

Bypassing the truth

The case against the Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route

a briefing by Friends of the Earth Scotland



Friends of the Earth Scotland

The Scottish Executive has announced plans for an Aberdeen western bypass. Friends of the Earth, locally and nationally, are opposing this environmentally and socially destructive scheme.

Friends of the Earth considers the entire process a “sham” and a “developers’ charter”. We are demanding that the road plans be shelved and that sustainable alternatives to road building be considered.

What is the Aberdeen Western Bypass?

The Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route, to give the road its official name, is a new dual carriageway planned to be bulldozed through Aberdeen’s western green belt from the A90 in the Charleston area, south of the city, to the A90 near Blackdog, north of Aberdeen.

Who wants the Aberdeen Western Bypass?

The bypass is being pushed for by the Scottish Executive, business groups and by roads lobby organisations. The scheme is being promoted by the North East Scotland Transport Partnership (NESTRANS) which is a group made up of Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Councils, business groups, Scottish Enterprise Grampian and Aberdeen and Grampian Chamber of Commerce.

What is the current situation?

In 2005, five possible routes for the bypass were ‘consulted’ on. However, the consultation was badly skewed as it failed to offer sustainable alternatives to road-building as an option. Thousands of objections poured in to the proposed routes, though it was the ‘Murtle’ route which met with the largest community opposition. This was mainly due to presence on the route of the Camphill community for people with special needs, whose Newton Dee site would have been devastated by the road.

In December 2005, Camphill’s campaign proved successful when Transport Minister Tavish Scott announced that the ‘Murtle’ option was to be



dropped. However, he left many observers dumbfounded by opting for, what he bizarrely called, an “innovative” solution - a route that was never part of the so-called consultation.

The new proposal is not for one new road, but for two new roads! It will see a dual-carriageway stretching from Charleston in the south, through Milltimber Brae, to the Blackdog junction north of Aberdeen with an additional road from Milltimber via Netherley to Stonehaven.

Residents along the route are furious that the chosen option was not included in the consultation. This decision by the Executive reinforces Friends of the Earth’s view that the whole process behind the project has been a sham from the start.

How much and who pays?

The original plan was supposed to cost £80 million. In 2002 the cost was put at £120 million. The minister’s announcement now puts the cost at anywhere between £295 million and £395 million (most likely toward the higher end). Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire Councils originally agreed to meet 9.5% of the cost each with the Executive covering the remaining 81%. There will be a ‘black hole’ of

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over £50m in the funding if the councils refuse to meet their 9.5% of the new cost.

What happens now?

The Executive expects the design of the route and road orders to be ready by late 2006 with completion by 2011. The plans will be subject to an Environmental Impact Assessment and there will almost certainly be a Public Local Inquiry, probably towards the end of 2006.

Why Friends of the Earth opposes the Aberdeen Western Bypass:

1. *The bypass will do nothing to reduced traffic demand or congestion*

The scheme will have no effect at reducing congestion levels. The Scottish Office 'Sustainable Transport Study for Aberdeen' concluded that the bypass would only remove 2% of city centre traffic. Aberdeen's congestion problem is mainly on the five main radial routes into the city (Stonehaven, Deeside, Westhill, Dyce, Ellon) at peak times and an orbital route like the AWPR can have only a marginal effect on this problem.

The impact of this proposal in terms of traffic generation has not even been considered despite the fact that Scottish government policy has for almost a decade acknowledged that road-building will tend to generate more traffic: "We acknowledge that the 'predict and provide' approach to road building is unaffordable, unsustainable and, ultimately, self defeating. New road capacity can generate more usage and add to congestion." (Transport White Paper 'Travel Choices for Scotland', Scottish Office: 1998)

The proposal has not been assessed against Aberdeen Council's targets to reduce traffic: "By 2011, to reduce the total number of vehicle trips within the Aberdeen area, consisting of the City and its main catchment area of 20 miles around, by 20% of 1997 levels (a reduction of 29% on projected "do nothing" figures)."

Instead the road is being supported to open up new development land. It is a developers' charter for ribbon development.

The new road itself will do little to assist Aberdeen City Council's plan to address the fact that 60% of City Centre workers commute by car and that whilst 64% of travel-to-work journeys are less than



Dan Barlow / FoE

4 km, more than half of these are made by car. (Aberdeen City Council's local transport strategy - December 2000).

2. *Failure to investigate alternatives:*

The scheme is being promoted despite the fact that, contrary to Government advice, the scheme has not been subject to a full multi-modal appraisal i.e. sustainable alternatives such as public transport investment and better traffic management have not been looked in to:

"We want to see new roads built only where it makes sense to do so: that is, after a thorough appraisal of the costs and benefits associated with any proposed scheme and any possible alternative modes which might serve the same route." (Transport White Paper 'Travel Choices for Scotland', Scottish Office: 1998).

"Before including major new [road] schemes in their strategy, local authorities should be able to demonstrate that they have looked at alternative or complementary solutions such as public transport improvements and traffic management measures, and that the road scheme is consistent with an integrated transport strategy." ('Guidance on Local Transport Strategies and Road Traffic Reduction Reports', Scottish Executive: 2000)

The 'Sustainable Transport Study for Aberdeen' (Scottish Office: 1998) found that traffic levels in the city could be reduced by 29% by 2011 through low-cost combinations of measures, including parking controls, extended bus priority and improvement to walking and cycling priorities. could reduce traffic levels in the city by 29% by 2011.

