

PRESS RELEASE

Monday 12 May 2008 – for immediate use

ROAD SENSE CAMPAIGNERS DEMAND SCOTTISH MINISTERS RE-THINK ON SCOPE OF PUBLIC LOCAL INQUIRY INTO PROPOSED ABERDEEN BYPASS (AWPR)

- *Campaigners claim that the scope of the inquiry is too narrow and must be broadened*
- *Inquiry must discuss the principle and cost of the AWPR project – not just ‘technical aspects’*
- *Inquiry should not go ahead until a complete and up-to-date AWPR costing is available*
- *If this does not happen, the inquiry will be “window-dressing” and “a cynical whitewash”*

Campaigners from Road Sense, (1) the community campaign against the proposed Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route (AWPR), (2) today (Monday 12 May 2008) demanded a re-think from Scottish Ministers on the scope of what will be discussed at the forthcoming Public Local Inquiry (PLI) into the proposed new road.

Speaking in the run up to the pre inquiry meeting for the AWPR PLI, to be held in Aberdeen on Tuesday 13 May 2008 (tomorrow), the campaigners claim that the scope of what is currently proposed for discussion at the AWPR PLI is too narrow, as it appears the PLI will not discuss whether the road should actually go ahead as proposed or not. At present, the PLI will only discuss technical and environmental aspects of the proposed new road.

In a recent letter to objectors to the AWPR project, the Scottish Government stated: *“Having accepted the need in principle for the road, Scottish Ministers do not wish to be advised on the justification for the principle of the Special Road Scheme in economic, policy or strategy terms.”* and: *“Scottish Ministers have directed that they only wish to be advised on the ‘technical aspects’ of the route choice...”*

William Walton, Chair of Road Sense, said: *“Scottish Ministers’ decision to only allow discussion at the AWPR PLI on ‘technical aspects’ of the road, and to ignore the important arguments for and against the AWPR in principle, means that the PLI will not discuss the most important question about the proposed new road – whether it should actually go ahead or not! This is disgraceful, and particularly disrespectful to the ten-thousand-plus people who took the time to object to the proposal. ”*

Mr Walton continued: *“We do not accept the restricted terms of reference and narrow scope for the AWPR PLI, since we do not accept that the case for the new road going ahead has been made by the Scottish Government. The scope of the inquiry must be broadened to include the question of whether the road should go ahead or not, as well as considering alternative options to the road as proposed. This would be in the best interests of the wider community, not just the huge engineering companies, property developers and self-interested politicians who are desperate to build the road for their own personal gain.”*

The Road Sense campaigners also claim that the AWPR PLI should not go ahead until all of the relevant information has been made available, including a comprehensive, complete and up-to-date re-costing of the AWPR project as it is currently proposed.

Scottish Ministers continue to promote the AWPR project using a projected cost of £295-£395 million, which was first presented in 2005. The Road Sense campaigners claim that the cost has undoubtedly risen in the meantime, as the scope of the project has changed, as it has grown considerably, and as it has fallen behind schedule.

Henry Irvine-Fortescue, Vice Chair of Road Sense, said: *"We believe that the inquiry should not be allowed to begin until a comprehensive, complete and up-to-date re-costing of the AWPR project as currently proposed has been undertaken and made public. The project has changed and grown so much since 2005, that the estimated cost being used by Scottish Ministers to justify it cannot be correct."*

Mr Irvine-Fortescue continued: *"When Tavish Scott MSP, the then Transport Minister announced the choice of the new 'hybrid' route in December 2005, he said the cost would come in at the lower end of the estimate i.e. £300 million. We don't believe this will be the case. We also believe the project as it now stands will not work, and represents poor value for money, especially for local taxpayers who are seeing schools closed and public services cut by Aberdeen City Council, which will have to foot a large chunk of the uncapped bill for the AWPR project."*

Under the current proposal for funding the AWPR, Aberdeen City Council is committed to pay 7.25 percent of the total cost of the project. Even at the projected total cost used by Ministers of £295 – £395 million, this would mean that Aberdeen City Council would be required to find £21 million – £29 million to pay for its share of the cost, at a time when it is particularly cash-starved.

Sheona Warnock from Road Sense, added: *"When Scottish Ministers state that they have 'accepted the need in principle for the road', what they are actually saying is that they have already made up their minds, and that the AWPR will be built regardless of the Inquiry process and outcome. This all begs the question, why is the Scottish Government bothering to have a PLI at all, if it is going to refuse to hear any arguments against the project in principle, to examine alternatives to the proposed road, or to properly examine the true costs of the project."*

Sheona Warnock continued: *"Prior to the Scottish Parliament elections in May 2007, Road Sense received an assurance from the then SNP Leader, Alex Salmond, that any final decision on the AWPR would be based on the findings of the PLI, yet SNP Government Ministers now state that they have accepted the need in principle for the road. If Scottish Ministers have already made their minds up, then the forthcoming PLI will simply be window-dressing and a cynical whitewash."*

The Road Sense campaigners will be holding a public meeting at 7.00pm on Friday 30 May 2008 at the International School of Aberdeen, 296 North Deeside Road, Milltimber, Aberdeen, AB13 0AB. The campaigners are inviting anyone who is interested in the proposed AWPR to attend the public meeting, including members of the media.

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Editors Notes:

1. Road Sense

Road Sense was formed in January 2006 and is a group that includes residents from across the Aberdeen area who are objecting to the proposed AWPR. See: www.road-sense.org

2. Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route (AWPR)

More information on the AWPR can be found at: www.awpr.org

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