing broadly defined improvement strategies; and**
- **Evolving strategies for key elements of the dualling programme such as junctions, lay-bys and Non-Motorised Users (NMUs).**

Outputs from the DMRB Stage 1 Assessment include:

- **Engineering assessment of the existing A96 corridor;**
- **Description of existing conditions;**
- **Development and sifting of broadly defined improvement strategies for dualling the A96;**
- **Identification of emerging strategies for junctions, NMUs, lay-bys, rest areas, etc;**
- **Identification of risks to dualling the A96;**
- **Aerial topographical survey of the existing A96 corridor;**
- **Traffic Surveys; and**
- **Stakeholder Consultation.**



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Sifting Assessment and Improvement Strategy Options

Prior to the DMRB Stage 1 and SEA Tier 2 assessments, a sifting process was undertaken to analyse a wide range of broadly defined improvement strategies. This process identified which of these strategies were feasible options.

The sifting process was undertaken as a two-stage process with input from both the Preliminary Engineering Assessment and Strategic Environmental Assessment teams at both stages. Sifting Part 1 against the programme objectives and Sifting Part 2 against DMRB criteria.

A workshop was held to agree the findings including the improvement strategies to be sifted out. The improvement strategies which remained after the sifting process progressed to the DMRB Stage 1 and SEA Tier 2 Assessments.

Indicative Improvement Strategies

16 alternative improvement strategies, including both near online and offline strategies and part route and whole route strategies.

Sifting Part 1 Process

Part 1 Assessment against the A96 Programme Objectives

- To improve the operation of the A96 and inter-urban connectivity between the cities of Inverness and Aberdeen and their city regions through reduced journey times, improved journey time reliability, and reduced conflicts between local and strategic journeys;
- To improve safety for motorised and Non-Motorised Users through reduced accident rates and severity and reduced driver stress;
- To provide opportunities to grow the regional economies on the corridor through improved access to the wider strategic transport network and enhanced access to jobs and services;
- To facilitate active travel in the corridor;
- To facilitate integration with public transport facilities; and
- To reduce the environmental effect on the communities in the corridor.

Indicative Improvement Strategies remaining after Sifting Part 1

Sifting Part 2 Process

Part 2 Assessment of Remaining Strategies against DMRB Criteria

In Part 2 of the sifting process, the remaining improvement strategies are subject to a high level assessment using DMRB criteria, including:

- Engineering;
- Environment; and
- Cost.

Workshop held to confirm recommendations of sifting process

Improvement Strategies to be progressed to the DMRB Stage 1 and SEA Tier 2 Assessments

DMRB Stage 1 and SEA Tier 2 Assessments

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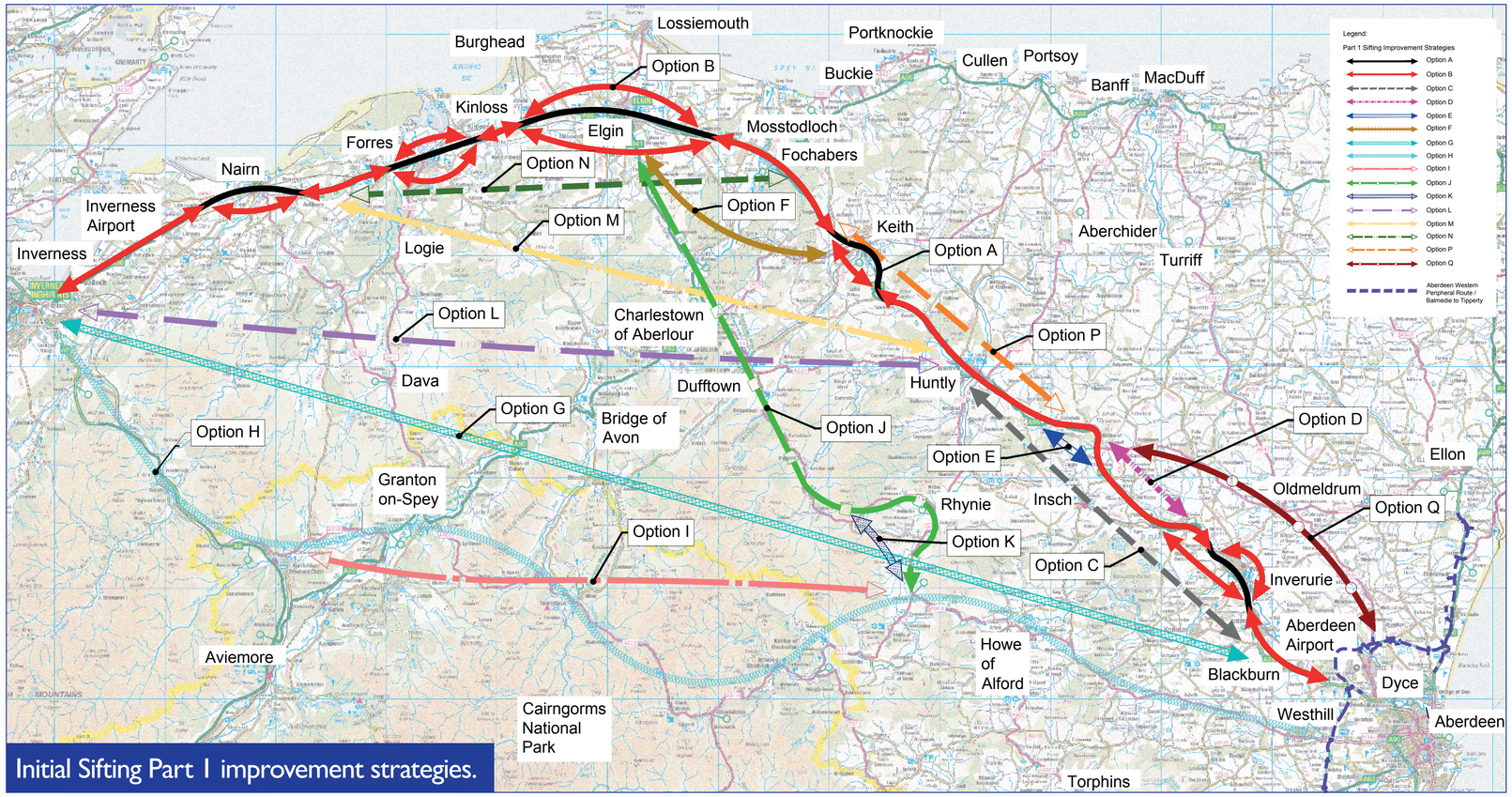
Sifting Assessment – Part 1

- **16 alternative improvement strategies were identified for assessment.**
- **Sifting Part 1 was based on whether or not each improvement strategy met the programme objectives.**
- **Improvement Strategy Options A, F, G, H, I, J, K, L, M and Q were assessed as not satisfying all of the programme objectives and did not progress to Sifting Part 2.**
- **Options B, C, D, E, N and P were taken forward to Sifting Part 2.**



Initial Sifting Part 1 improvement strategies.

Improvement strategies are different high level approaches to providing a dual carriageway between Inverness and Aberdeen, for example a bypass north or south of towns along the existing A96.

It is important to note that the improvement strategy options on display do not represent specific corridors or route alignments.

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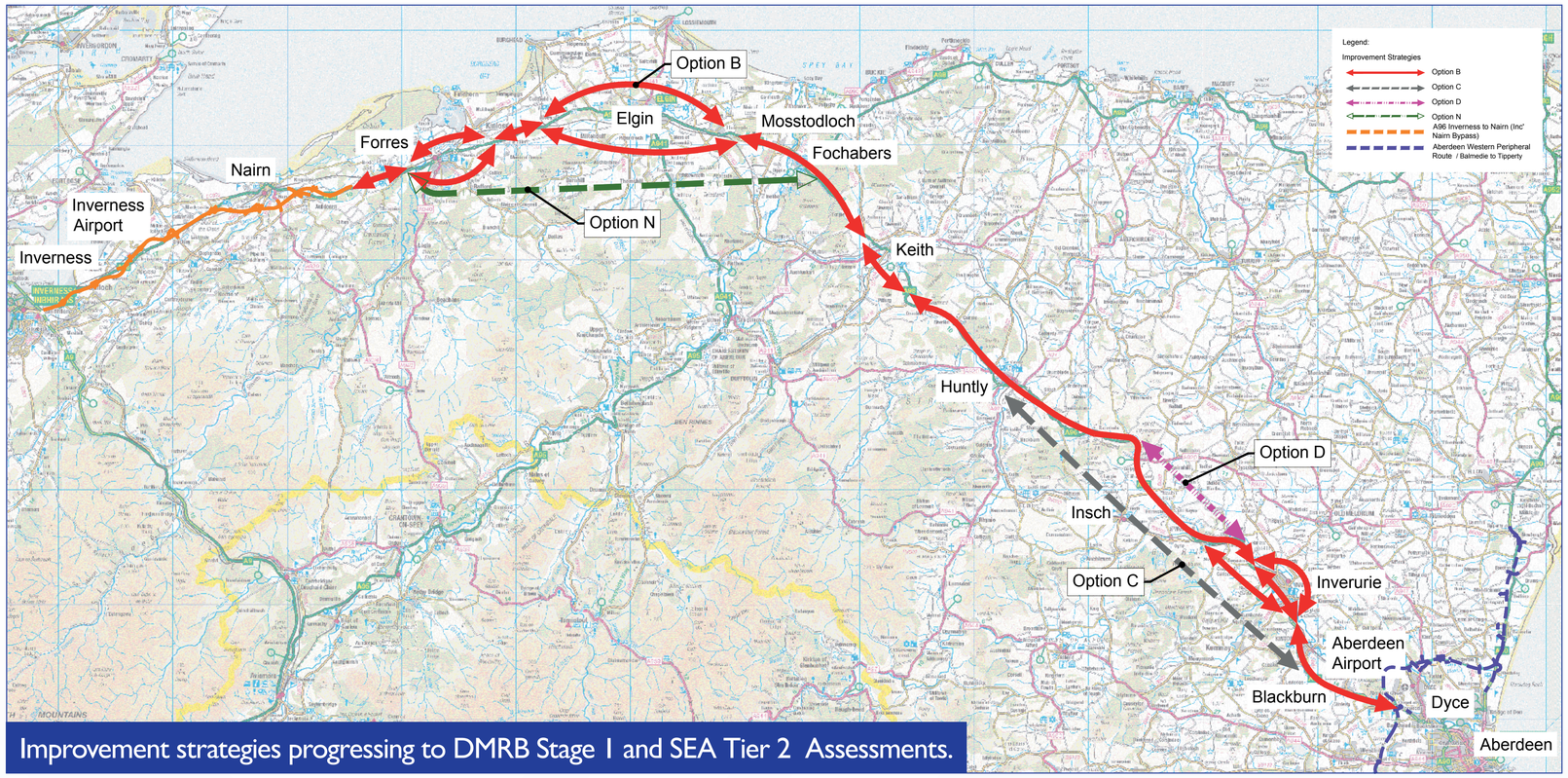
Sifting Assessment – Part 2