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3. Air pollution problems will not be solved by a new road

Air quality at a number of sites in Aberdeen is currently set to exceed guideline levels for a number of pollutants. In particular the Aberdeen Local Air Quality Management Assessment report (August 2004) predicts that National Air Quality Standards for both NO₂ and PM₁₀ will be breached at a number of locations. It is a statutory duty for local authorities to hit the European air quality targets and the Government may risk legal action if these are not met.

Air quality improvements are one of the justifications being made for building a bypass. However, there is no evidence that this will in fact be the case.

4. New roads result in more climate change emissions

The transport sector accounts for 14% of Scotland's greenhouse gas emissions and 23% of climate changing carbon dioxide emissions. Emissions from the transport sector have increased by 8% in Scotland since 1990 (Netcen, 2004) and road traffic is the second fastest growing sources of greenhouse gas emissions.

The Scottish Executive's Transport Delivery Report produced in March 2002 acknowledges that "action is required now to prevent rising carbon dioxide emissions from road transport." Indeed the UK Climate Change Strategy requires that the transport sector delivers 40% of the UK's proposed reduction of CO₂ levels by 2010.

Aberdeen City Council's Climate Change Action Plan also states that it is imperative to "look at how we can reduce the emissions from fossil fuels that are causing climate change". Despite this, no information on the climate change implications of implementing this road project have been provided.

5. The road will destroy some of Aberdeenshire's most unspoiled and precious land

The route will plough through Netherley - a valuable area of wild and unspoiled land. This landscape includes the Red Moss raised bog which is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) managed by The Scottish Wildlife Trust - who opposed the plans during the original consultation.

North East Scotland Biodiversity, of which



Gregor McAbery

Aberdeen City and Shire councils are both partners, has said: "Intact lowland raised bogs are a priority habitat and one of Europe's rarest and most threatened habitats. They occur throughout the UK in flat low-lying basins. Since the start of the 19th century, the extent of prime lowland raised bog has decreased by about 95%."

Indeed, the launch of Scottish Natural Heritage's Natural Care Grampian Lowland Bog Scheme was at Red Moss in 2004. The Councils should be helping to repair and care for these rare habitats, not promoting their destruction.

SNH recently assessed Red Moss as: "Clearly a valuable site despite the damage that the area has suffered." And added "the site has great potential for monitoring recovery and for interpretation." There were also 64 species found present in the area.

The bypasses own STAG1 assessment states that: "Red Moss of Netherley SSSI falls within the route corridor which may affect the hydrological regime and result in direct habitat loss (major). It may not be possible to fully mitigate this impact."

Water supply to the Moss will be affected, as will the entire ecosystem of the area, including bats, buzzards, deer, otters, swans and surrounding woodlands.

The proposed route also passes close to historic standing stones and megalithic burial sites at Kempston hill.

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What should happen instead?

Plans for an Aberdeen Western Bypass should be shelved. The money committed by the Executive and councils should be spent on sustainable alternatives instead. This could include:

i) An enhanced bus services and infrastructure

- Provide additional bus services to meet the changing needs of the area
- Expand bus priority to ensure bus reliability and cut travel time
- Improve bus information providing Realtime bus information both online and at stop.
- Improve and expand evening, Sunday and night service links.
- Provide CCTV on all buses

ii) Completing Aberdeen Crossrail.

- New stations, more frequent trains and additional park and ride.
- Install CCTV on all trains and in Aberdeen station

iii) Tackling congestion through demand management

- Rapidly expand controlled parking/residents parking zones to cover all areas within walking distance of the city centre or major traffic generators like universities and business parks
- Assess the benefits from both local congestion charging and national road user charging

iv) Encouraging cycling and walking

- Invest in cycle routes, pedestrian crossings, street lighting and pavement maintenance to encourage people to walk or cycle more of their trips.

v) Exploring the possibilities of trams in Aberdeen

- Cities of Aberdeen's size and population are well-suited to tram systems. Similar sized cities such as Graz and Linz in Austria and Bern and Lausanne in Switzerland all have tram systems.

What can I do now?

1. Sign the Parliamentary petition. Use the online petition to urging the Scottish Executive to think again. Access it at: www.STOPtheBYPASS.com

2. Write to you MSP. Urge them to press for this unnecessary and destructive road project to be dropped. To find out who your MSP is and how to contact them call 0845 278 1999 or visit www.scottish.parliament.uk/msp/index.htm

3. Make a donation to the campaign. Halting this road is going to require money as well as time. Make a donation at: www.STOPtheBYPASS.com

4. Join Friends of the Earth Scotland. Without supporters Friends of the Earth can't take action to protect the environment. With your support we can do so much more. You can join today by calling 0131 554 9977 or visiting: www.foe-scotland.org.uk

5. Support Aberdeen Friends of the Earth. If you live in or around Aberdeen then why not get involved in local activities to stop the bypass? For information please call Alan Carter on 01224 276810 or visit: www.aberdeen-foe.org.uk

Useful links

Aberdeen Friends of the Earth - Local Group
www.aberdeen-foe.org.uk

Greenbelt Alliance - local conservation group
www.aberdeengreenbelt.org

Road Sense - local community campaign
www.road-sense.org

Roadblock - national campaign group
www.roadblock.org.uk

Official Aberdeen bypass website
www.awpr.co.uk

Friends of the Earth Scotland, Lamb's House, Burgess Street, Edinburgh, EH6 6RD. Tel: 0131 554 9977 Email: info@foe-scotland.org.uk
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