

PE1540/Y

Scottish Government submission of 11 January 2019

Further to the Public Petitions Committee meeting on 6 December 2018, a number of actions were identified pertaining to provision of information in respect to the above subject. This letter contains an update on the information requested.

The Scottish Government fully appreciates the importance of the A83 to the Argyll and Bute area and remains fully committed to the region. Since 2007, there has been £70 million of investment in the maintenance of this route. This includes £11 million towards landslide mitigation works at the Rest and Be Thankful and improvements to the local diversion route to help keep Argyll open for business.

As you will be aware, at the conclusion of the A83 Route Study (2013) there was commitment from the Scottish Government to invest in the 'Red Option' suite of landslide mitigation measures (i.e. debris nets, drainage improvements and introduction of hillside planting). The Study determined that this option gave similar benefits to other options considered, but with lower costs and with a lower potential environmental impact.

These measures have already been successful in stopping landslip material from reaching the road and have kept the route open for an estimated 50-60 days when it would otherwise have closed. This includes stopping or managing the flow of a vast proportion of the 3200 tonnes of material and boulders that mobilised from the hillside during and after the landslide of October 2018, which was the largest landslide on this hillside in a decade.

Work also continues on-site to enhance the measures by constructing further roadside catchpits (as landslide mitigation) along the hillside as part of a programme of £4.4 million, which runs into late 2019/20.

The specific points raised in your letter of 6 December 2018 are covered below: -

Update on the National Transport Strategy:

The review of the National Transport Strategy (NTS) is currently being undertaken and will inform the second Strategic Transport Projects Review (STPR2). The NTS Review, which will set out a compelling vision for transport over the next 20 years, is being progressed through collaborative working with transport partners, development of a robust evidence base and stakeholder engagement with citizens across Scotland. Throughout 2018 engagements have taken place including specific collaboration with Young Scot and Age Scotland in rural, island and urban communities across Scotland to inform the development of the strategy. Transport Scotland is planning to publish the NTS by the end of 2019 and are committed to consulting on the strategy in advance of publication. This will be through further engagement then a formal consultation. With regards to how the A83 fits in to the strategy, the NTS will set the strategic framework to inform STPR2, but will not itself set specific route or infrastructure priorities.

STPR2 will identify potential transport investment as part of a Scotland-wide appraisal of strategic transport options and is intended to inform investment priorities for the next 20 years. Both the NTS and STPR2 are due to be concluded within the term of this Parliament. As announced by the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and

Connectivity (Michael Matheson) at the A83 Taskforce on 15 November 2018, Transport Scotland will be meeting with Argyll and Bute Council early in 2019 in one of the first formal regional engagements on NTS and STPR2. The aim of this first meeting will be to discuss the emerging vision, outcome and policies of the NTS and what they mean for Argyll. The meeting will also discuss the evidence gathering and objective setting stage of STPR2.

Consultancy support for the project has now been awarded. Over the next month, Transport Scotland will be working with the consultants on project planning and programming.

A83 Taskforce Meeting update:

In addition to the commitment mentioned above on prioritising Argyll and Bute within the second Strategic Transport Projects Review at the 15 November 2018 A83 Taskforce meeting, the Cabinet Secretary also established the review of the potential for additional physical landslide mitigation measures at the Rest and Be Thankful. The Cabinet Secretary has asked for the review to report back to him by mid-February in advance of the next Taskforce meeting in March to enable discussion of the findings at that meeting.

A link to the November A83 Taskforce meeting minutes will be shared with the Committee when they are published by the end of January.

Update on the Hillside Planting:

Transport Scotland also continues to work with the land owners to conclude the private sale of the identified land required to enable the planned hillside planting trial to commence. It is hoped to conclude the purchase early in 2019 so that preparatory works can commence shortly after. The planting of vegetation and forestry on the hillside has been designed with the Forestry Commission and aims to further reduce the risk of landslides. The benefits of this innovative proposal will only be realised around 15 to 25 years after planting. We believe that this is the first time that this technique has been used in the UK for stabilising a slope of this magnitude.

At the same time, proposals are being put in place to ensure that there is a robust monitoring programme in place for the planting scheme. This is likely to involve a number of people from a range of enterprises and institutions, including Transport Scotland, the Transport Research Laboratory and the Universities of Strathclyde and Dundee.

Summary:

Mr Matheson highlighted at the recent A83 Taskforce meeting that, with regard to calls for a 'permanent solution', any significant transport investment needs to be supported by robust evidence and fully considered through the appraisal and business case process. Recognising the previous A83 Trunk Road Route Study is now six years old, it is appropriate to reflect on not only the investment undertaken to date (which has successfully mitigated against landslides on the A83) but also the priorities for the Argyll & Bute region as a whole. This will help to identify if the transport needs of the region can be met by further interventions.

Therefore, Mr Matheson announced that this area would be prioritised in STPR2. This means that recommendations for Argyll & Bute can be one of the first reported. STPR2,

in its regional approach, will consider the transport needs for the whole area. The programme and timescales for this will be known in the new few months, further to the meetings of the regional working group and inception stage of the STPR consultancy commission.