- **In Sifting Part 2, Options B, C, D, E, N and P were assessed at a high level against DMRB criteria for engineering, cost and environmental factors.**

- **Options E and P were not recommended to proceed to DMRB Stage 1 due to the significant engineering and cost disadvantages associated with the tunnelling required for both of these options.**

- **Options B, C, D and N were taken forward to DMRB Stage 1 and SEA Tier 2 Assessments.**



Improvement strategies progressing to DMRB Stage 1 and SEA Tier 2 Assessments.

Improvement strategies are different high level approaches to providing a dual carriageway between Inverness and Aberdeen, for example a bypass north or south of towns along the existing A96.

It is important to note that the improvement strategy options on display do not represent specific corridors or route alignments.

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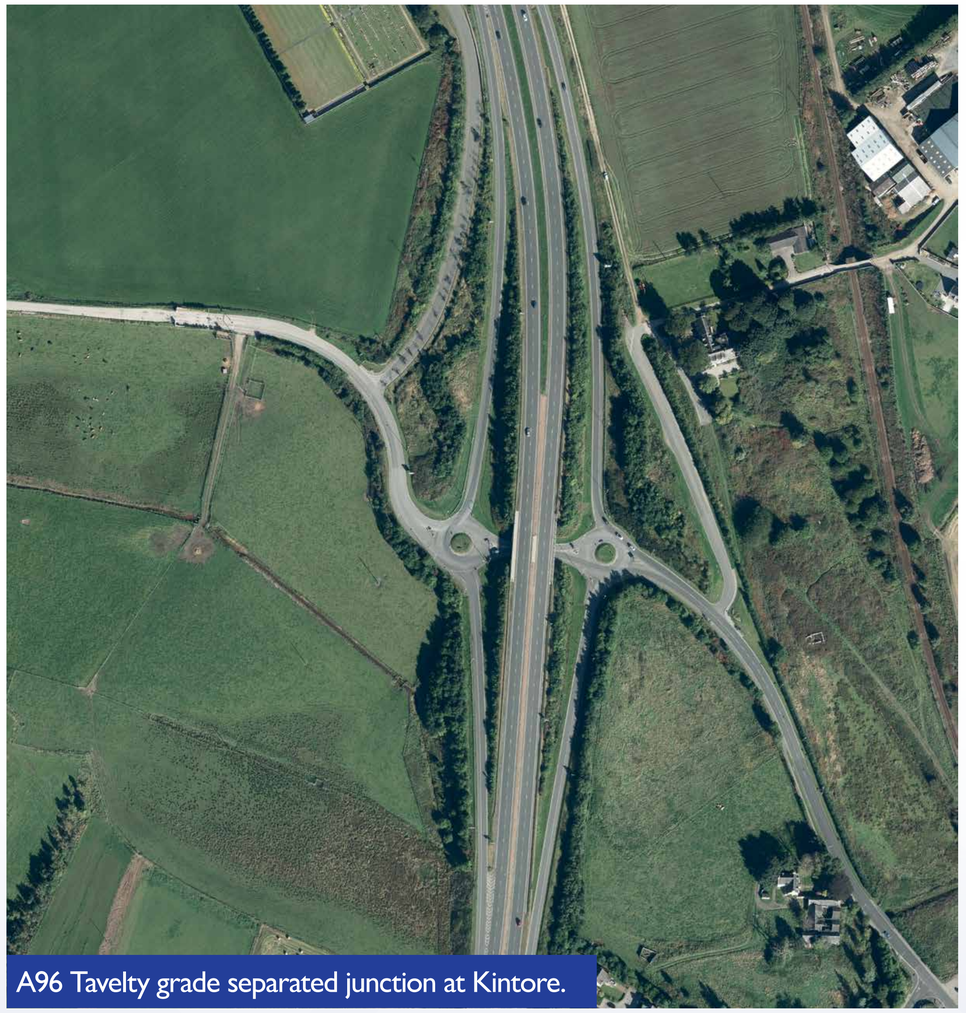
Junction and Access Strategy

There are over 600 junctions and accesses along the A96 between Inverness and Aberdeen, excluding those within the main urban centres of Nairn, Forres, Elgin and Keith. The junctions provide important access to adjacent roads, villages, community facilities and properties. Only three of these junctions are currently grade separated (junction with slip roads and over bridge or underpass).

Numerous at-grade junctions and accesses are present along the existing single carriageways, which permit right-turn manoeuvres but can lead to a greater risk of accidents.

Given the nature of the existing road alignment, the presence and number of existing at-grade junctions and direct accesses is also a potential hazard to road users.

The dualled A96 will be a high standard dual carriageway (DMRB Category 7A), and all junctions should be grade separated where possible.



A96 Tavelty grade separated junction at Kintore.

A96 at-grade junction with the B9039 near Morayston (looking westbound).

Junction and Access Strategy (Continued)

Grade separation will improve the safety of vehicles joining and leaving the A96 dual carriageway by eliminating right-turn manoeuvres across the road and providing acceleration and deceleration lanes, known as merges and diverges respectively.

Due to the high number of junctions and accesses along the existing route, combined with the aspiration for grade separation, the junction and access strategy will rationalise junctions and accesses and close gaps in the central reserve.

A complete assessment of the existing junctions and accesses within the extents of each scheme will be undertaken during the future stages of design.

If you have any concerns regarding your future access arrangements, please be assured we will work closely with you during the future stages of design to ensure any adverse impacts are minimised.

Principles to be followed:

- **There should be no gaps in the central reserve;**
- **All junctions should be grade separated where possible;**
- **Number of direct accesses and junctions to be minimised, including through rationalisation where possible;**
- **Any new crossings of the A96 as part of new grade separated junctions shall be made accessible to Non-Motorised Users;**
- **The landscape and visual impact of any new junction shall be minimised through sensitive design and environmental mitigation; and**
- **Junctions with A, B and C class roads shall be assessed for provision of a grade separated junction. Unclassified roads and accesses shall be rationalised and an alternative connection provided unless particular site specific considerations can be demonstrated.**

Non-Motorised Users (NMUs) Strategy

Non-Motorised Users (NMUs) include pedestrians, cyclists and equestrians.

The A96 Dualling Programme will be developed taking into account the programme objective of promoting active travel. Suitable provision for NMUs is, therefore, an important part of the A96 Dualling Programme.

We are currently consulting with various bodies, including local authorities, regional transport partnerships, the Ramblers Association, the British Horse Society, Sustrans and many other stakeholders, to identify known NMU provision in the vicinity of the A96 and develop the proposed strategy.

NMU facilities will be developed as the dualling programme moves forward to more detailed stages of design development in consultation with local communities and interest groups.

Principles to be followed for crossing the A96:

- **There will be no NMU at-grade crossings of the proposed A96;**
- **NMU crossing points in close proximity to each other will be combined into a single crossing point;**
- **NMU crossing points will make use of other grade separated crossing facilities, such as junction overbridges/underpasses and accommodation works overbridges/underpasses; and**
- **Crossing points solely for the use of NMUs will be provided where site specific requirements can be demonstrated.**

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INVERNESS TO ABERDEEN

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Lay-By Strategy

Lay-bys are paved parking areas adjacent to carriageways that are used by travellers as short-term stopping locations for both resting and emergency breakdowns.

Another common use is that of a bus stop to separate buses and their patrons in safety away from carriageway traffic, while maintaining mainline traffic flow.

The objectives of the lay-by strategy align with access for NMUs and bus services, while also providing safe rest stops for the variety of travellers.

The Transport Scotland *Roads for All: Good Practice Guide for Roads* includes additional design requirements not specified within the DMRB that ensures safety and accessibility for disabled people.

Lay-by on the A96 near Huntly (looking westbound).

Principles to be followed:

- **Identify demand for short-term stopping along the route;**
- **Identify proposed locations of lay-bys based on demand, with respect to the DMRB and with consideration of local environmental sensitivities; and**
- **Check spacing does not exceed maximum recommended space of 2.5km in each direction.**

Rest Area Strategy

Rest areas can be provided on rural trunk roads as places where drivers can safely pull off the road and stop, mitigating the accident risk associated with driver fatigue.

While lay-bys provide relatively safe stopping areas for short durations, rest areas are more suitable for longer stops and often include toilets and picnic areas.

The provision of rest areas is of particular importance to commercial vehicles travelling the route, which are more likely to require a safe area to make longer duration stops.

The strategy for provision and spacing of rest areas will take into account bypassed towns, local amenities and possible provision of parking facilities in such towns. This shall be considered through consultation and agreement with the local authorities and communities.

A96 near Allanfearn (looking westbound).

