

KilliecrAnkie1689

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A9 PLAN FAILS TO RESPECT THE PAST AND HAS NO VISION FOR THE FUTURE

Transport Scotland's plan for dualling the A9 not only fails to take account of the importance of the historic battlefield at Killiecrankie but ignores new technology that is already changing transport requirements. Campaigners for a review of the A9 plan say that the design of the dual carriageway that Transport Scotland proposes may be obsolete by the time construction is completed in 2025.

"We have consistently opposed the design that Transport Scotland wants at Killiecrankie because it requires dumping thousands of cubic metres of infill material on the core area of a historic battlefield," says George MacLean of KilliecrAnkie1689. "Now our research shows that the design complies with outdated road standards that will not meet transport requirements even in the near future. Transport Scotland argues that their way of widening the road at Killiecrankie delivers the best value for money. We think this is far from the truth. Their design could be a hugely expensive mistake."

Campaigners are urging the head of transport, Michael Matheson, whose appointment in June appears to unify various parts of the transport remit at Cabinet level, to take a comprehensive approach to the A9 upgrade. Until June, the project was overseen by Keith Brown, then Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure, Economy and Fair Work. Humza Yousaf, then a junior minister, also had transport responsibilities. Now that all transport matters appear to be consolidated and elevated, campaigners hope that the new Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity will use the position to take a broader view of the project so that it protects and enhances the heritage site while simultaneously providing a transport link that is suitable for 21st century travel.

Transport Scotland says one thing but does another, claim campaigners. Earlier this year, it unveiled its vision for the Electric A9, stating that "Scotland's longest Electric Vehicle-ready route will stand as a beacon to those at home and abroad." However, Jo Blewett, the head of Transport Scotland's A9 dualling project, admitted to campaigners last November that there is no provision in the design which they have presented to local communities to make it an electric highway.

The emphasis of the studies that design consultants, Jacobs, produced for the A9 was on the quality of the drivers' experience, hence the inclusion of huge lay-bys on sensitive parts of the battlefield. Even if charge hubs for an electric highway were located within towns and villages adjacent to the A9, the road itself is not designed

for the transport revolution that is already underway. The modelling that was used for traffic forecasting and to demonstrate the economic benefit is based on typical conditions for a 2015 weekday in spring. The model did not incorporate the latest methods of scenario-planning in order to consider future transport opportunities. Transport engineers say that far too much weight has been given to modelling evidence and that predictions will be 'nonsense' if they fail to factor in technology that is changing our travel patterns.

Analysis published by TransportXtra magazine suggests that forecasts for national traffic have tended to overestimate growth over the past 20 years. To optimise the A9 upgrade, campaigners say that Transport Scotland must anticipate all facets of travel needs for the next generation.

For instance, easyJet said last year that it hopes to be flying electric planes on short haul flights within a decade. These will be quieter and cheaper and, with an aircraft range of up to 335 miles, it could mean that a service such as Edinburgh to Inverness becomes the norm.

The flying car has already arrived and although the first model is not for the mass market, it may not take long for this technology to be widely embraced. Uber, for example, intends rolling out an aerial taxi service in 2023 with testing beginning in a couple of cities in the US in 2020.

Later this year, trials are going to take place of convoys of semi-automated trucks on UK motorways. If it works, haulage could be revolutionised. Within a few years there may be long platoons of electric freight vehicles running together with only a single driver or no driver.

According to Jacobs' figures for Transport Scotland, approximately 16% of the current traffic at Killiecrankie is HGVs. The prospect of autonomous vehicle trains demands a re-think of the road design. In his blog of 29 May 2017, Derek Halden, a civil engineer who worked on the original construction of the A9, says that junction configuration would need to be carefully considered to allow vehicles with drivers to merge in and out of lengthy vehicle trains.

It is not just junctions that are affected. Changes in vehicles, technology and demand will impact on every aspect of road building from land acquisition, imprint of infrastructure, lay-by policy and drainage to design of carriageways. In its objection to Transport Scotland's proposal at Killiecrankie, Historic Environment Scotland (HES) questions every one of these aspects on the Killiecrankie battlefield that is listed in the Inventory of Historic Battlefields.

The Scottish Government recognises that transport is changing but Jacobs and Transport Scotland fail to consider the implications in their detailed planning, say campaigners. The government's stated vision is to phase out the need for new petrol and diesel cars by 2032 – only 7 years after the expected completion of the upgraded A9 on which at least £3 billion will have been spent.

“It is already very clear that our grandchildren will not be expecting roads designed for manually driven vehicles with internal combustion engines. Thanks to the decisions in the 1970s and 80s the A9 is well known for being a generation behind the rest of Europe, so why not rethink the current road design specifications and go a generation ahead?” asks Derek Halden in his blog.

The promotion of the transport portfolio to Cabinet level is an opportunity for a senior minister to join disparate aspects of the A9 upgrade. George MacLean says, “Instead of heritage competing with economics, the minister could take this opportunity to promote a broader view and insist that the upgrade respects the past and supports the future.”

NOTES FOR EDITORS

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1 Information on the A9 project Killiecrankie to Glen Garry, including the Environmental Statement and draft Road Orders, is available on Transport Scotland’s website: <https://www.transport.gov.scot/projects/a9-dualling-perth-to-inverness/a9-killiecrankie-to-glen-garry/>

2 Objections to Transport Scotland’s A9 plan at Killiecrankie have been submitted by Historic Environment Scotland, Perth and Kinross Heritage Trust, Cairngorms National Park Authority, Perth and Kinross Council, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency, Killiecrankie and Fincastle Community Council, heritage groups, historians and KilliecrAnkie1689.

3. Charge Place Scotland is a network of electric vehicle charge points developed by the Scottish Government. According to the website, the Electric A9 is “brought to you by Transport Scotland”. <http://chargeplacescotland.org/electrica9/>

4 Details of the modelling that was used by Jacobs for Transport Scotland for traffic forecasts at Killiecrankie are in DMRB3 Chapter 5.3

5 easyJet press release about electric short haul flights 27 September 2017
<https://mediacentre.easyjet.com/en/stories/11618-easyjet-and-electric-aircraft-pioneer-wright-electric-outline-electric-future-of-aviation>

6 Derek Halden blog <http://dhc1.co.uk/rebuilding-the-a9-trunk-road-is-a-great-opportunity-to-invest-in-the-future>

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