A96 Corridor Review
Draft Summary Report

2024

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for

TRANSPORT SCOTLAND
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Contents

What is the A96 Corridor Review?

The A96 is a trunk road linking Inverness and Aberdeen, connecting several communities along its length, including Nairn, Forres, Elgin, Fochabers, Keith, Huntly, Inverurie and Kintore.

The intention to dual the A96 was announced in December 2011, when the Scottish Government published its Infrastructure Investment Plan which contained a commitment to dual the A96 between Inverness and Aberdeen. This was supported by the Scottish Government's Agenda for Cities, which focused on developing and promoting economic growth through the key assets of Scotland's cities and their regions.

In August 2021, it was agreed by the Scottish Government to take forward a transport enhancements programme on the A96 corridor that improves connectivity between surrounding towns, tackles congestion and addresses safety and environmental issues.

While the current plan is to fully dual the A96 route, it was also agreed as part of this process there would be a transparent, evidence-based review of the programme, to include a climate compatibility assessment and other statutory assessments.

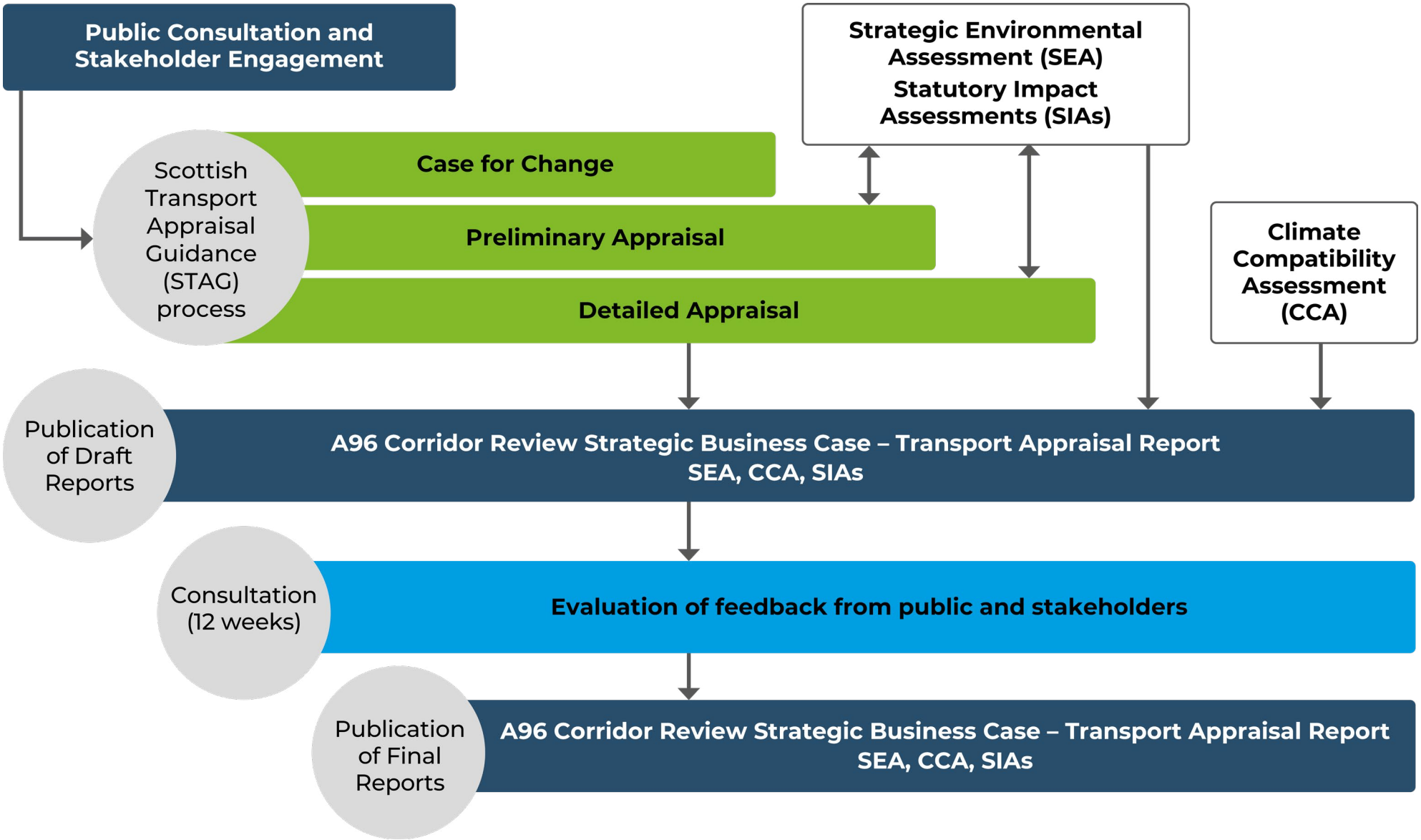
As it has already received Ministerial consent following a Public Local Inquiry, dualling of the A96 from Inverness to Nairn as well as a bypass of Nairn is separate from the wider A96 review process.

The A96 Corridor Review has considered all relevant transport modes within the A96 corridor, including roads-based transport, rail, public transport and active travel modes.

The draft outcomes of the A96 Corridor Review's appraisal and assessment work sets out that a package of interventions (referred to as "Refined Package") across a range of modes of transport have been identified as the best performing in terms of the assessment criteria. This Refined Package aims to maximise the level of potential benefits by combining the best performing interventions considered within the Review whilst optimising investment within the corridor and delivering the best value for money.