Principles to be followed:

- **Rest areas are provided, as a minimum, every 45km and no more than 30 minutes driving time apart;**
- **Close liaison with the local authorities regarding both rest area locations and rest area provisions to minimise the impact on the services currently provided or proposed within local communities; and**
- **Consultation with the Scottish Freight and Logistics Advisory Group (SCOTFLAG) and the Regional Transport Partnerships to ensure that the rest areas developed correlate well with commercial vehicle drivers' requirements and demands along the route.**

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INVERNESS TO ABERDEEN

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Key Engineering Issues

In order to understand the constraints to the A96 Dualling Programme, a thorough review of the existing corridor has been undertaken to identify the present engineering, environmental, traffic and economic features to provide an understanding of how the dualling programme may positively or negatively impact these features.

The following key engineering issues have been identified during this review:

Key Issues

- **The combination of the current single carriageway alignment, roadside properties and density of junctions and accesses suggests it is likely to be preferable to develop the proposed dual carriageway alignment offline, within the existing A96 corridor, and retain the existing A96 as part of the local road network, rather than online widening of the existing road.**

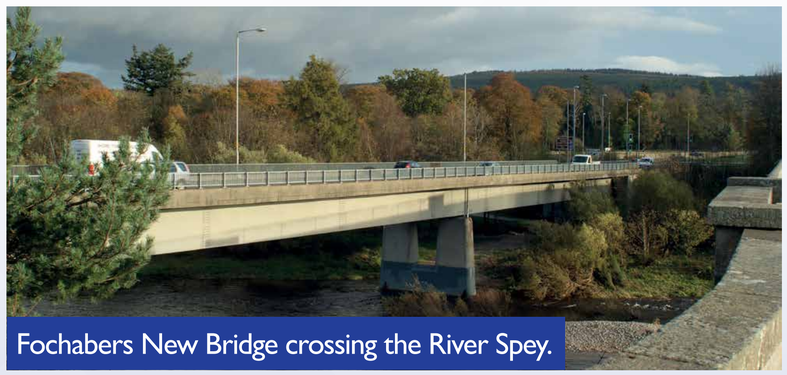
- **There are extensive areas of flood risk at Forres, Elgin, Fochabers and Inverurie.**

- **The existing A96 at Fochabers is constrained by the town, the Gordon Castle Estate and the layout of the existing road.**

- **The Baxters factory and the Old Toll house/ electricity sub-station constrain the potential route options to the west of the River Spey.**

- **A major structure will be required for the crossing of the River Spey and its floodplain with the river designated as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC).**

Forres (River Findhorn & Pilmuir) Flood Alleviation Scheme.



Fochabers New Bridge crossing the River Spey.

Key Engineering Issues (Continued)

Key Issues Continued

- **Topography is likely to constrain route options at sections between Fochabers and Keith, Keith and Huntly as well for the bypass corridors to the north and south of Inverurie and sections of offline options at Option C, Option D and Option N.**

- **Huntly Rail Overbridge cannot be readily extended to accommodate a dual carriageway cross section below it.**

- **The A96 between Oyne and the Inveramsay Rail Bridge is particularly constrained due to the proximity of the Aberdeen to Inverness railway line which runs parallel to the south side of the A96 and the settlement at Pitcaple which the A96 passes through.**

- **The existing bypass at Inverurie is constrained on both sides of the road by residential properties as well as by the available cross-section under the Upperboat Overbridge.**

- **Utilities are present along the route, including national transmission high pressure gas mains and Scottish Hydro Electric transmission overhead lines, the Blackhillock sub-station and proposed extension, and the new sub-station proposed for the Beatrice Onshore Transmission Works.**

Huntly Rail Overbridge.

A96 near Pitcaple (looking westbound).

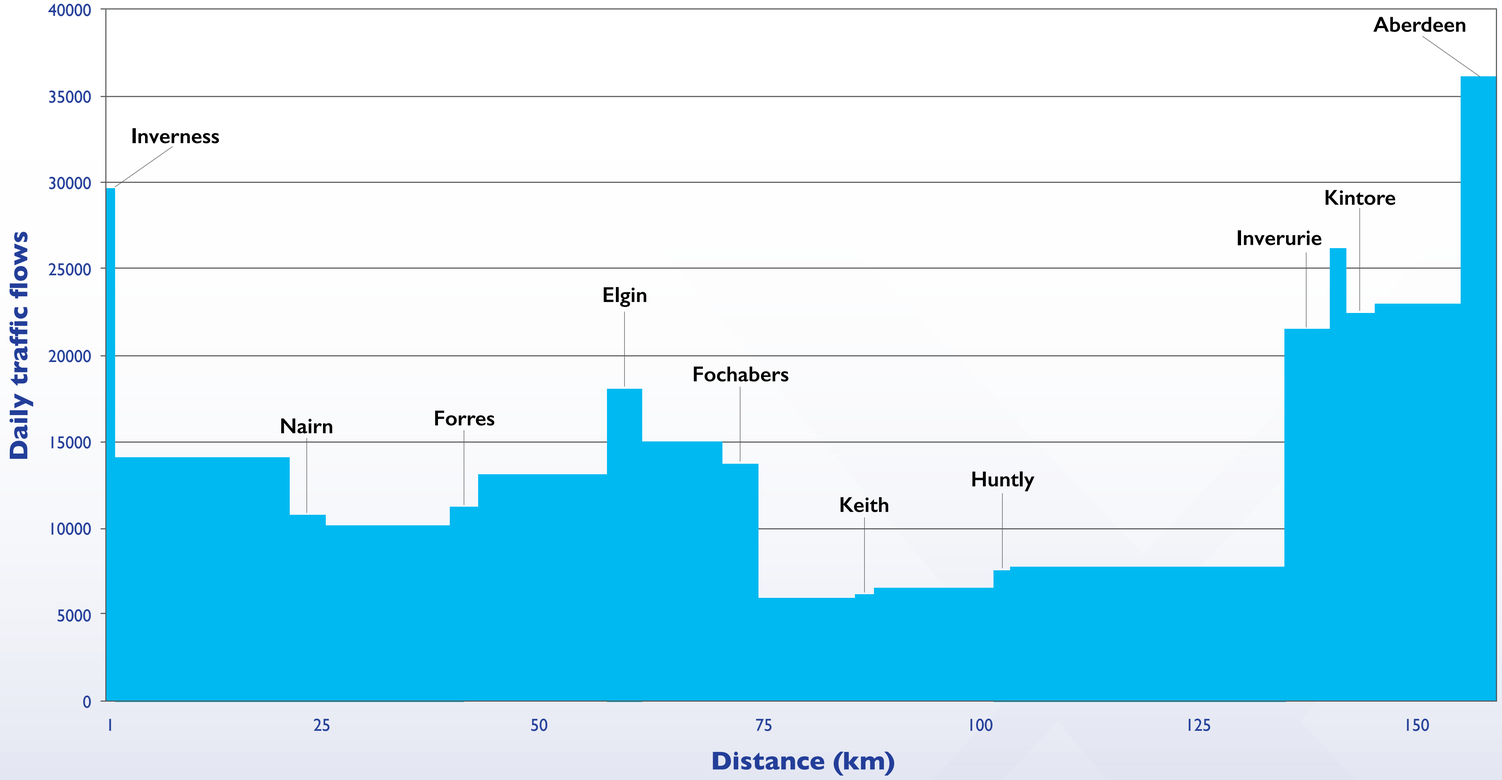
Traffic

The existing A96 is used by a variety of different users. The diagram below shows the average daily traffic flows on the A96 between Inverness and Aberdeen.

The highest volumes of traffic occur at either end of the A96 as you approach Inverness and Aberdeen, followed by traffic through Elgin and between Inverurie and Kintore.

Car journey times between Inverness and Aberdeen are typically around 2 hours and 40 minutes. Bus journey times are approximately 3 hours 50 minutes due to their stopping patterns. Typically, around 78% of traffic on the A96 are cars, with 13% Light Goods Vehicles and 8% Heavy Goods Vehicles. The remaining 1% are bus/coaches and motorcycles.

A96 traffic flows (2008-2012 average)



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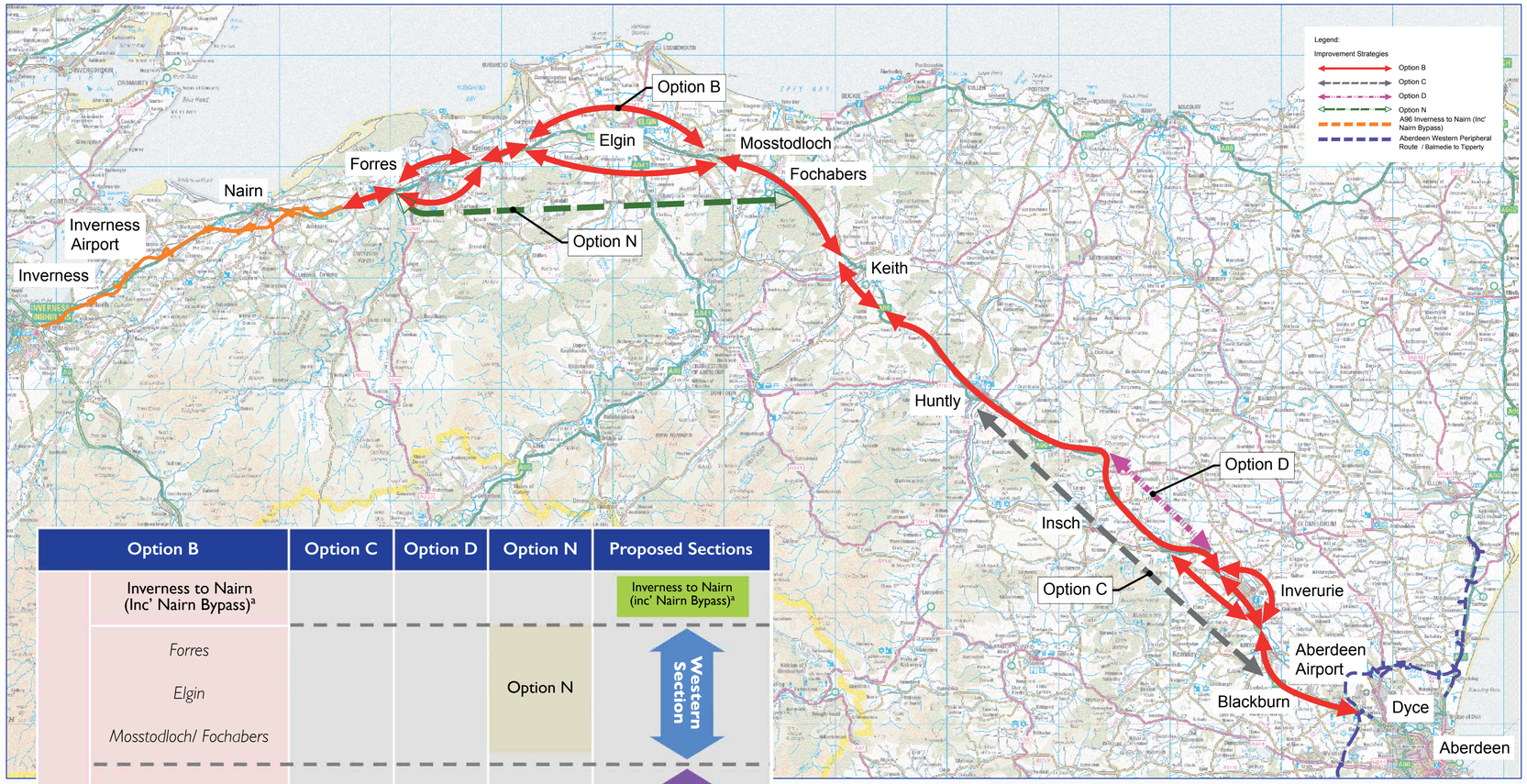
Recommendations and Findings

