

2. Need for the Scheme

2.1. Introduction

2.1.1. This chapter outlines the national context for dualling the A9 between Perth and Inverness and sets out the objectives of the dualling programme. It establishes the need for and commitment to the Dualling, which includes the Proposed Scheme.

2.2. Background

2.2.1. As outlined in Chapter 1, dualling of the A9 between Perth and Inverness was identified in the Strategic Transport Projects Review in 2009 and the Scottish Government's Infrastructure Investment Plan (IIP) in 2011 and 2015.

2.2.2. The A9 is a strategic route that links Central Scotland with the Scottish Highlands, providing a key road transport corridor for passenger vehicles (including tourist traffic), bus and coach services and freight traffic. Improvements to the route are considered to be critical in growing and developing northern Scotland for communities, businesses and visitors/leisure users.

2.2.3. The A9 between Perth and Inverness is 177km long of which 129km requires dualling.

2.2.4. Key characteristics of the A9 (Perth to Inverness) include:

- A higher than average rate of serious or fatal accidents;
- A lower than average general accident rate;
- Approximately 20% of accidents are winter weather related;
- Traffic flows that vary between circa 23,000 (2012) Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT) at Perth and Inverness to circa 8000 (2012) AADT south of Aviemore;
- Marked seasonal fluctuations in traffic flows;
- A changing cross section from single carriageway through localised WS2+1 (overtaking) sections to dual carriageway;
- Numerous at-grade junctions;
- Driver frustration due to lack of guaranteed overtaking opportunities; and
- A surrounding environment of high sensitivity.

2.2.5. Specific considerations along the Proposed Scheme include:

- A changing cross section from single carriageway to a section of northbound overtaking WS2+1 (approximately 1km long at Carrbridge);
- Environmental constraints including the River Spey Special Area of Conservation (SAC), Craigellachie National Nature Reserve (NNR) and Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Alvie SSSI, Tor Beag Scheduled Monument and extensive areas of ancient woodland and the presence of protected and priority habitats/species;
- Two major watercourse crossings (River Dulnain and Baddengorm, both part of the River Spey SAC) and a crossing of the Highland Mainline (HML) Railway and Tier 2 (unclassified road) at Slochd Beag;
- Access required to the settlements of Aviemore and Carrbridge and property and landholdings on both sides of the A9;

- Constrained topography in the vicinity of Slochd Summit, compounded by the presence of the HML Railway; and
- A number of motorised and non-motorised at-grade crossings of the A9, with associated safety risks.

2.3. Scheme Objectives

2.3.1. Transport Scotland has set the following objectives for the dualling of the A9:

- (i) To improve the operational performance of the A9 by:
 - Reducing journey times; and
 - Improving journey time reliability.
- (ii) To improve safety for motorised and non-motorised users by:
 - Reducing accident severity; and
 - Reducing drivers stress.
- (iii) To facilitate active travel within the corridor; and
- (iv) To improve integration with Public Transport Facilities.

2.4. National Context

A9 Route Action Plan and Route Strategy, 1995 – 1997

2.4.1. Initial studies into improving the A9 commenced in 1995 with a Route Action Plan and a Route Strategyⁱ for the A9 corridor which considered opportunities to improve safety and relieve driver stress. A wide range of carriageway improvement options were considered including climbing lanes, wide single carriageways and dual carriageways in order to address operational problems on the A9. Within the vicinity of the Proposed Scheme the following schemes were identified within the Route Action Strategy:

- Kinveachy Northbound Climbing Lane commencing 3.1km north of Granish and covering a length of 0.7km;
- Carrbridge (South and North) Northbound Climbing Lane – 0.3km north of river bridge near Carrbridge to 1.9km north of the A938 covering a length of 4.2km;
- Junction Improvement – B9152 Aviemore (Lynwilg), southbound deceleration; and
- Junction Improvement – A95 Aviemore (Granish), low cost grade separation.

2.4.2. Since the initial action plan and route strategy, a number of other studies were undertaken for the A9 and this resulted in the implementation of WS2+1 schemes along the A9 – at Loch Insh, Ralia, Carrbridge and Moy. The Carrbridge WS2+1 scheme is located within the Proposed Scheme extents.

