

### **Roads Inquiry Sham Revealed and Parliament Misled over true Bypass costs.**

Evidence uncovered recently by The Herald newspaper shows that the Public Inquiry (PI) into the Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route was denied information that could, opponents say, have led to a different outcome. Information obtained using Freedom of Information legislation has revealed that Ministers were advised by Transport bosses of the escalating costs of the road before the Inquiry began in 2008. Ministers chose to ignore that advice and the Inquiry went ahead without the cost being updated. The government deliberately chose to exclude discussion of economic arguments at the Inquiry.

A RoadSense spokeswoman said, “It looks as though the road costs were deliberately underestimated. We were not allowed to discuss the cost of the AWPR at the Inquiry because of the severely restricted remit– under the terms set by the Transport Minister himself, who we now know had been warned at the time of rising costs. This is unacceptable behaviour. In the interests of vote catching in the North East, the taxpayers were deliberately deceived”.

“It is of real concern that when ministers were asked in Parliament in 2009 for up to date cost estimates for the AWPR, they didn’t inform MSP’s of the information they had received from Transport Scotland”

Road Sense campaigners believe that it is nothing short of scandalous that no review of costs for the AWPR has been carried out since 2003, even though the Government were advised to do so. It is not acceptable for ministers to shrug their shoulders over the real costs of large infrastructure projects like roads and avoid the issue of cost over-runs. They are responsible – and we pay the tax bill.

It is also instructive that a respected institution, the Civil Engineering Contractors Association (CECA), has claimed that a rise of at least 10% in costs is likely. They say that this is particularly the case for the AWPR, whose costs will be largely driven by fuel-based products such as bituminous material and the fuel of the vehicles carrying out the construction work

The correspondence also reveals for the first time that Transport bosses and ministers acknowledge that the cost of the road could rise to between £800-£900 million, something which was never tested at the public inquiry and has never been made public.

It has been clear that the costs were underestimated from the very beginning, perhaps with recognition that the AWPR would not gain approval if the public were informed of the true costs.

RoadSense has previously been ridiculed in the press for “scaremongering” about the possible costs of the road, but it hopes that the whole topic of the costs of the AWPR will now be revisited.

Road Sense has also passed the documents to lawyers who are pursuing the appeal at the Inner Court of Session.

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#### **Media Contacts:**

William Walton, Tel: 0781 2070035 or Sheona Warnock, email: sheonawarnock@hotmail.com

#### **Notes for Editors:**

1. The Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route (AWPR) is a proposed 46km long bypass linking Stonehaven in the south to Blackdog north of the city. Tavish Scott chose his own route in December 2005 after a public consultation exercise in which five options were put forward for consideration.

The AWPR was subject to a Public Inquiry in September 2008 – January 2009. Ministers denied any consideration of alternative routes at that inquiry. The Minister approved the scheme in December 2009. The Scottish Government has repeatedly stated that the route will cost £295-395m. However, more than £150m has already been spent on ground investigations, property acquisition and property relocation and the true costs are likely to be around one billion pounds.

2. Road Sense was formed in January 2006 and is a group that includes residents from across the Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire area that are objecting to the Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route as it is currently planned. It presented arguments against the route at the Public Inquiry but argued that the remit was unduly limited with the result that much of its evidence was deemed inadmissible. RoadSense has over 500 supporters. More information on Road Sense can be found at: [www.road-sense.org](http://www.road-sense.org)

3. More information on the AWPR can be found at: [www.awpr.co.uk](http://www.awpr.co.uk). More information on the AWPR Public Local inquiry can be found at [www.awpr-pli.org](http://www.awpr-pli.org)

4. "Warning over cost of bypass" by Damien Henderson, Transport Correspondent. 27 Sep 2011 <http://www.heraldscotland.com/news/transport-environment/warning-over-cost-of-bypass-1.1126089>

5. Patrick Harvie MSP and Alex Johnstone MSP both asked Parliamentary questions related to the cost of the AWPR on 21<sup>st</sup> July 2009 and 24<sup>th</sup> September 2009 respectively.