- **The four broadly defined improvement strategies Options B, C, D and N are all recommended to be taken forward for further assessment at DMRB Stage 2 (i.e. route option assessment).**

- **The geographic relationship between the four improvement strategies is shown in the figures to the right. To allow the appropriate comparison of route corridor options developed from the four improvement strategies, the offline strategies need to be directly compared against the equivalent geographic section of Option B.**

- **It is, therefore, proposed to progress the next stage of design development (DMRB Stage 2) as three geographic sections in addition to the Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass) section, which is being taken forward separately.**



Option B	Option C	Option D	Option N	Proposed Sections
Inverness to Nairn (Inc' Nairn Bypass)[a]				Inverness to Nairn (inc' Nairn Bypass)[a]
Forres *Elgin* *Mosstodloch/ Fochabers*			Option N	Western Section
Keith *Huntly*				Central Section
Glens of Foudland *Inverurie* *Kintore* *Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route*	Option C	Option D		Eastern Section

a – The A96 Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass) scheme is currently at a more advanced stage of development. The preferred option for this scheme was announced in October 2014.

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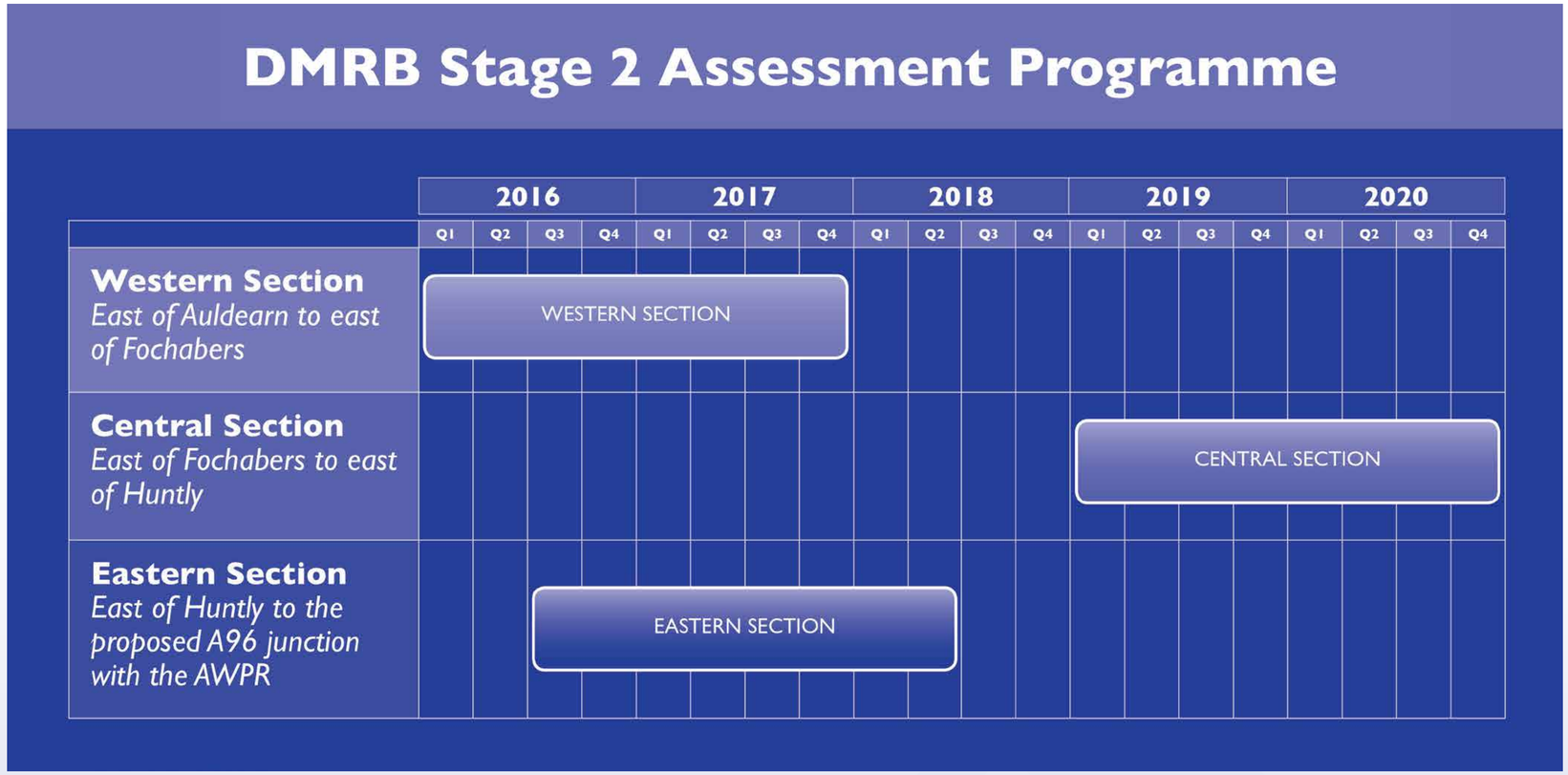
Recommendations and Findings (Continued)

DMRB Stage 2 Assessment Programme

The proposed programme for the next stage of design development (i.e. DMRB Stage 2 assessment) is illustrated below. During the DMRB Stage 2 Assessment, route options will be developed and assessed for each section. This will include an engineering, environmental, traffic and economic assessment of the potential impacts of each option to inform a preferred option choice. The completion of the DMRB Stage 2 Assessment and the identification of preferred options for each section would inform subsequent stages of assessment, promotion and construction.

As the dualling programme is progressed, individuals, communities and businesses affected by the work will be kept fully informed and their vital feedback taken into account.



Comments and Feedback

We welcome your comments and feedback. Please take your time to consider the information presented and provide any comments you may have by 22 June 2015. Comments can be made on the feedback form provided and placed in the feedback box at the exhibition or sent by email or post.

Please email your comments to:
a96dualling@transportscotland.gsi.gov.uk

Alternatively post to:

A96 Dualling Team
Transport Scotland
Buchanan House
58 Port Dundas Road
Glasgow
G4 0HF

For further information on the A96 Dualling Inverness to Aberdeen programme, please visit the Transport Scotland website:
www.transportscotland.gov.uk/a96dualling

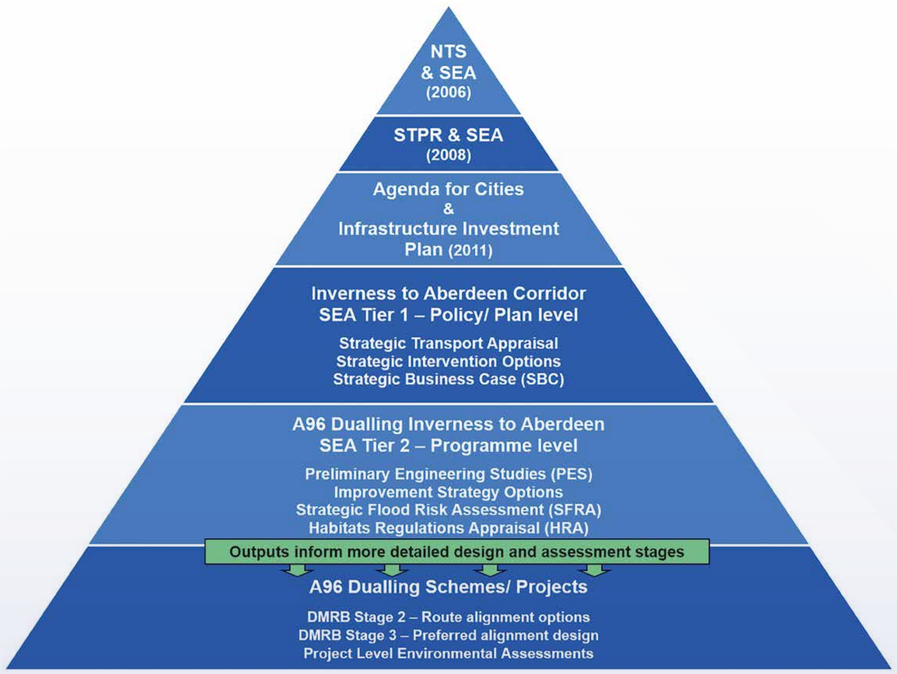
A96 near Huntly (looking westbound).

Photo courtesy of Lorne Gill, Scottish Natural Heritage.