Strategic Transport Projects Review (STPR) 2009

2.4.3. The STPRⁱⁱ was published by Transport Scotland in 2009 and it defined the most appropriate strategic investments in Scotland's national transport network to 2022. The STPR and the associated Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) assessed the wider strategic transport corridor between Perth and Inverness and identified the following objectives with respect to the A9 corridor:

- To promote journey time reductions, particularly by public transport, between the central belt and Inverness primarily to allow business to achieve an effective working day when travelling between these centres;
- To improve the operational effectiveness of the A9 as it approaches Perth and Inverness;
- To reduce journey time and increase opportunities to travel between Inverness and Perth (and hence onwards to the central belt); and
- To address issues of driver frustration relating to inconsistent road standard, with attention to reducing accident severity.

2.4.4. STPR recommended a series of 29 transport investment priorities, one of which was to dual the A9 between Dunblane and Inverness - considering full dualling and wider improvements.

2.4.5. With regard to the section of the A9 between Perth and Inverness, the STPR stated that the first phase of the dualling would consist of:

- Dual Carriageway from Perth to Blair Atholl; and
- Implementation of climbing lanes, 2+1 sections and junction improvements between Blair Atholl and Inverness.

2.4.6. The subsequent phases would then consist of:

- Dualling the A9 between Aviemore and Inverness; and
- Dualling the A9 between Blair Atholl and Aviemore.

2.4.7. The STPR stated that the A9 dualling would be 'expected to provide a significant contribution to the Scottish Government's purpose of increasing sustainable economic growth. In addition, this will also contribute to the national objectives of promoting journey time reductions between the Central Belt and Inverness and the reduction in accident rates. The intervention also addresses the corridor specific objectives of improving the operational effectiveness of the A9 on approaches to Perth, and addressing issues of driver frustration'.

2.4.8. The STPR forms the Strategic Business Case for the A9 Dualling.

A9 Dualling Case for Investment (2016)

2.4.9. The A9 Dualling Case for Investmentⁱⁱⁱ builds upon the STPR and seeks opportunities to address the growing economic and transport demands along the A9 between Perth and Inverness. It confirmed the range of current problems, identified as part of the STPR, and established the validity of the original rationale for investment.

2.4.10. The Case for Investment indicates that since the STPR, further assessment completed in 2013/14, highlighted the following issues:

- Continuing high incidence of serious and fatal road accidents, with evidence that this is linked to the current single carriageway road standard and overtaking manoeuvres;
- High levels of driver frustration with evidence that this is linked to slow moving vehicles, the build-up of platoons and the restriction of travel speed to well below desired levels;
- Current journey times to Inverness from Perth, Edinburgh and Glasgow are 10-15% slower than with a 'connected cities'^{iv} policy in place;

- Problems associated with incidents on the A9, due to the lack of convenient alternative routes, cause lengthy diversions and delay impacting on businesses and private vehicle users; and
- High levels of dependency of local, regional and national businesses on efficient transport for the movement of good, access to markets and access to workforce.

2.4.11. The Case for Investment considered the impact of the A9 Dualling on: Economy, Safety, Environment, Integration, Accessibility and Social Inclusion. In its conclusions, key findings were that the A9 Dualling will:

- Make a significant contribution to reducing the severity and rate of accidents along the A9 corridor;
- Significantly improve the levels of driver stress through a reduction in driver frustration and the fear of accidents;
- Provide the opportunity to enhance links to walking and cycling routes, helping to increase active travel and improve access to recreational facilities;
- Benefit bus, coach and freight travel along the corridor through reduced and more reliable journey times; and
- Improve access to goods, people, employment opportunities and services along the corridor by reducing end to end journey times by twenty minutes, which will make a material contribution toward connecting the cities of Perth and Inverness. Appropriate mitigation and sympathetic design will minimise any adverse impacts such as severance or increased travel distances to access towns and villages.

2.5. National Policy Framework

2.5.1. The Proposed Scheme, as part of the A9 Dualling, is supported through the following key transport and planning policies.

National Transport Strategy (2006 and 2016 refresh)

2.5.2. The National Transport Strategy (NTS)^v was produced under a commitment presented in the 2004 Transport White Paper, 'Scotland's Transport Future'. The NTS is one of eight main delivery programmes for 'Choosing Our Future', Scotland's sustainable development strategy. The NTS has five high level objectives:

- Promote economic growth;
- Improve integration;
- Promote social inclusion;
- Improve safety of journeys; and
- Protect our environment and improve health.

