

Reply address:
Aberdeen and Grampian Chamber of Commerce
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16th July 2010.

Dear Minister,

Transport at the Crossroads – an open letter.

“There is a very clear and present danger of the North east being ignored and frozen out. Delay, delay and delay until it is too late and other events take over - almost 'time barring' our projects.”

Eddie Anderson, Managing Director ARR Craib and Vice Chair of NESTRANS

This comment encapsulates a feeling of frustration across the North-east of Scotland regarding delays to transport infrastructure projects in our region. We believe we have robust plans for the future prosperity of the North-east with transport infrastructure at the heart of these exciting developments. We write to seek your help with those parts of the plans that fall within your remit or influence.

The region is at a crossroads and our significant investment plans for the North-east will allow us to play a key role in ensuring the future economic prosperity that is required not only for the North-east but the whole of Scotland are on hold.

These plans do require government support in the short window of opportunity created by the developing new energy sectors and the robust further potential of North Sea oil and gas prospects.

The frustration that is felt is generated because in order to achieve the additional jobs our plans will create we need to develop the region's infrastructure, allowing the other unique attractions that our peripheral region has to offer to convince firms to locate in the North-east rather than other parts of the world.

At a time of constraint in public-sector finance, the priority must be to enable business investment and release the wealth-generating potential of the private sector in Scotland. This means backing winners in the short to medium term.

The plans for the region remain affordable and essential in a period of reduced public spending. Even if budgets are reduced by 25% there is still 75% of substantial national budgets available for investment, and what our region needs is a fraction of what is currently being invested in other parts of the country. It is often said that the North-east benefits from projects in the central belt and this is of course true for people and goods travelling to and through the central belt. It is also true that the central belt will benefit from investment in the North-east. Early progress with these projects will also help to support the construction industry in the region, a sector badly hit by the recession.

We just need the priority and urgency to be given to our projects - our small share of national investment - to continue to make our much larger contribution to national wealth. It is this

contribution to the national “cake” that ensures the whole of Scotland benefits from a successful North-east economy.

At the heart of our concern is the lack of progress with the Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route (AWPR) and the knock-on effect that this is having on other essential projects. These investments have strong business, community and cross-party support in the North-east, and there is widespread dismay at the lack of progress.

In view of the planned elections in May of next year, we are also seeking the support and commitment of all parties going forward to prioritise the North-east. We seek your help in the following areas:

- Most residents and businesses in the region welcomed the Scottish Government’s decision to proceed with the AWPR in December 2009, and are dismayed by the further delays since this announcement. We understand the constraints on what the Government can say and do whilst the judicial process comes to a conclusion. However, we are seeking the Government’s and, in view of the prospect of the May 2011 election, all parties commitment to speedy progress to construction should the Court find the objections not sustained. (With the same dynamic approach taken to the construction of the two national P&R projects.)
- With regard to construction of the Balmedie to Tipperty dual carriageway, we would ask for the same urgency to be applied now. The Reporter’s report is with you as the Minister, and it is in your gift to make a prompt decision.
- Faster progress on the Aberdeen to Inverness rail line study including a station at Kintore would be appreciated, helping us to move towards early construction. We note the compelling evidence of the stunning increase in passenger numbers achieved through a relatively minor timetable change on this route indicating the latent demand for an improved rail service.
- Though you have already indicated that the Haudagain improvements have been delayed until after a decision on the AWPR is known, we request that the Government indicate its support for a particular option now to permit the necessary preparatory works to be done. (For example, tenants need to be re-housed which will take some time, and detailed design work needs to be done in advance of promoting Orders) These preparatory works can be carried out without prejudicing the Court’s consideration of the AWPR arguments and will allow construction at the earliest possible time.

We, the undersigned are united in our view that these highest priority projects are essential to regional and national prosperity, will lay the foundations to build that prosperity, and that their further delay will compromise the economic future of Scotland. We would request your urgent and renewed attention to these issues, creating the platform for the people and businesses of the North East to generate the economically vibrant future the whole of Scotland needs.

We will all approach an electoral crossroads next May and as we do so we urge all parties to put transport issues at the heart of their campaign plans.

Yours sincerely,

Signatories

Eddie Anderson, Nestrans and ARR Craib
Bob Collier, AGCC
Duncan Skinner, Chair North East Committee SCDI
Tom Smith, ACSEF
John Miche, ACCA and Michies

Colin Parker, Aberdeen Harbour Board
John Wallace, Peterhead Port Authority
John Nelson, Director Centre for Transport, Aberdeen University
Stewart Milne, Stewart Milne Group
James Milne, Balmoral Group
Kevin Brown, Shoreporters
George Yule, Dominion Gas
Billy Allan, ASCO
Angus MacCuish, FG Burnett
David Paton, Chartered Surveyor
Kevin McCormick, Covey McCormick
Donald Smith, Health and Beauty Company