Strategic Environmental Assessment

A Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of the A96 Dualling Programme proposals has been undertaken in compliance with the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005.

The purpose of SEA is to ensure that potential environmental effects are considered from the earliest stages of A96 Dualling Programme development.



SEA Tiering Approach

Northbound view of A96 and the Bin Forest.

SEA has been integrated with the developing programme following a two-tier approach.

Tier 1 informed the Strategic Business Case for the Programme and Tier 2 assessed a range of broadly defined improvement strategy options for A96 Dualling.

The following panels explain the SEA process and summarise key findings of the assessments.

Tier 1 SEA – Informing the Strategic Business Case

In 2014, a strategic appraisal of the Inverness to Aberdeen transport corridor was undertaken, and the findings informed the Strategic Business Case (SBC) for the A96 Dualling Programme.

Tier 1 SEA informed the appraisal, ensuring that potential environmental effects associated with strategic intervention options were robustly examined alongside economy, accessibility and social inclusion, safety, and integration topics.

Tier 1 Strategic Environmental Assessment Topics

- **Biodiversity, Flora and Fauna**
- **Soils and Geodiversity**
- **Water and Flooding**
- **Population and Human Health**
- **Historic Environment**
- **Landscape**

View looking north-west along the A96 towards Fochabers.

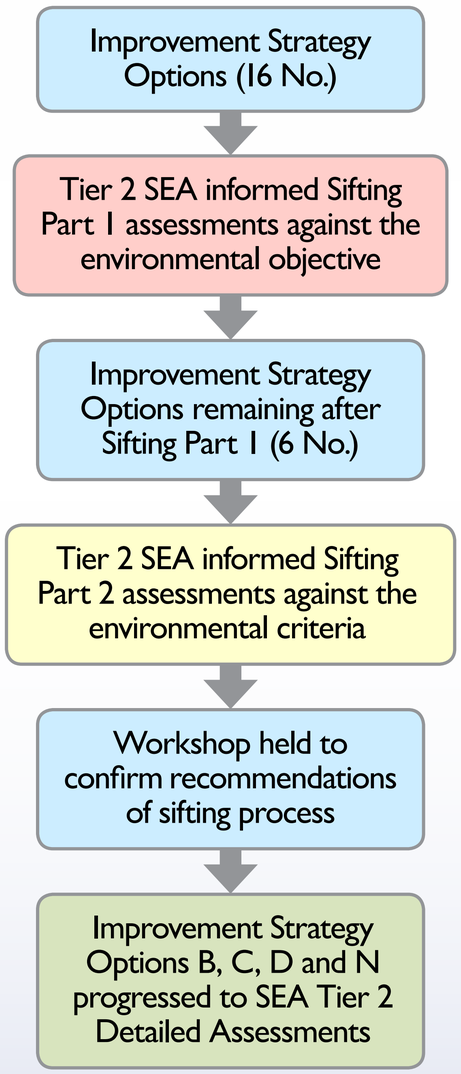
The Tier 1 SEA Environmental Report was published for consultation on 25 September 2014 and the consultation period closed on 6 November 2014.

The SBC concluded that, overall, full dualling between Inverness and Aberdeen was the best way to meet the future needs of those living, working and travelling along the A96 corridor in the 21st century.

SBC and Tier 1 SEA reports are available from Transport Scotland's website at: **www.transportscotland.gov.uk/a96dualling**

Tier 2 SEA – Stages and Approach

Tier 2 SEA Stages



The figure on the left outlines how Tier 2 SEA integrated with the Sifting Assessment and Improvement Strategy Options process (described earlier in the exhibition).

The SEA used Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping tools to draw study areas around each improvement strategy option and to manage the wide range of environmental constraint data considered under each SEA topic.

At each stage of assessment, additional layers of environmental data were considered including international nature conservation sites, nationally protected sites and locally important sites.

Tier 2 detailed assessments were also informed by supporting strategic studies:

- **Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA);**
- **Habitats Regulations Appraisal (HRA) Screening; and**
- **Landscape Review.**

Tier 2 Strategic Environmental Assessment Topics

1 Water and Flooding
2 Biodiversity, Flora and Fauna
3 Landscape and Visual
4 Historic Environment
5 Air
6 Population and Human Health
7 Soils and Geodiversity

Key findings are summarised in subsequent panels.

Topics 5, 6 and 7 are combined under the 'Communities and Land Use' panel.

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INVERNESS TO ABERDEEN

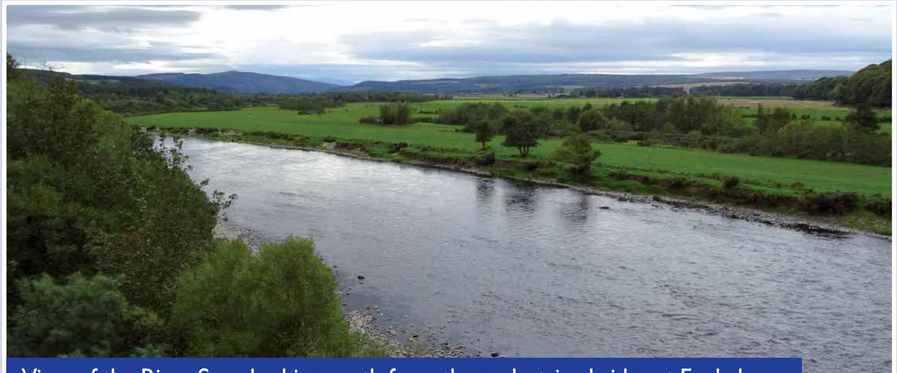
Water and Flooding

Subjects considered: fluvial (rivers), pluvial (surface water) and coastal flooding; watercourse crossings; flood defence infrastructure and properties in the flood plain.

Key Local Issues

- **Functional flood plains within option boundaries are typically associated with rivers, burns, estuaries, and areas of low lying land.**
- **Some areas include a significant number of properties within the functional flood plain.**
- **Substantial areas of flood risk north-west of Forres (north variant of Option B), north-east of Elgin (north variant of Option B) and to the east and south-east of Inverurie (affecting all Option B variants in this area).**
- **Crossings required for Rivers Findhorn, Lossie, Spey, Isla, Deveron, Urie and Don.**
- **Existing flood defence/alleviation schemes could present issues near Forres, Elgin and Inverurie; there is also a scheme proposed at Huntly.**

How the options compare



View of the River Spey looking south from the pedestrian bridge at Fochabers.

- **The northern end of Option B (Forres-Elgin-Fochabers) is significantly more constrained in flood risk terms than in central and southern parts.**
- **Southern bypass options around Forres and Elgin are less constrained by flood risk issues than north bypass options, however areas with significantly more properties in/near the floodplain may create more traffic demand than less populated areas.**
- **Option B north around Inverurie requires an additional major watercourse crossing when compared with other Option B variants.**
- **In some areas, Options C, D and N appear to be less constrained by flood risk issues than the corresponding parts of Option B.**

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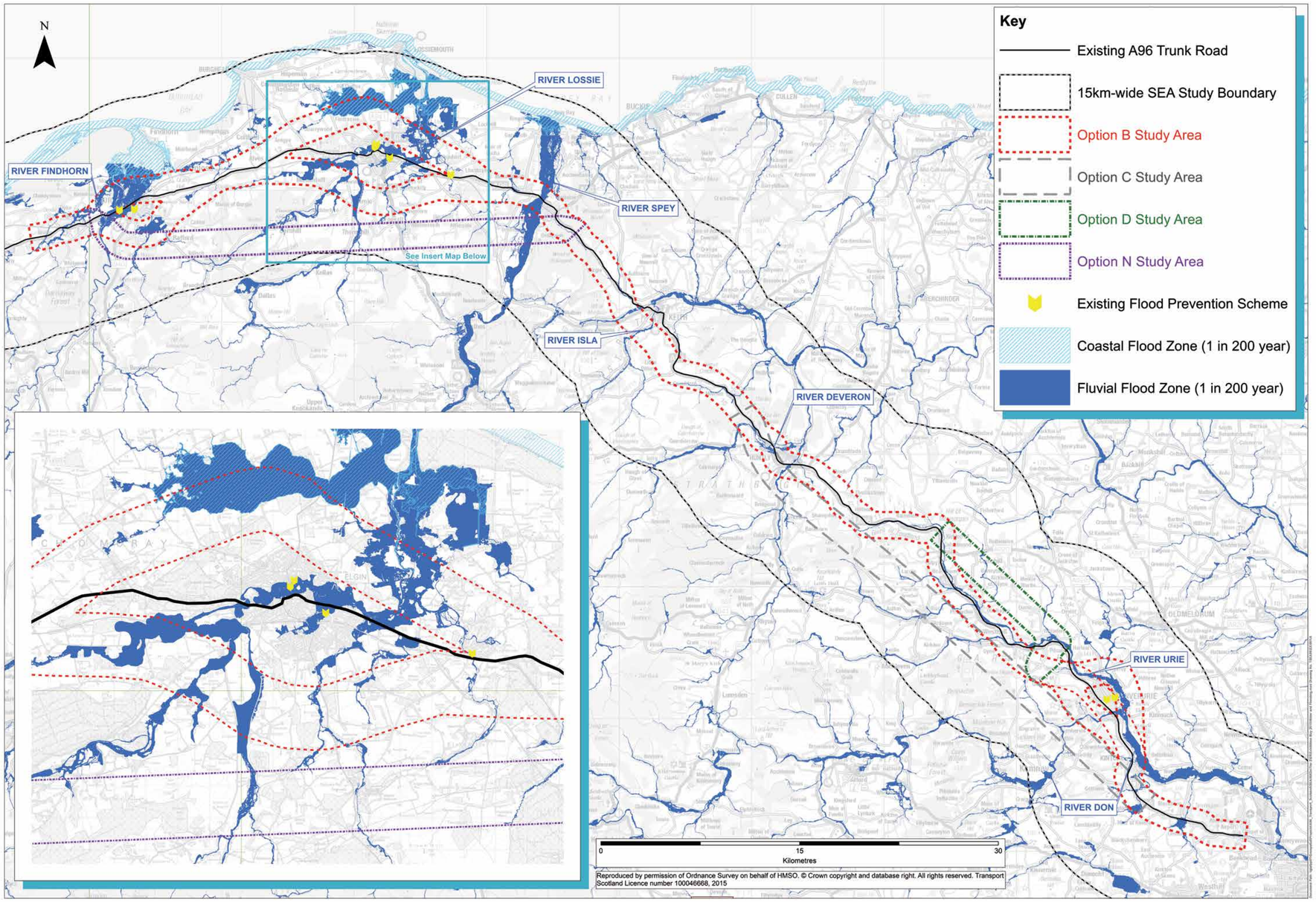
Water and Flooding



