

## **PRESS RELEASE**

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### **ANTI-ROAD CAMPAIGNERS STAGE FLAMBOYANT DEMONSTRATION AT START OF ABERDEEN BYPASS PUBLIC INQUIRY**

#### ***Campaigners use shop window dummies to illustrate their claim that the Public Inquiry is just "window dressing" by Scottish Ministers***

Anti-road campaigners will stage a flamboyant demonstration and photo-call (1) outside the opening of the Public Local Inquiry (PLI) into the Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route (AWPR) (2) this morning (Tuesday 09 September 2008).

The campaigners, from groups such as Road Sense (2), the Scottish Green Party, Friends of the Earth Scotland and Transform Scotland (3), will use shop window dummies, floating dummies, and other props to illustrate their claim that the AWPR PLI is just "window dressing" by the Scottish Government.

The Scottish Government has stated, with regard to the remit and scope of the Public Local Inquiry: "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 narrow remit and limited scope for the AWPR PLI has prevented a number of important organisations and objectors from giving evidence against the proposed new road, including Friends of the Earth Scotland and Transform Scotland. These organisations, and others, such as the Scottish Wildlife Trust, have been informed that their factual and technical arguments against the proposed new road are beyond the limited scope of what will be considered at the AWPR PLI. This has also led the Scottish Green Party to boycott the AWPR PLI as a "sham".

The decision by Scottish Ministers to limit the scope of what will be considered at the AWPR Public Local Inquiry means that it will not consider the basic question of whether the project should go ahead or not. Other important issues will not be discussed, including the project's uncapped cost to the taxpayer, its context within wider transport policy, and its relevance in the context of climate change and carbon emissions, dwindling oil supplies and rising fuel prices.

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 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."

Shiona Baird, Vice Convener of the Scottish Green Party and former Green MSP for North East Scotland, said: "Mr Salmond and his colleagues have made their intentions clear. This road will go ahead, regardless of public concern, regardless of the thousands of objections, all because they think it will win them brownie points for "investing in the North East". The Inquiry is therefore a sham, a debate simply about where the white lines go, and we refuse to participate in a process where the outcome has already been decided."

Campaigners from Road Sense will, however, participate in the AWPR 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 that are allowed within the narrow remit and limited scope.

William Walton, Chair of Road Sense, said: "Road Sense is gravely concerned by Scottish Ministers 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 have objected to the road, and who have now been excluded from having their objections considered, and from taking part in the PLI."

Mr Walton continued: "We 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."

The campaigners are investigating a number of legal challenges to both the process followed by the AWPR's promoters, and the narrow remit and limited scope set for the Public Local Inquiry. There is also the possibility of an infraction being reported to the European Commission under the EU Habitats Directive because of the proposed road's impact on protected and endangered wildlife and their habitats.

Should the PLI Reporter recommend that the AWPR not be built, but Scottish Ministers choose to go ahead and build it anyway (as was the case with the PLI into the M74 in Glasgow), the campaigners may also consider taking the project to judicial review.

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 proposed new 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 a nationally significant scheme, so Ministers should not be trying to push it through as they are. There may well be legal grounds to challenge this."

## **ENDS**

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### **Editors Notes:**

#### **1. Demonstration and Photo-call**

The demonstration outside the opening of the AWPR PLI will take place between 9.30am – 10.30am on Tuesday 09 September 2008 at the entrance to The Hilton Aberdeen Treetops Hotel, 161 Springfield Road, Aberdeen, AB15 7AQ (for directions, see: [www.hilton.co.uk/aberdeen](http://www.hilton.co.uk/aberdeen)).

#### **2. Public Local Inquiry into the Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route**

The AWPR PLI commenced on Tuesday 09 September 2008, and will run for approximately ten weeks. It is being 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 can be found at: [www.awpr.co.uk](http://www.awpr.co.uk)
- More information on the AWPR PLI can be found at: [www.awpr-pli.org](http://www.awpr-pli.org)

#### **3. Road Sense**

Road Sense is the community campaign against the AWPR as proposed. It was formed in January 2006 and is a group that includes residents from across the Aberdeen area and northeast who are objecting to the AWPR. The organisation thinks the AWPR as proposed is not the best solution to the transport problems of the northeast.

- More information on Road Sense can be found at: [www.road-sense.org](http://www.road-sense.org)

#### **4. Other groups involved**

- More information on the Scottish Green Party can be found at: [www.scottishgreens.org.uk](http://www.scottishgreens.org.uk)
- More information on Friends of the Earth Scotland can be found at: [www.foe-scotland.org.uk](http://www.foe-scotland.org.uk)
- More information on Transform Scotland can be found at: [www.transformscotland.org.uk](http://www.transformscotland.org.uk)

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

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