2.5.3. One of the aims of the NTS is to deliver a world class transport system and the following key strategic outcomes were identified:

- Improve journey times and connections: to tackle congestion and the lack of integration and connections in transport which impact on high level objectives for economic growth; social inclusion; integration and safety;
- Reduce emissions: to tackle the issues of climate change, air quality and health improvement which impact on high level objectives for protecting the environment and improving health; and

- Improve quality, accessibility and affordability; to give people a choice of public transport, where availability means better quality transport services and value for money or an alternative to the car.

2.5.4. The strategic outcomes of the NTS were used to inform the objectives for the A9 Dualling as set out in Section 2.3.

2.5.5. A refresh of the NTS was published in January 2016^{vi} which reiterated Scottish Ministers commitment to the dualling of the A9 between Perth and Inverness by 2025.

National Planning Framework 3 (2014)

2.5.6. National Planning Framework 3 (NPF3)^{vii} sets the context for development planning in Scotland and provides a framework for the spatial development of Scotland as a whole. It sets out the Scottish Government's development priorities over the next 20-30 years and identifies national developments which support the development strategy. NPF3 includes 14 national developments, identified to deliver the strategy.

2.5.7. Within NPF3, under the spatial priorities for change, it states that 'We will complete dualling of the trunk roads between cities, with dualling of the A9 from Perth to Inverness complete by 2025 and dualling of the A96 from Inverness to Aberdeen by 2030'.

2.5.8. Furthermore, it states that 'the dualling of the A9 between Perth and Inverness and improvements to the Highland Main Line railway will provide a step change in accessibility across the rural north, increase business confidence and support investment throughout the region'.

Scotland's Economic Strategy (2015)

2.5.9. Scotland's Economic Strategy^{viii} sets out the Scottish Government's overarching framework for increasing competitiveness and tackling inequality in Scotland. The Strategy sets out four priorities for achieving sustainable economic growth, one of which is investing in people and infrastructure in a sustainable way.

2.5.10. The Strategy promotes investment in the nation's infrastructure in order to help businesses to grow, create employment opportunities and boost connectivity. The Strategy advocates taking a strategic and long-term approach to infrastructure investment and lists a number of major projects that are supported by the Scottish Government. This includes investment in the dualling of the A9.

Scotland's Cities: Delivering for Scotland (2011)

2.5.11. Scotland's Cities: Delivering for Scotland^{ix} was published to complement the Government's Economic Strategy. It highlighted that successful cities are '*connected cities, with strong digital and transport infrastructure*'.

2.5.12. The objectives for the Proposed Scheme have been developed to further promote connectivity between two of Scotland's key cities, in line with objectives contained within Scotland's Cities: Delivering for Scotland.

2.6. Local Context

Existing Traffic Conditions and Safety

- 2.6.1. The A9 carriageway from Dalraddy to Slochd has an Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT) flow of approximately 7,600 (based on 2012 figures). Approximately 22% of the traffic is Heavy Good Vehicles (HGVs) – recorded between Granish and Aviemore South over 12 hours (2012 traffic count).
- 2.6.2. The current single carriageway sections between Dalraddy and Slochd can lead to vehicles being held up by slower moving traffic, including HGVs. The resultant journey time increase can cause driver frustration potentially giving rise to the execution of dangerous overtaking manoeuvres.
- 2.6.3. The Proposed Scheme includes the development of grade separated junctions at Aviemore South, Granish and Black Mount, as well as four Left In Left Out junctions at Craigellachie National Nature Reserve (NNR), the vicinity of Lethendry (northbound and southbound) and Slochd. This will remove the need for potentially dangerous right turns across the path of traffic travelling in the opposite direction, which will improve safety for motorised and non-motorised users.
- 2.6.4. Upgrading the road from single carriageway to dual carriageway would reduce driver frustration, provide opportunity for safer overtaking and prevent right turn manoeuvres across the carriageway.