Biodiversity, Flora and Fauna

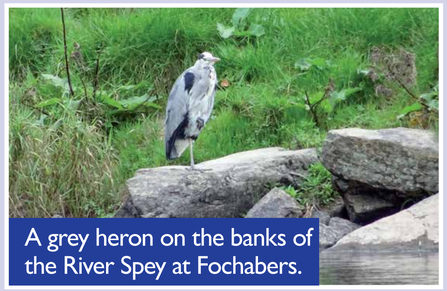
Subjects considered: Internationally designated Ramsar sites, Special Protection Areas (SPAs), Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), National Nature Reserves, Local Nature Reserves, Ancient Woodland and Native Woodland, and locally designated Sites of Interest to Natural Science (SINS), Local Nature Conservation Sites (LNCS) and Study of Environmentally Sensitive Areas (SESA).

Key Local Issues

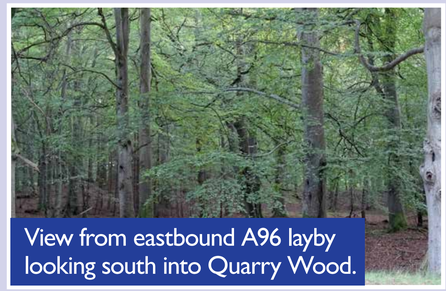
- **National/International sites designated for nature conservation include:**
  - **Darnaway and Lethen Forest SPA (Options B and N south of Forres);**
  - **Lower Findhorn Woods SAC (Options B and N south of Forres);**
  - **Moray and Nairn Coast SPA/Ramsar (Option B north of Forres);**
  - **Loch Spynie SPA/Ramsar (Option B north of Elgin); and**
  - **River Spey SAC/SSSI (Options B and N between Mosstodloch and Fochabers).**
- **Locally designated sites include:**
  - **Findhorn Valley (Option N west and south of Forres);**
  - **Spynie (Option B north of Elgin);**
  - **Spey, Garmouh - Boat O' Brig (Options B and N); and**
  - **Hill of Foudland (Options C, D, and B).**
- **Ancient (and/or native) Woodlands are extensive in areas, in particular around Fochabers.**

How the options compare

- **The northern end of Option B (Forres-Elgin-Fochabers) is significantly more constrained in terms of international and national nature conservation sites than the central and southern parts.**
- **Option B south of Elgin is less constrained in terms of designated sites than Option B north.**
- **Option C is the only option with potential to avoid the local site at Foudland, however it is unlikely to avoid the local site at Bennachie, which is avoided by Options B and D.**
- **Options N and C are more densely wooded than corresponding parts of Options B and D.**
- **Option B south around Inverurie is moderately more constrained in terms of woodland than other variants at this location.**



A grey heron on the banks of the River Spey at Fochabers.



View from eastbound A96 layby looking south into Quarry Wood.

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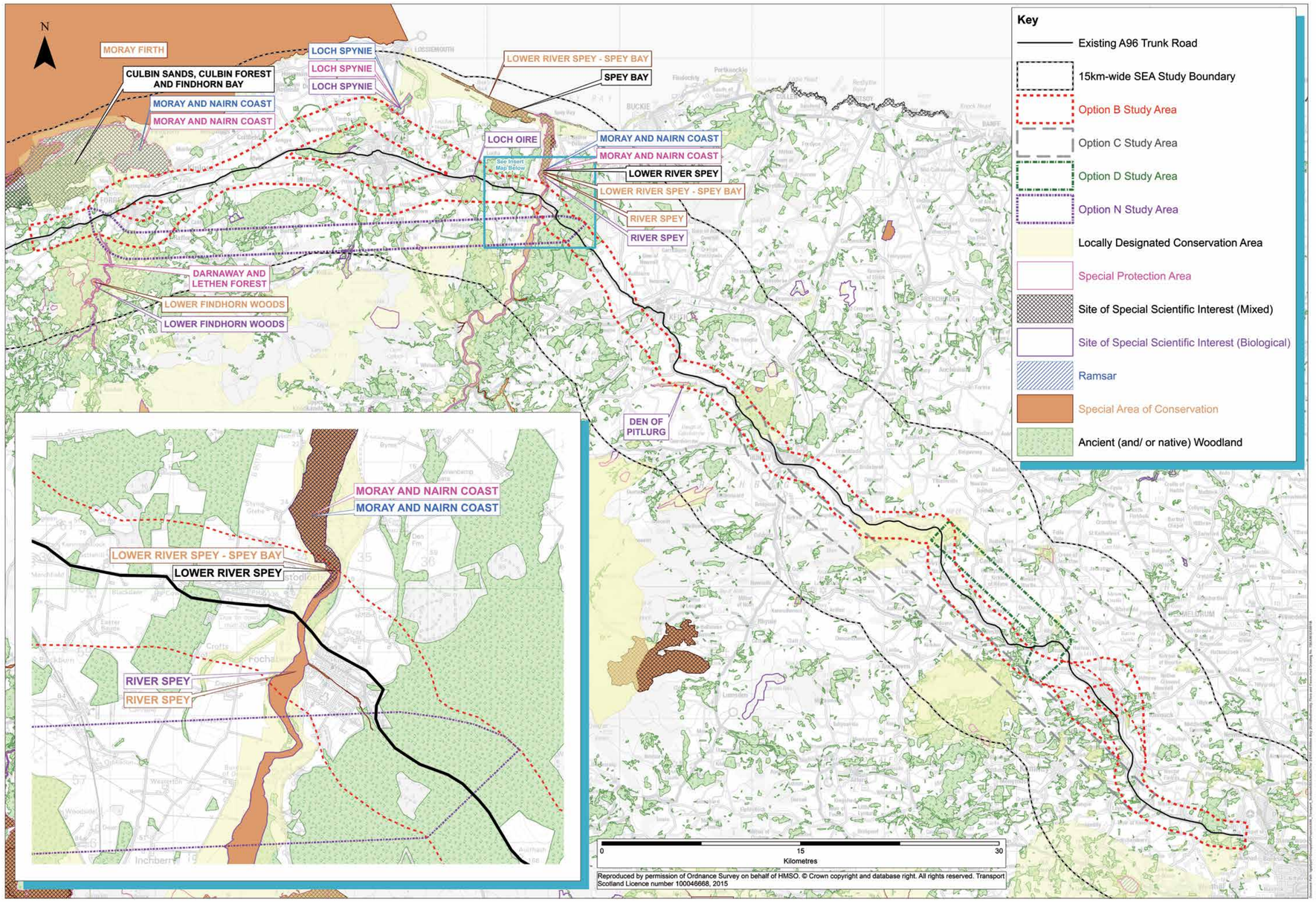
Biodiversity, Flora and Fauna



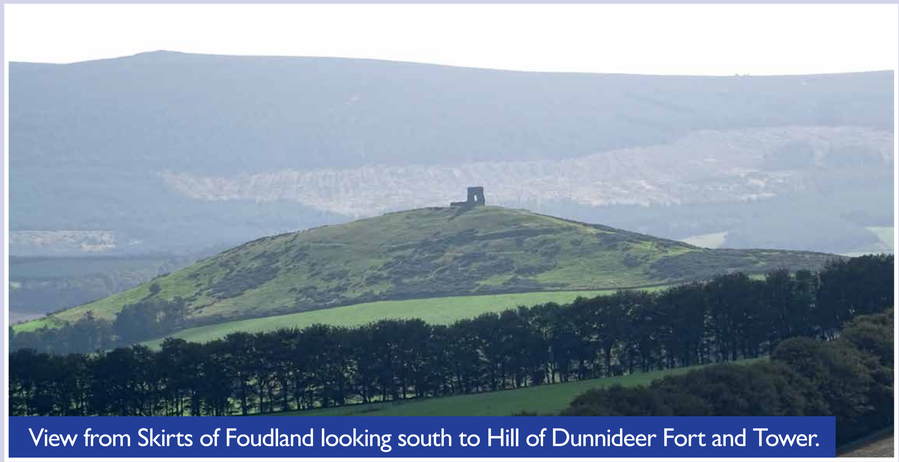
Landscape and Visual

Subjects considered: landscape designations; landscape character and sensitivity, taking account of key elements such as landform, woodlands, infrastructure, settlements and properties, which could be visual receptors.

