

First Minister submission of 8 December 2023

Inquiry into A9 Dualling Project

Further to your letter of 30 October 2023 in relation to the A9 dualling, this letter provides my reflection on the official advice I received during my time as Minister for Transport and Islands.

Firstly, my Government is supportive of the work of the Committee in examining aspects of this vitally important project. We have instructed officials at Transport Scotland to make available the considerable volume of documents that you have requested and will continue to work positively and transparently with you on this matter.

The A9 dualling is a vital part of our plans to support the residents and businesses in the Highlands and is also of national economic importance to Scotland. We are the only Government who has been prepared to make the long-term investment required in this substantial infrastructure project and we continue to be totally committed to delivering the dualling as soon as possible.

I congratulate Laura Hansler and the A9 Dual Action Group on securing this inquiry. I welcome the committee's approach in taking evidence from a range of interested parties in order to obtain a comprehensive view of the complexities involved in such an ambitious project.

I was Minister for Transport and Islands between 18 May 2016 and 28 June 2018. During that period, in recognition of the strategic importance of the dualling project, it was assigned Cabinet Secretary oversight. I understand that this responsibility was briefly held by Mr Ewing as Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Connectivity and subsequently and substantively by Mr Brown as Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Jobs and Fair Work. I therefore did not have responsibility for the project and received only limited advice from Officials, generally either as part of a wider copy list or where I was providing Ministerial cover for colleagues.

At that time, the project was going through its design development stages. Thus, the advice that I received was mainly related to the substantial consultation work being undertaken in respect of the route options and management of community and environmental impacts. I

welcomed the active engagement that Transport Scotland was undertaking in those early development stages. The advice I had sight of served to underline the complexity involved in developing a route that could both complement its environment and serve its local communities, along with delivering a quality strategic connection.

Although my role at the time was limited, my continued determination to see the A9 dualled is not. Along with the reflections of past Ministers, the Cabinet Secretary will be pleased to update the committee on our plans to progress the project following her statement to parliament which I hope will provide you with a complete account of our continuing investment in this vital project.

**HUMZA YOUSAF MSP
FIRST MINISTER OF SCOTLAND**