



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Keith Brown MSP
Cabinet Secretary for the Economy,
Jobs and Fair Work

By e-mail only:

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**Public Audit and Post-legislative
Scrutiny Committee**

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Dear Keith,

At our committee meeting on 24 November 2016 we took evidence from Scottish Government and Transport Scotland officials on an update report on major capital projects. At two points in the meeting Members discussed the progress being made on the Aberdeen western peripheral route (AWPR). I have set out the relevant exchanges below (emphasis added) for your information—

Liam Kerr: I will stick with the AWPR. Has the ONS decision to reclassify it led to any delay in the likely completion time?

Mike Baxter (Transport Scotland): There has been no impact from the ONS decision with regard to the AWPR. The timing of the decision has not impacted on the delivery of that project.

Ross Thomson: I have three questions that follow on from Liam Kerr's question about the AWPR. My first question relates to the ONS statement and reclassification. As you know, the AWPR project is being done in partnership with Transport Scotland, Aberdeenshire Council and Aberdeen City Council; both councils have a commitment with the Scottish Government around the £75 million cap or the 9.5 per cent, whichever is lower. What impact would the ONS statement have on those contributions potentially? What is the risk around that?

Mike Baxter: The NPD element of that project is separate from the councils' contribution, so there is no direct financial impact.

Ross Thomson: I am sure that the heads of finance will be relieved to hear it. That is good. Touching on what Liam Kerr mentioned, you said that there was no impact in timeline costs from the ONS decision. However, we had storm Frank last year, we have had a safety shutdown recently and just in October staff on the site were laid off. Where are we now with the timeline and costs?

Mike Baxter: We are where we expected to be on costs, and winter 2017 is still achievable for the overall programme. I think the slower rate of development in 2015 was offset by additional works in 2016 to catch up. I think that there are 10 million cubic metres of earthworks to be moved on the AWPR project, so it is no small undertaking.

On the basis of these answers, it was the Committee's clear understanding that the AWPR was progressing as planned and that there were no major issues with the programme or any part of it – otherwise, officials would have highlighted any such issues.

However, as you are aware, subsequent discussions in both the Chamber and the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee revealed that Transport Scotland became aware on 9 November of delays to a section of the route i.e. almost two weeks before officials briefed our committee.

We consider it unacceptable that officials did not provide us with full information, however qualified, at our meeting on 24 November 2016. The AWPR is a significant and expensive infrastructure project that is of considerable interest to both this Committee and local communities. We have a right to be provided with fully transparent information on how public money is being spent and how construction is progressing, and it is our expectation that this will be provided at all times in the future. We therefore ask you to explain why we were not given full and correct information, whether you consider that to be acceptable and invite you to provide assurances that the Committee will be provided with appropriate information in the future. We also request a further, concise written update on the current state of progress with the AWPR, in order to determine whether we should take any further oral evidence on this matter.

I have copied this letter to the Chief Executive of Transport Scotland and the convener of the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee.

Yours sincerely



Jenny Marra MSP
Convener of the Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee

cc: *Roy Brannen, Chief Executive, Transport Scotland*
Edward Mountain MSP, Convener, Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee