



Press Release **6th September 2006**

For immediate release

Farmer urges MSPs to reconsider Aberdeen By-pass

Paddy Imhof, a farmer and tree grower at Wedderhill Farm Blairs, today submits a petition to MSPs of the Scottish Parliament's Public Petitions Committee in Edinburgh. The petition asks the Scottish Executive to review its support for the Aberdeen By-pass. The petition has the support of Road Sense, the local group challenging the proposed by-pass, and Aberdeen Friends of the Earth.

Paddy's petition calls for the "Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Executive to review its proposals for the controversial Aberdeen Western Peripheral route in light of growing public concern with this project". The petition was formally lodged with the Scottish Parliament on 29th June 2006 and will be considered by the Public Petitions Committee at its meeting on Wednesday 6th September 2006. The petition now has almost 5,000 signatures.

Paddy Imhof first became involved in the by-pass issue when Camphill were battling against it going through their land. He became more active in February this year after the final route corridor had been announced and he had attended public meetings organised by Road Sense and Friends of the Earth.

Paddy said this morning:

'It became apparent to me pretty quickly that I wanted to take a personal and active role. After discussing it with a group of friends I decided to organise and put my name on a petition to the Parliament. This is not something I have ever done before and it took some getting used to the fact that my name would now be in the public domain.

The AWPR is a 1970s solution to a problem of the 21st century. It is not appropriate to build more roads to solve congestion. Roads simply create more traffic. This was borne out very clearly in a study published recently by the CPRE and The Countryside Agency which shows that recent by-passes have not reached the objectives set for them. Traffic problems were worse after the by-passes were constructed than they were before they were built. Any attempt at solving traffic problems by building more roads is inappropriate if not crazy, especially on the scale of the AWPR.

What we need to do is reduce traffic, not accommodate it. We treat traffic growth as if it was a natural phenomenon, when in fact it is created by ourselves. Therefore we are in control, ultimately, and we must tackle it at source, we must change our behaviour. Climate change is no longer a distant possibility; it is now a reality that is beginning to bite through an increasing number of weather abnormalities and catastrophes. We still have a chance to turn things around. It is up to each one of us to make a move in

reducing harmful emissions, in saving energy and also in becoming aware of our utter dependency on oil-derived energy. We must let our politicians know that this approach is what we expect from them.

Our attitude to nature has to change from being rapacious to caring. There have been many positive developments in our view of Nature and therefore, losing greenbelt land is now of concern to many more people than before. To tarmac over and scar even more countryside I find outrageous and upsetting, particularly as I suspect what is really behind this project is the creation of more development opportunities for the short-term gain of a few individuals.

We live at a time when supply and demand of oil is very finely balanced, as many people with senior jobs in the oil industry tell me. Wouldn't it be something if we in the Northeast could create a Modern Transport System that would be the envy of the rest of the country? One that reduces reliance on the private motor car, reduces climate change emissions, gets everyone to work on time and saves us all vast amounts of money.

There is no denying that we have traffic and congestion problems in Aberdeen and that they urgently need to be tackled, I'm not just a simple nay-sayer. One of the big problems we have is the growing number of single occupant vehicles; a bypass will simply exacerbate that because it will encourage higher car use. The councils, through Nestrans, do actually have some enlightened measures in the pipeline, including Crossrail, better walking and cycling facilities, improved bus services, better parking controls, various junction improvements etc which in themselves would already remove a large part of the justification for the AWPR. To me, it seems almost as if they are lumbered with this project, like it or not. Furthermore, the freight gauge enhancement announced in May has the potential to take a huge amount of freight traffic off the roads and reinstating railway up to Fraserburgh and a light railway out to Banchory is no longer an unaffordable pipe dream.

We cannot look at traffic problems in isolation, we have to have a much larger kind of thinking which starts with planning: no more developments that depend on the car for access, no more so-called sink estates. Aberdeen is a pleasant compact city; we do not want ribbon development along a route corridor which will give rise to more unsightly out-of town shopping centres which in turn will empty the city centre of viable shops. The oft-quoted argument that we need this bypass for the economic well-being of the Northeast is well answered by the 1999 SACTRA study that shows quite clearly that traffic can be cut without harming the economy.

If we should have the misfortune to be saddled with this project it would be like mortgaging our future. It is my feeling that it is going to cost much more than the £295-395m that was announced by Tavish Scott – according to the official figures a mile of dual carriageway now costs £15.3m - which would bring this project to over £400m already; that is probably a very conservative figure anyway, as the basic road building ingredients such as bitumen, steel and diesel for construction are going up in price in tandem with the increase in the oil price. Furthermore, all major road projects invariably go into huge cost overruns'.

A send-off for Paddy's Petition took place last Saturday, 2 September, when Road Sense held a Ceilidh at Kippie Lodge. The all ticket affair was sold-out, with over 200

supporters dancing the night away to The Grey Cats Ceilidh band, with Paddy himself on double bass. Those at the Ceilidh wished Paddy well for his trip to Edinburgh. The event helped to raise over £5000 towards future public inquiry costs, thanks to the generous support of those who took part.

Ends

NOTES FOR EDITORS

Reports on the study of by-pass failures by The Countryside Agency and the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) can be found on the following links:

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/5138912.stm>
http://www.countryside.gov.uk/WhoWeAreAndWhatWeDo/roads_report.asp
<http://news.independent.co.uk/uk/transport/article1157021.ece>

The costs of dual carriageway construction were given as £15.3 million per mile, based on prices at the end of 2005 by an English Minister in Hansard. The link is:

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200506/cmhansrd/cm060504/text/60504w04.htm>

Spokespersons for Transport Scotland have estimated costs of £4 – 8.6m/mile for the AWPR dual carriageway, although the road with its embankments, cuttings and bridges is likely to be more expensive than a normal route.

Further Information can be obtained through:

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The new £400 Million route for the Aberdeen By-Pass (the Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route) was announced by Tavish Scott, the Transport Minister on December 1st, following a consultation on 5 other routes (which did not include the Tavish Scott route). The Tavish Scott route combines a road from the A90 at Charleston, splitting the community of Maryculter, with a separate 8 mile long fast link directly from Stonehaven, which goes through Netherley. The two routes merge south of the river Dee and the combined dual carriageway then passes over the Dee on a new bridge and then goes through the suburb of Milltimber, passing through a large number of houses, the International School Aberdeen with more than 300 students and passing close to Kippie Lodge, a long established family orientated sports and country club.

The previously preferred route had already been surveyed at a cost of £11M. The analyses from the AWPR team show that other routes, closer to Aberdeen, would have been much cheaper to build and more effective in terms of these analyses. The new Tavish Scott by-pass will now take traffic out as far as Peterculter.

The new route is longer, more expensive, further from Aberdeen and brings less benefit to the City than the other options. The route which has been selected affects many hundreds of families in several communities, including Charleston, Banchory Devenick, Blairs, Maryculter, Netherley, Peterculter and Silverburn. It is expected by the Scottish Executive to cost in the region of £395 Million, but independent estimates are that costs will escalate. The cost of the route is to be shared between the Scottish Executive, which will pay just over 80%, and the Councils of Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire. It is planned that road orders will be laid in December.