

## Major Transport Infrastructure Projects

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Your ref:  
PE 1236

Our ref:

Date:  
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Dear Ms Wilson

Thank you for your letter of 3 October regarding Petition PE1236 and in particular seeking views on the letter from Nestrans Regional Transport Partnership to the Committee (PE1236/KK).

We have noted the letter and have also recently received a copy of the final report direct from Nestrans.

As you are aware, the 'Aberdeenshire Council Local Development Plan, Main Issues Report - Laurencekirk Expansion - A90(T) Appraisal (March 2010)' was undertaken by Transport Scotland to assist Aberdeenshire Council in the preparation of their Local Development Plan and based on their Main Issues Report spatial strategy. The appraisal was accepted by Aberdeenshire and published on their website.

This appraisal was a strategic review and makes the case that it is the proposed developments in Laurencekirk that necessitate the provision of at least one grade separated junction at Laurencekirk, and, hence upgrades should be developer funded. This case was accepted by the Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan Reporters as outlined in the 'Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan Examination Report (March 2012)'.

The Nestrans report reconfirms the finding of the Transport Scotland Appraisal, that grade separation is needed to support development, rather than making a new or different case for provision of a grade separated junction. It provides a summary of a number of historic reports and also seeks to provide an updated estimate of future traffic growth in the area. In this regard it is disappointing that the report does not make reference to other reports published in the interim, such as the 'URS Cost Refinement Exercise, Transport Scotland (August 2011)' and the 'Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan Examination Report (March 2012)' which includes the Reporters' findings from the Examination Hearing for Laurencekirk Sites M1 and R1. The Reporters' findings supported the established position that any grade separation will be developer funded.

At this stage, a case for the provision of grade separated junction, in the absence of development, at Laurencekirk has not been made within this report. No objective led, robust evidenced based appraisal has been provided as to why grade separation is needed prior to development taking place, or any alternative options identified that could meet the objectives for the Laurencekirk area.

Following the finalisation of the Nestrans report, Transport Scotland will meet with Nestrans and Aberdeenshire Council on 5 November to discuss the findings. Transport Scotland could provide a detailed review should the Committee wish.

In advance of the meeting, turning to the other key points made in the Nestrans letter.

The letter states that 'Aberdeenshire Council Local Development Plan Main Issues Report - Laurencekirk Expansion - A90(T) Appraisal (March 2010)' underestimates the growth in traffic from Laurencekirk.

Nestrans/Aberdeenshire Council have identified an arithmetic error in the 'Aberdeenshire Council Local Development Plan Main Issues Report - Laurencekirk Expansion - A90(T) Appraisal (March 2010) in respect of employment land. However, revising the development traffic generation figures upwards does not change the findings of the report, that a grade separated junction is required to support development in Laurencekirk. It only demonstrates that grade separation is required even at a lower level of development than that identified in the LDP Main Issues Report, and indeed in the now available adopted LDP. The underestimation of new development traffic actually strengthens the case for developers to fund any required upgrades.

As set out in the 'Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan Examination Report (March 2012)' and the 'Adopted Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan (June 2012)', the next step is for the developer for the major development site (M1) in Laurencekirk to bring forward a Transport Assessment to examine in detail the implications of their development site. More information on the current status of the development site could be sought from Aberdeenshire Council, however meetings between Transport Scotland and the developer have already taken place.

As noted above, the Nestrans report seeks to provide an estimate of future traffic growth in the area. This has been undertaken in a fairly simplistic way. It does not appear, for instance, to correctly discount traffic flows, which may lead to an element of double counting. The appropriate mechanism for considering future traffic growth and the impact of future development for the Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan allocations is through Transport Assessments to support planning applications for specific development sites taking into account relevant factors at the time these are produced. Additionally any impacts of development proposed within the Angus Local Development Plan will also need to be appraised when there is further clarity on what these are and Transport Scotland will continue to engage with Angus Council and other stakeholders on this.

Regarding the 50mph speed limit at the southern Laurencekirk junction, it is Scottish Ministers' responsibility to set appropriate speed limits across the trunk road network. The recently published Speed Limit Review has concluded that 50mph limit at Laurencekirk is the appropriate speed limit for the current conditions.

Regarding traffic from Angus, the letter to the Committee from Tactran (PE1236/JJ) notes that the A937 between Montrose and Laurencekirk is 'not defined as a regionally significant A-class road' and that 'it is considered that Heavy Goods Vehicles, other than those requiring access to properties along the A937, should be discouraged from using this route [A937] in favour of the more appropriate A935 and A92 connections to/from A90(T)'. In addition, at the junction between the A92 and the A937 at the north of Montrose, the signposted route to Aberdeen is via the A92 to the existing grade separated junction at Stonehaven. The Committee may wish to seek views from Angus Council on whether more can be done to discourage the use of the A937 and hence reduce traffic at the A937/A90 junction at Laurencekirk.

Regarding Transport Scotland's continuing actions to improve road safety on the A90 at Laurencekirk, the Committee may wish to be aware that Transport Scotland completed an improvement programme to provide a merge lane at the A90/A937 northern junction at Laurencekirk on 17 March 2012. In addition, following the implementation of the various improvements in May 2010, a post implementation exercise is ongoing to identify any changes in traffic flows, speeds and accident patterns at the three junctions since the installation of these measures. A report reviewing the effectiveness of these measures will be submitted after May 2013.

I hope this information is helpful to the Committee.

Yours sincerely,

Ainslie McLaughlin  
Director of MTRIPS