

T: 0300 244 4000
E: scottish.ministers@gov.scot

Jenny Marra MSP
Convener of the Public Audit and Post-legislative
Scrutiny Committee
Room T 3.60
The Scottish Parliament
EDINBURGH
EH99 1SP

Our ref: 2017/0001

24 January 2017

Dear Jenny

A90 Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route/Balmedie to Tipperty Project (AWPR/B-T)

Thank you for your letter dated 10 January 2017 regarding evidence given at the Committee meeting on 24 November 2016.

In response to the Committee's points, I am content that the information provided by Transport Scotland at the Committee was full, transparent and correct. Transport Scotland confirmed that the scheduled opening of the overall AWPR/B-T project in the winter 2017/2018 period is still achievable. This has not changed and the AWPR/B-T remains scheduled to open during that winter period.

To assist the Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee's understanding, I have set-out the background below from the 9 November 2016:

- On 9 November 2016, the project contractor notified Transport Scotland that the opening of the Balmedie to Tipperty section would be rescheduled from spring 2017 to winter 2017/18.
- From this point, until the 17 November 2016, Transport Scotland worked with the contractor to establish the facts of the situation, provide initial challenge to the revised timescale to ensure that no other solution could be found to keep the Balmedie to Tipperty element of the project on time.
- On 17 November 2016, I received a full briefing from Transport Scotland. I immediately instructed Transport Scotland to interrogate the contractor's programme and challenge them to ensure that they are mitigating the effects where possible and to verify their position.

- Transport Scotland subsequently acted on this instruction and provided me with regular updates on the situation up to the 8 December 2016. It was essential that this work was completed and the necessary information fully established before Parliament could be fully and reliably informed. Once these facts were established, I provided the REC with a written note on 9 December 2016. I also requested to attend the next REC Committee, to provide an update on major transport projects.
- I attended the REC Committee on 14 December 2016 to provide Committee members with an opportunity to ask any questions on all major projects including AWPR/B-T.

In addition to the above, Mike Baxter (Transport Scotland Finance Director) provided evidence to Public Audit Committee on 24 November 2016. The relevant exchange, highlighted in your letter is annexed to this letter for ease of reference. Transport Scotland confirmed to the Committee that, “*winter 2017 (period) is still achievable for the overall programme*”. It would have been inappropriate to provide the Committee with the emerging information that had yet to be fully verified.

In terms of the current status of the AWPR/B-T project, this remains unchanged since I updated the REC Committee in December 2016. The first phase of the project, at Aberdeen Airport was open to traffic in August 2016 – ahead of the contractor’s planned date – and is already bringing benefits to the local area. The winter 2017/18 period still remains achievable to open the remainder of the project.

It was a considerable success to be able to begin the construction phase in 2015 and I fully appreciate that substantial time and resource has been invested by the Scottish Government and Transport Scotland with significant progress made to date. When complete, this project will provide substantial benefits across the whole of the North East and will boost the economy; increase business and tourism opportunities; improve safety and cut congestion, as well as increasing opportunities for improvements in public transport facilities.

I trust that this information sufficiently addresses the concerns raised in your letter.



Keith Brown

Extract from Public Audit Committee on 24 November 2016

Ross Thomson: "...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. ..."