Key Local Issues

- **The existing A96 is an established part of the local landscape for Option B.**
- **Around Forres and Elgin is characterised by flat, lowland agricultural land, with some large areas of woodland.**
- **Around Fochabers, the character is more hilly, undulating to the east with large areas of woodland which may be difficult to avoid.**
- **Between Keith and the Glens of Foudland the landscape is of a hilly, open character with patches of woodland, individual dwellings and farms.**
- **Bin Forest presents challenges due to the proximity of forest and adjacent hills.**
- **The northern end of Options B and N are constrained by setting impacts on historic features such as Dallas Dhu Distillery south of Forres.**
- **Keith Hall GDL also contributes to a sensitive landscape east of Inverurie which would be directly impacted by Option B north in this section.**

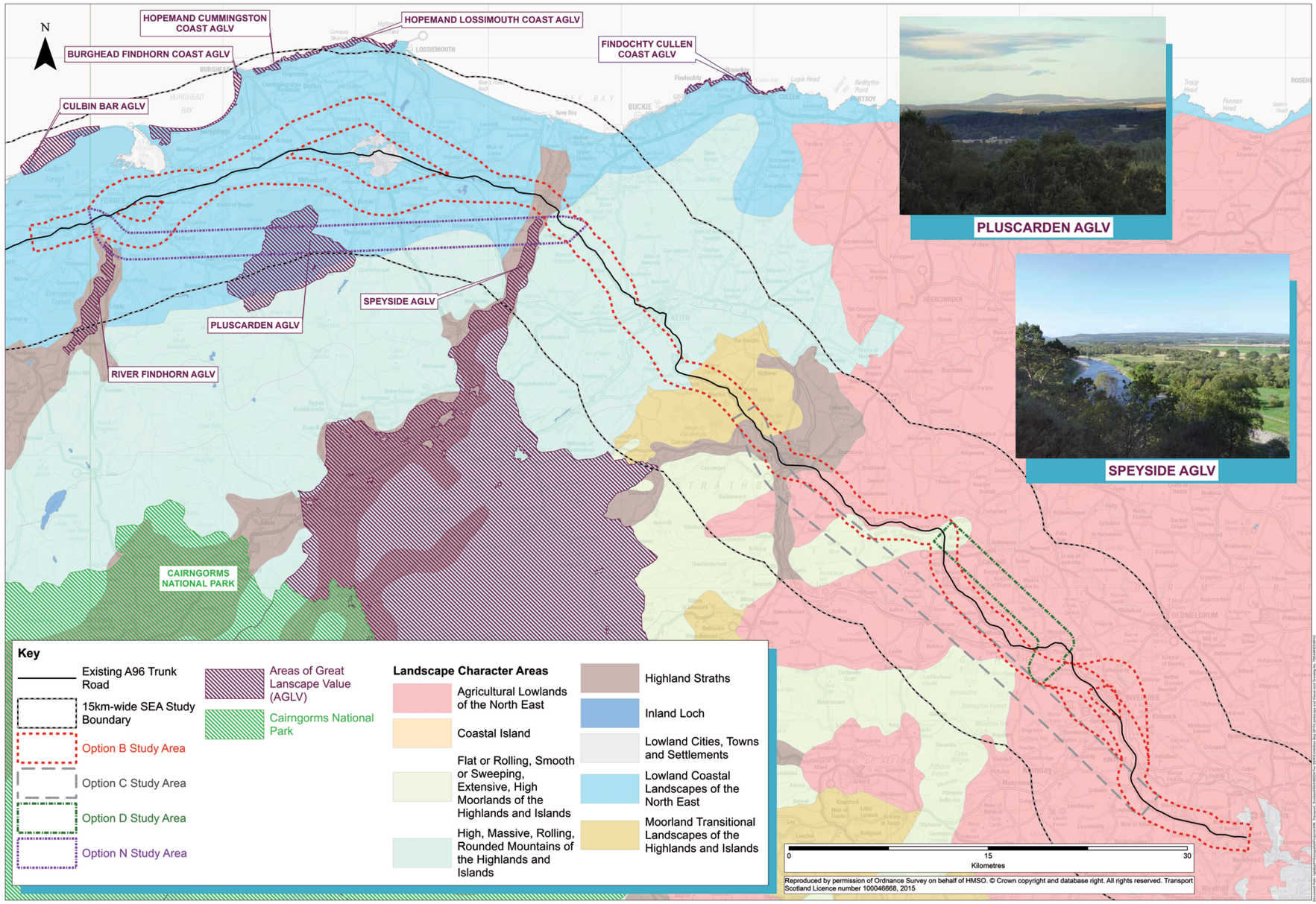
How the options compare



View from Skirts of Foudland looking south to Hill of Dunnideer Fort and Tower.

- **Option B passes through a range of landscape types and sensitivities and potential effects on landscape of variants to the north and south of Forres and Elgin are not predicted to be significantly different.**
- **Option B north at Inverurie is more sensitive than other local options.**
- **Option N includes three Areas of Great Landscape Value (AGLVs) and is more constrained than Option B, with greater potential for significant landscape effects, in particular through the Speyside area.**
- **Option C passes through a relatively high quality landscape and dualling is predicted to present greater risk of impacts than corresponding parts of Option B.**

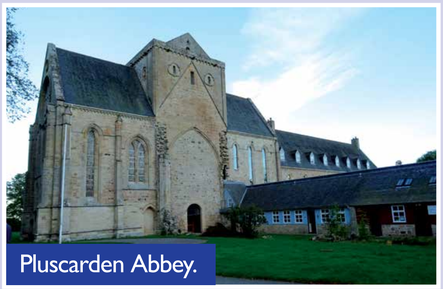
Landscape and Visual



Historic Environment

Subjects considered: Scheduled Monuments (SM), listed buildings, gardens and designed landscapes (GDLs), inventory battlefields, conservation areas in towns and local archaeological sites.

Key Local Issues


Pluscarden Abbey.


Picardy Symbol Stone detail.

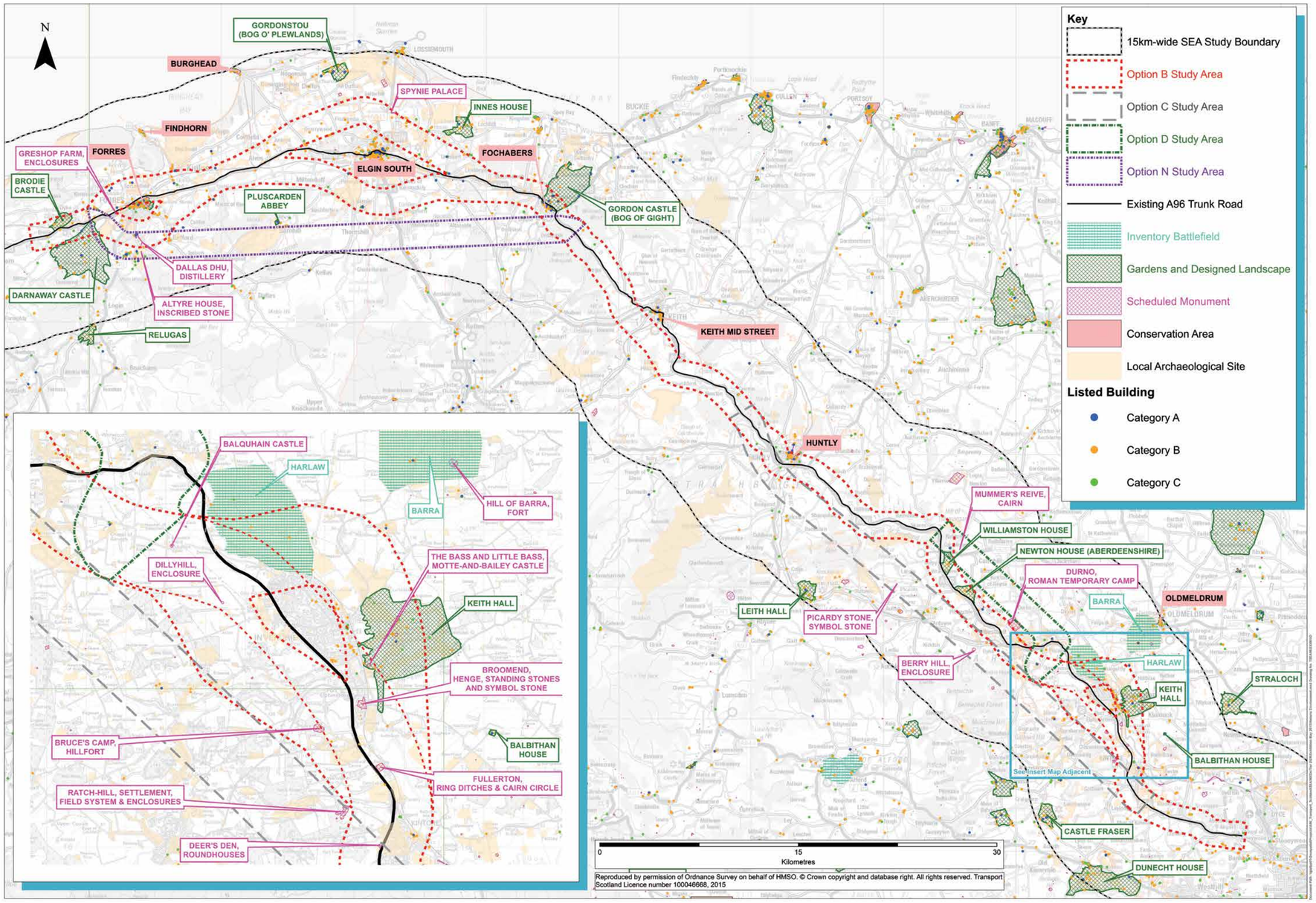
Particular constraints include:

- **Dallas Dhu Distillery Scheduled Monuments (SMs) and listed buildings (Options B and N);**
- **Gordon Castle and Keith Hall GDLs, associated listed buildings and SMs (Option B);**
- **Williamston House and Newton House GDLs and associated listed buildings (Option B and D);**
- **Harlaw Inventory Battlefield (Option B); Picardy Stone SM (Option C); and**
- **Local archaeology sites are present in all option areas. The value, nature and extent of these non-designated cultural heritage assets will be considered at later detailed design stages.**

How the options compare

- **There are historic environment assets within all option areas which have the potential to be directly and/or indirectly affected through dualling; generally, there is a higher number and density of assets from south of Huntly towards Inverurie and Aberdeen.**
- **While Option B north around Forres has a risk of impacts on the town's conservation area, it is less constrained than the southern variant and Option N which include the high value assets associated with Dallas Dhu Distillery.**
- **Option N avoids Gordon Castle GDL and the conservation area around Fochabers which constrain Option B.**
- **Option D has fewer constraints than the corresponding part of Option B around Colpy, avoiding Williamston House GDL, Kirkton Farm A Listed Building, Mummer's Reive Cairn and Woodside hut circles SM.**
- **The variants of Option B around Inverurie are more constrained by historic environment features than the corresponding part of Option C.**
- **Option B north of Inverurie is more constrained than other variants due to the location of Harlaw battlefield and Keith Hall GDL.**

Historic Environment



Communities and Land Use

Subjects considered: areas of population, air quality, key walking, cycling and equestrian routes, prime agricultural land and high carbon soils.