Accident Statistics

- 2.6.5. The majority of collisions on the A9 between Perth and Inverness occur along sections of single carriageway, and generally near to junctions. Whilst accident rates are below the national average, the severity of accidents is significantly higherⁱⁱⁱ.
- 2.6.6. Along the Dalraddy to Slochd extent there were 31No. reported accidents between 2008 and 2014. 23No. of these were categorised as slight, 5No. as serious and 3No. as fatal. For the accident categories of slight and serious, these are broadly equally split between occurring at junctions and on the mainline. By comparison, all fatal accidents are recorded as having occurred away from junctions.
- 2.6.7. The Proposed Scheme aims to improve the safety of the A9 which will reduce accident rates and severity.

Tourism and Recreation

- 2.6.8. The A9 provides access between Perth and Inverness and beyond, and is a popular tourist route enabling visitors to access different regions of Scotland. The area surrounding the Proposed Scheme offers a wealth of tourist attractions and recreational activities within and in the vicinity of the UK's largest National Park.
- 2.6.9. The area attracts mountaineers, climbers, walkers, cyclists/mountain bikers, bird-watchers and nature/outdoor enthusiasts year-round as well as more seasonal visitors for skiing/snowsports and field sports including salmon fishing, grouse/pheasant shooting and deer stalking. Aviemore, in particular, is a key location in Scotland's tourist industry and an economic hub for the CNP. There is a wide range of accommodation provided in the town and leisure facilities include the Strathspey Steam Railway, Cairngorm Reindeer Centre and Macdonald Spey Valley Golf and Country Club. Carrbridge is also a popular tourist destination with hotels, guest houses and holiday lets in the village and leisure attractions including the Landmark Forest Adventure Park.

- 2.6.10. The Cairngorms National Park Partnership Plan (2017) notes that ‘the visitor economy is more critical to the Cairngorms National Park than anywhere else in rural Scotland, supporting some 43% of employment in the area’. The Plan highlights the importance of maximising the opportunities for businesses, communities and visitors from the A9 dualling project. Moreover, Policy 3.2 states that in order to enable sustainable patterns of settlement development, infrastructure and communications there requires to be support of ‘sensitively designed improvements to the A9 and other trunk roads and mainline railway line as an integral part of enhancing the connectivity of the Highlands’.

2.7. A9 Dualling Strategic Environmental Context

- 2.7.1. The Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Environmental Report was reviewed in a public consultation in June 2013^x. An SEA Addendum Report was published in March 2014^{xi} that collated and reviewed feedback from the consultation process.
- 2.7.2. An A9 SEA Post Adoption Statement was published in September 2014^{xii}. The purpose of this report was to outline how the SEA findings and how the comments received on the SEA Environmental Report and SEA Addendum have been taken into account, including those from Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), Historic Environment Scotland (HES) and Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA). It also provides a Monitoring Framework to ensure the strategic constraints identified during SEA and comments are appropriately fed into DMRB Stage 2 and DMRB Stage 3.
- 2.7.3. The SEA Monitoring Framework sets a structure to clearly record how the key environmental constraints, identified by the SEA have been considered and addressed through each later stage of the DMRB assessment process.
- 2.7.4. Appendix 2.1 presents the SEA Monitoring Framework for the Dalraddy to Slochd project and identifies how the recommendations made in the SEA for each of the key environmental constraints have been considered in the DMRB Stage 2 and DMRB Stage 3 assessments.

ⁱ Scott Wilson Kirkpatrick (1997); A9 (T) Perth to Inverness Development of a Route Strategy – Phase 3 Final Report.

ⁱⁱ Scottish Government (2009); Strategic Transport Projects Review – Final Report.

ⁱⁱⁱ Transport Scotland (2016); A9 Dualling Case for Investment – Main Report 2016.

^{iv} Scottish Government (2011); Scotland’s Cities: Delivering for Scotland.

^v Scottish Executive (2006); National Transport Strategy.

^{vi} Scottish Government (2016); National Transport Strategy.

^{vii} Scottish Government (2014); Scotland’s Third National Planning Framework.

^{viii} Scottish Government (2015); Scotland’s Economic Strategy.

^{ix} Scottish Government (2011); Scotland’s Cities: Delivering for Scotland

^x Transport Scotland (2013); A9 Dualling Programme – Strategic Environmental Assessment, Environmental Report.

^{xi} Transport Scotland (2014). A9 Dualling Programme: Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) – Environmental Report Addendum.

^{xii} Transport Scotland (2014). A9 Dualling Programme: Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) – Post Adoption Statement.