

David Stewart, Convener
Public Petitions Committee
Room T3.40
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

In 2014 Scotland Welcomes the World



Your ref: PE1509
Our ref:

21 August 2014

Dear David,

Public Petition PE1509 Aberdeen to Inverness Rail Travel

Thank you for your letter of 6 August 2014 regarding Public Petition PE1509, in which the Committee has raised two issues in relation to the Aberdeen to Inverness railway.

In response to the issues raised, I can confirm that:

- The £170 million package of improvements on the Aberdeen to Inverness line, announced by the First Minister on 28 March 2014, focuses on double tracking the east end of the route, due to the pressing need to increase commuter services to improve management of overcrowding affecting existing train services between Aberdeen and Inverurie. This phase of works will be completed in Control Period 5 (CP5) 2014-2019. The scope of Phase Two of the project has still to be defined, but Network Rail will be examining the feasibility of extending the existing Nairn loop to form a continuous section of double track with the proposed Dalcross loop. The development of Phase Two will take place in Control Period 5 (CP5) for delivery in Control Period 6 (2019 – 2024).
- Scottish Ministers' High Level Output Specification (HLOS), announced in June 2012, makes clear the important contribution rail freight makes to the economic growth in Scotland. In recognition of this significant contribution, the HLOS includes a £30 million Scottish Strategic Rail Freight Investment Fund, which supports increased spending on infrastructure to encourage growth in rail freight and facilitate modal shift to rail during CP5.

- Phase One of the Aberdeen to Inverness and Phase Two of the Highland Main Line Rail Improvements Projects will benefit freight provision on both routes through track and signalling enhancements. The Outline Business Case for the A96 road upgrade is in its early stages and the project is to be completed by 2030. The plans to dual the A9 between Perth and Inverness and upgrade the Highland Main Line are programmed to be completed by 2025. The Strategic Transport Projects Review (STPR) formed a multi-modal appraisal of the Perth to Inverness corridor and concluded that both road and rail interventions should be brought forward. Improving the connection between Perth and Inverness will be by both an upgrade to the Highland Main Line and dualling of the A9. The Scottish Government remains committed to encouraging modal shift from road to rail. The A9 Dualling Programme Outline Business Case will include analysis of the modal shift impact of the A9 Dualling Programme on rail and road freight and the planned upgrade to the Highland Main Line.

I hope this helps to clarify the present position.

Kind regards

KEITH BROWN