

Open Letter to all Recently Elected MSP's

on Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route (AWPR) – 18 May 2007

With the recent national elections and the formation of a new administration, there is an opportunity for reflection on key policy matters. Road Sense is a campaign group with the objective of getting the best Transport Solution for the North East. As we all come to terms with a new Scottish Executive, I would like to provide you with some constructive comments for your consideration on the issue of the proposed Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route.

AWPR Aims

The objectives of the AWPR as stated by the Scottish Executive were originally to reduce city centre congestion and to provide improved North/South transport communication. These have been amended more recently to include the completion of the strategic road network. In addition, the local Councils clearly see the AWPR as supporting green-field development opportunities.

AWPR Status

The AWPR was endorsed by the Scottish Executive in 2003. The AWPR team performed the detailed planning on the Murtle option which included a design and environmental impact assessment. Nicol Stephen (the Transport Minister at that time) then initiated a route consultation process in 2004. The public consultation process was undertaken during 2005 and Tavish Scott selected a new option which had not been included in the process.

The new 'option' transpired to be no more than a broad corridor of upto 2km in width which, without any further consultation, was subsequently narrowed to a preferred route. During the second half of 2006 the AWPR team completed the design of the main carriage-way routing, partially prepared an Environmental Impact Assessment and issued Draft Special Road Orders. Later this year the Environmental Impact Assessment is scheduled to be completed and Draft Road Orders for the necessary accommodation roads are to be issued.

The Executive's cost estimate of the current proposals is £295-395m but many people now estimate that the realistic capital cost will be in excess of £500m.

AWPR – Issues with Tavish Scott's Specific Proposals

Tavish Scott's proposals will address the North/South communication issue but there is much debate about every other aspect. Specifically:

The proposed route is considerably more expensive than the other options previously considered. There is dispute on the analysis on the impact on city centre congestion with some Scottish Executive and Council documents indicating only a 2% traffic reduction. The Environmental Impact Assessment states that the impact of the southern section of the AWPR on a range of matters such as land-use, water quality, ecology, nature conservation, landscape, cultural heritage and noise is likely to be adverse or significantly adverse. The proposals will require the re-location of Aberdeen's International School.

Regardless of whether one believes in the concept of an AWPR or not, Tavish Scott's proposals seem to be the worst of all worlds – they are enormously financially and environmentally costly yet they will only produce minor overall transport benefits.

Alternatives

There are numerous alternative options to the existing proposals. A proper review of these route options including tunnelling could yield far greater transport benefits with significantly lower environmental and amenity impacts.

Early upgrades could include investment on key access junctions: Haudagan, Bridge of Dee, Airport Roundabout and Parkhill. Review of traffic lights and access on Anderson Drive could also improve free-flow.

Proper consideration of significant investment in public transport should be given as forming part of the overall solution.

Public View

It is reported that the business community are 100% behind the AWPR. However, many business interests are against Tavish Scott's specific proposals because they do not address or solve many basic business needs.

Over 5000 people signed an e-petition requesting the Executive to review Tavish Scott's proposals and over 8000 objected to the Draft Special Road Orders.

In a pre-election survey most candidates for the various elections supported the AWPR in principle but did not support Tavish Scott's proposals.

Scottish Transport Priorities

Over recent months a number of transport issues have been raised for the new Administration to address. These include: the Forth Road Crossing, A96 Upgrade, A82 Upgrade and dualling of the A9.

The value for money and efficiency of Mr Scott's proposals for the AWPR will have to be set against the budget available and the potential benefits to the nation. This will be the key decision for the new administration.

Summary

It is clear that the North East aspires to and deserves improved transportation effectiveness and efficiency. However it is equally clear to everyone that Tavish Scott's specific proposals do not offer a sensible part of the solution.

The objective of Road Sense is to work for the best transport solution for the North East. We urge the new administration to move quickly to invest in immediate improvement initiatives and in the mean-time we suggest an open and independent review of all the options (including a no-AWPR option) in order to avoid wasting further significant expenditure on what is the wrong solution.

If these proposals proceed to a Public Inquiry then they will be extensively tested against all Planning and Environmental policies and regulations and we strongly believe that they will be found to be noncompliant. A better option is to start investing now on "quick wins" and review the larger transportation issue for the area to ensure the right solution.

Yours Sincerely,

William Walton, Chairman - Road Sense