

Michael Matheson MSP
Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and
Connectivity
Scottish Government
St Andrew's House
Edinburgh
EH1 3DG

Date: 17 July 2019

Dear Cabinet Secretary,

Aberdeen to Inverness Connectivity

Over recent months we've been aware of increasing pressure on how the Scottish Government responds to the climate emergency and the suggestion that projects such as the A96 upgrade should be abandoned as a result. We do need to look closely at what our low carbon future looks like and the steps we need to take as a country to put in place the right infrastructure to support that journey and meet our long-term needs.

It's easy for some to simply call for a blanket end to road projects, but as you know plans for the A96 are about addressing a route that is not fit for purpose, where communities along it endure the daily pressures of cars and HGV's doing long distances crawling through them. This upgrade not only delivers a new trunk road fit for purpose but will unblock the communities it currently cuts through, freeing up new opportunities to enhance these town centres, improve safety, increase air quality, and put pedestrians at the top of transport hierarchy. SCDI and our members have very much welcomed your Government's longstanding commitment to seeing this key arterial route brought up to a standard that meets the long term needs of this area as, combined with the upgrading of the A9, it will finally see the road network between Scotland's seven cities fit for the future. That commitment recognised not only the contribution to the local areas around this route that upgrading would bring but the difference it would have in tackling the journey time unreliability faced by the businesses and exporters who utilise it on a daily basis.

We agree that we're right to question upgrades that are simply about new capacity and look at whether there are alternative investments that could be made, but for an area of the country with so many rural communities, our shift to lower carbon forms of transport will always rely on our road network.

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We of course need to see work to improve our rail network, and whilst welcoming the Government's current commitments, know we need to do much more to bring down journey times to increase rail capacity. We also know that more can be done to deliver cycle paths and walking routes, and vitally look at how we deliver public transport to those that have seen access to bus routes decline if we're to reduce the reliance so many have on a private car. We also know from the use of concessionary travel cards that eligible users use their card five times as much in Edinburgh or Glasgow than those in communities along this route, highlighting the challenge that many face in accessing public transport and the lack of choice they have as a result.

As we look to tackle climate change, we need to ensure that the right decisions are taken to connect our cities and towns, and support those living and working in rural areas. Addressing inadequate road infrastructure in the north of Scotland should not be a casualty at the hands of those who have long since benefited from transport investment. We hope that the Scottish Government remains fully committed to delivering on the A96 upgrade, as well as the completion of the A9 upgrade, to address the constraints it imposes and deliver a strengthened transport network for all our benefit.

With continued economic uncertainty over the future flow of trade we need to ensure that our own infrastructure can play a part in strengthening, and improving the resilience of, the economy throughout Scotland. We would welcome any reassurance you can offer and would of course be happy to discuss our concerns further.

Best wishes,



Jane Cumming
Chair, SCDI Highlands & Islands Committee



Trevor Garlick OBE
Chair, SCDI North East Committee



Chris Gaffney
Chair, SCDI Rural Commission