Key Local Issues

- **Main population centres at Forres, Elgin & Fochabers (Options B and N), Keith (Option B), Huntly (Options B and C), Insch (Option C), Inverurie (Options B, C & D) and Kintore (Options B and C).**
- **A fully dualled A96 could increase, or decrease, local air pollutant concentrations, depending on the final alignment/bypasses and traffic flows.**
- **Options B and N are crossed by important cycling and walking routes near Forres (National Cycle Network Route 1 and Dava Way) and Fochabers (Speyside Way).**
- **The Isla Way crosses Option B near Keith and Core Paths are present throughout all options.**
- **Agricultural land uses predominate outwith towns, and there is potential for greater impacts on higher quality land in Option B north at Forres and Elgin, and parts of Options B and D between Inverurie and Colpy.**
- **High carbon content soils are not extensive in the region.**

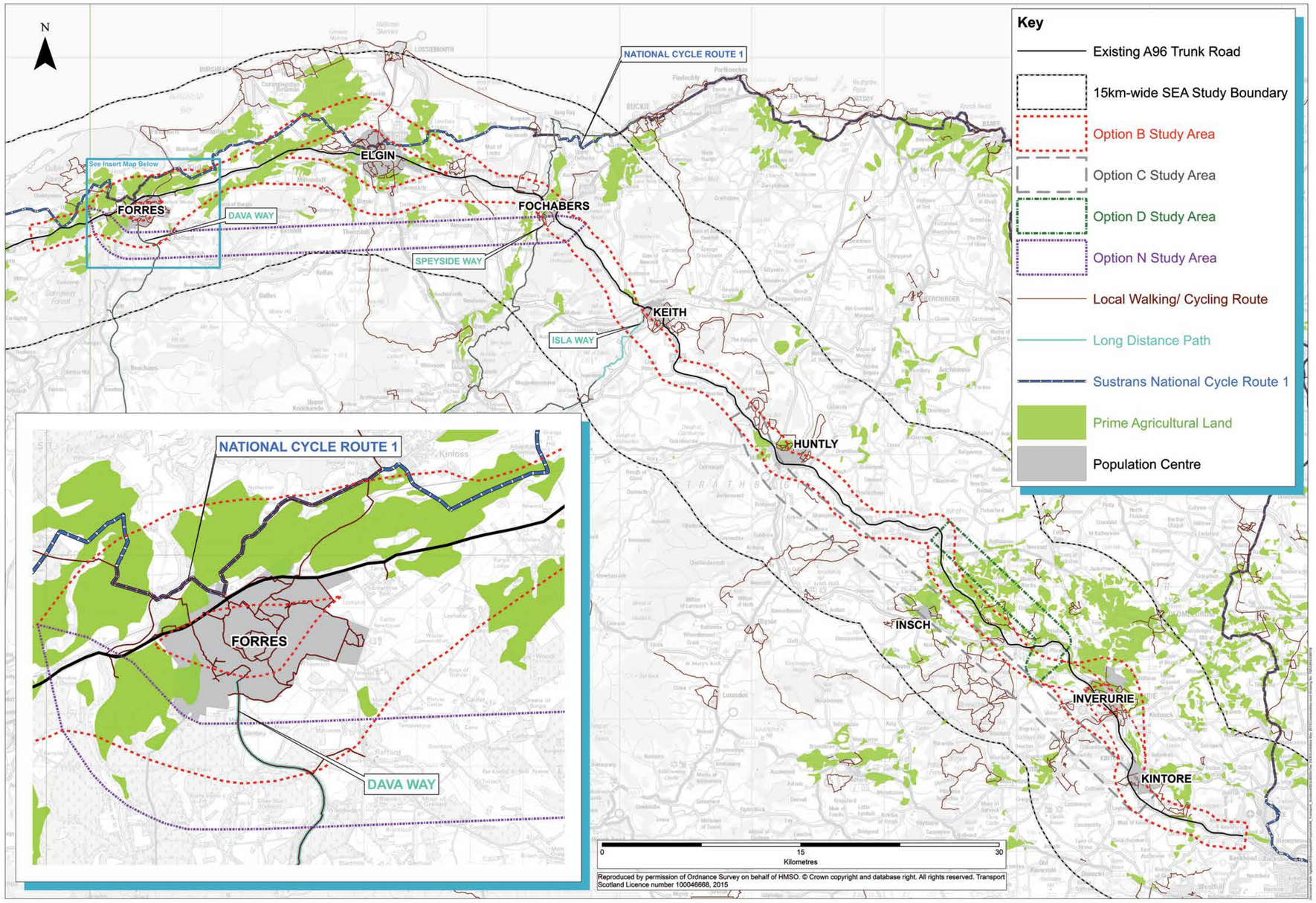
How the options compare

Speyside Way information board.


View from Darkland Farm north-west of Lhanbryde looking north-east.

- **Options C and N provide opportunities to alleviate traffic-related environmental effects from properties in Forres, Elgin, Huntly and Inverurie.**
- **Option C, however, passes close to the large settlement of Insch.**
- **Option B, south of Forres and Elgin (rather than Option B north), potentially results in lower impacts on prime agricultural land.**
- **Options D and B, north at Inverurie, are more constrained by prime agricultural land than other options in the area.**
- **Some severance of agricultural land and farm units is predicted across all options, which will be considered further in later design stages.**

Communities and Land Use



Strategic Mitigation Approach

Mitigation is needed to help avoid, reduce or offset potentially significant environmental effects. Specific mitigation will be developed as environmental assessment of dualling progresses, adopting the following hierarchy:

Avoid	**Avoidance** of designated conservation sites and other sensitive areas and features will be the primary design approach
Reduce and Minimise	Where avoidance is not possible, design teams will **reduce and minimise potential impacts** (e.g. minimise encroachment within designated nature conservation sites and other sensitive environmental areas, e.g. functional floodplain)
Mitigate	Following avoidance and minimisation measures, design teams will develop location specific **mitigation** measures to address any adverse effects (mitigation will be informed via e.g. Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and Habitats Regulations Appraisals (HRA) processes)
Compensate	Where residual effects are anticipated following mitigation, design and environmental assessment teams will develop appropriate **compensatory measures** (e.g. habitat creation, flood storage/alleviation measures)

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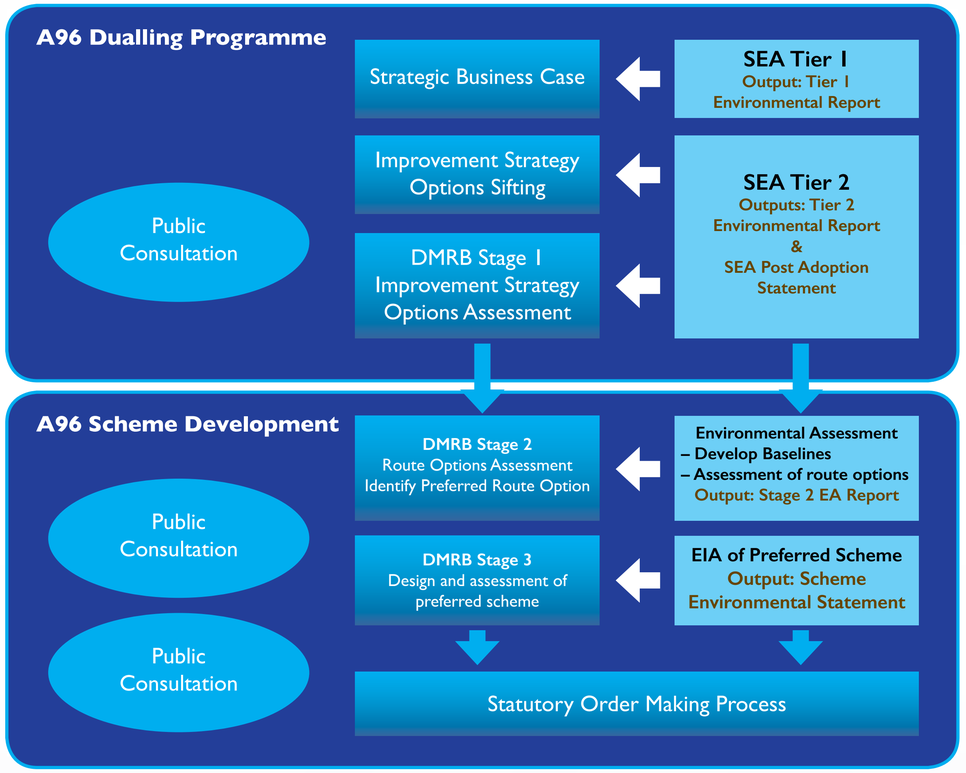
What happens next?

An Environmental Report detailing the outcome of the Tier 2 SEA has been published for consultation and is available on the Transport Scotland website. The public consultation period runs from 11 May to 22 June 2015.

Following the closing date of the Environmental Report consultation period, all written feedback will be collated to inform a final review of the SEA findings and recommendations.

A record of feedback and how it has been taken into consideration will be documented in the SEA Post Adoption Statement, which will:

- **explain the whole SEA process and how it has been integrated with the A96 dualling programme;**
- **summarise the key findings of the public consultation process which is currently ongoing;**
- **set out how the A96 programme has been influenced by the SEA and by the feedback from consultation; and**
- **set out a monitoring framework to ensure the findings of SEA are addressed at subsequent DMRB stages.**



Feedback on the SEA Environmental Report and Non-Technical Summary is welcomed.

You can email or write to Transport Scotland at:
A96 Dualling Team, Transport Scotland, Buchanan House, 58 Port Dundas Road, Glasgow, G4 0HF.

Email: **a96dualling@transportscotland.gsi.gov.uk**