

PRESS RELEASE

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IMPORTANT OBJECTORS EXCLUDED FROM FORTHCOMING ABERDEEN BYPASS PUBLIC LOCAL INQUIRY BECAUSE OF ITS LIMITED REMIT AND SCOPE

- *Narrow scope of what will be considered at AWPR PLI rules Friends of the Earth Scotland and Transform Scotland out from taking part*
- *AWPR PLI condemned as a “charade” and “window-dressing”*

The narrow remit and limited scope for the forthcoming Public Local Inquiry (PLI) into the Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route (AWPR) (1) has ruled out a number of important organisations and objectors from taking part, including Friends of the Earth Scotland and Transform Scotland – the Scottish campaign for sustainable transport (2).

The AWPR PLI will commence on Tuesday 09 September 2008, and will run for ten weeks (3). The Scottish Government has stated, with regard to the scope of the AWPR PLI: *“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.”*

This decision to limit the scope of what can be discussed at the AWPR PLI means that it will not consider the basic question of whether the project should go ahead or not. It is also likely that other important issues may not be discussed, including the project’s uncapped cost, its context within wider transport policy, and its relevance in the context of climate change and peak oil.

The Scottish Government’s decision to restrict the scope of the AWPR PLI means that a large number of the unprecedented ten-thousand-plus objectors to the AWPR, including many of Scotland’s environment and transport expert and campaigning groups, will now be excluded from giving evidence to the PLI, as their objections and arguments now lie outwith the Inquiry’s narrow scope. These objectors include organisations such as Friends of the Earth Scotland and Transform Scotland (2).

Colin Howden, Director of Transform Scotland said: *“The decision to restrict the scope of the Inquiry is designed to silence and disenfranchise objectors to the road. We have a range of well-considered, factual and reasonable arguments to offer as to why the project should not go ahead, but the Scottish Government has chosen to silence opponents by excluding their arguments from consideration. It is clear that the Scottish Ministers are not prepared to allow free and open scrutiny of this project, and as such we are not prepared to participate in the charade that this Inquiry represents. It’s clear that the Scottish Government wants this road at all costs, and the Inquiry is a simply an exercise in window-dressing.”*

Duncan McLaren, Chief Executive of Friends of the Earth Scotland, said: *“The limited scope of the PLI means it won’t have grounds or evidence to reject the road, making it look like a foregone conclusion. If this is the case why have a PLI at all? We are mystified as to the legal foundation for such a limited scope and curtailment of terms. The AWPR is not listed in the National Planning Framework, and is not classed as nationally significant scheme, so Ministers should not be trying to push it through as they are. There may well be legal grounds to challenge the limited scope of the PLI.”*

Campaigners from Road Sense (4), the community campaign against the AWPR, have announced that they will take part at the forthcoming PLI, despite its narrow remit and limited scope. The campaigners believe that they can still convince the PLI Reporters that the AWPR as proposed is not the best solution to the transport problems of the northeast, even just relying on arguments allowed within the narrow remit and limited scope of the PLI.

Henry Irvine-Fortescue, Vice Chair of Road Sense, said: *“Road Sense is gravely concerned by Scottish Minister’s decision to restrict the scope of what can be discussed at the PLI. This deeply unfair and undemocratic move will put many of our arguments against the AWPR outside the scope of the PLI. That said, we feel we have to participate. We owe it to the thousands of people and organisations who objected to the road, and who have now been excluded from taking part in the PLI.”*

Mr Irvine-Fortescue continued: *“We still have strong and compelling, factual arguments against the new road as it is currently proposed, and are looking forward to exposing the many flaws and half truths in the arguments put forward by the road’s proposers. The exclusion of many objectors from the PLI constitutes a serious blow to public participation and local democracy, and creates a significant democratic deficit. We will fight at the PLI on behalf of all of those who have been unfairly and cynically excluded from doing so themselves.”*

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Editors Notes:

1. Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route (AWPR)

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

2. Transform Scotland and Friends of the Earth Scotland

More information on Transform Scotland can be found at: www.transformscotland.org.uk.

More information on Friends of the Earth Scotland can be found at: www.foe-scotland.org.uk.

3. Public Local Inquiry (PLI)

The AWPR PLI will commence on Tuesday 09 September 2008, and will run for approximately ten weeks. It will be held in the Cedar Suite of the Aberdeen Hilton Treetops Hotel, and will normally sit for four days each week (Tuesday to Friday). More information on the AWPR PLI can be found at: www.awpr-pli.org

4. 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 AWPR as it is currently proposed. More information on Road Sense can be found at: www.road-sense.org

From the press office of Portable PR, on behalf of Road Sense