The draft outcomes of the A96 Corridor Review have now been published for public consultation before a final decision can be reached by the Scottish Government.

A96 Corridor Review Process

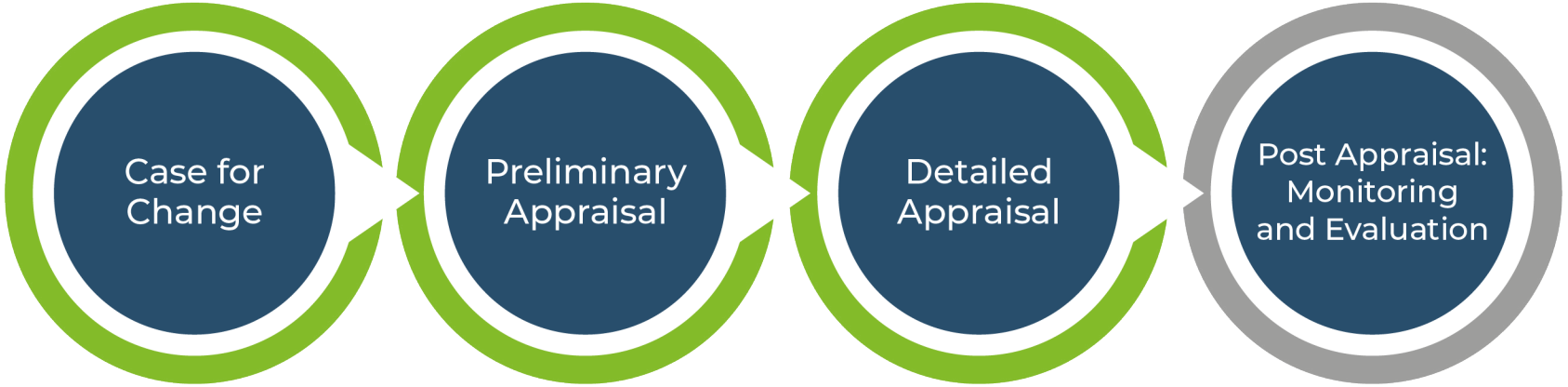


How has the A96 Corridor Review been developed?

The A96 Corridor Review followed the Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance (STAG), which is an objective-led, evidence-based transport appraisal process. An appraisal using STAG is required whenever Scottish Government funding, support or approval is needed to change the transport system. This process also ensures alignment with Transport Scotland's second Strategic Transport Projects Review (STPR2) and industry best practice.

The four key stages of the STAG process are illustrated below. The approach includes identification of problems and opportunities, development of transport planning objectives based on these, option generation and sifting and appraisal of options against a series of criteria.

STAG process



A96 consultation and engagement

A public consultation exercise and engagement with stakeholder groups across the corridor have been key to informing the Review.

The first stage of the STAG process (Case for Change (2022)) included identification of problems and opportunities linked to all modes of transport for the A96 corridor, drawing upon relevant data analysis, policy review and stakeholder engagement including workshops and online public consultation.

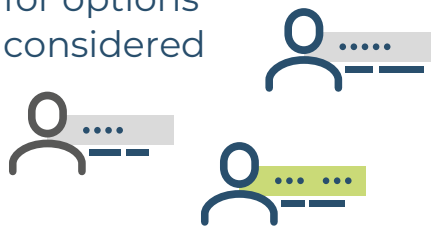
At this stage a set of Transport Planning Objectives (TPOs) were developed, in alignment with Scotland's second National Transport Strategy (NTS2) and STPR2, but with a particular focus on the specific evidence-based problems and opportunities for the corridor. TPOs are of central importance to the STAG process, providing a clear and transparent appraisal of transport options, from initial option identification and sifting, through to the next stages of preliminary and detailed appraisal and subsequent monitoring/evaluation.

8
stakeholder briefing sessions held

25
stakeholder groups engaged

4,687
public consultation responses received

over
11,000
suggestions for options considered



A96 Corridor Review Transport Planning Objectives (TPOs) and sub-objectives

Transport Planning Objective 1:
A sustainable strategic transport corridor that contributes to the Scottish Government's net zero emissions target.

- Reduce transport related emissions through a shift to more sustainable modes of transport.
- Increase the active travel mode share for shorter everyday journeys.

Transport Planning Objective 2:
An inclusive strategic transport corridor that improves the accessibility of public transport in rural areas for access to healthcare, employment and education.

- Increase public transport mode share by improving connections between sustainable modes of transport.
- Reduce the reliance on private car for access to healthcare, employment and education.
- Improve mobility and inclusion, recognising the specific needs of disadvantaged and vulnerable users.

Transport Planning Objective 3:
A coherent strategic transport corridor that enhances communities as places, supporting health, wellbeing and the environment.

- Reduce demand for unsustainable travel by enhancing place-making within settlements along the A96.
- Increase active travel mode share for both shorter and longer distance journeys.
- Reduce real and perceived severance caused by the strategic transport network both between and within communities.
- Protect or enhance the natural environment and heritage.

Transport Planning Objective 4:
An integrated strategic transport system that contributes towards sustainable inclusive growth throughout the corridor and beyond.

- Increase sustainable access to labour markets and key centres for employment, education and training.
- Increase the mode share of freight by sustainable modes.
- Increase competitiveness of key sectors by improving journey time reliability for commercial transport.

Transport Planning Objective 5:
A reliable and resilient strategic transport system that is safe for users.

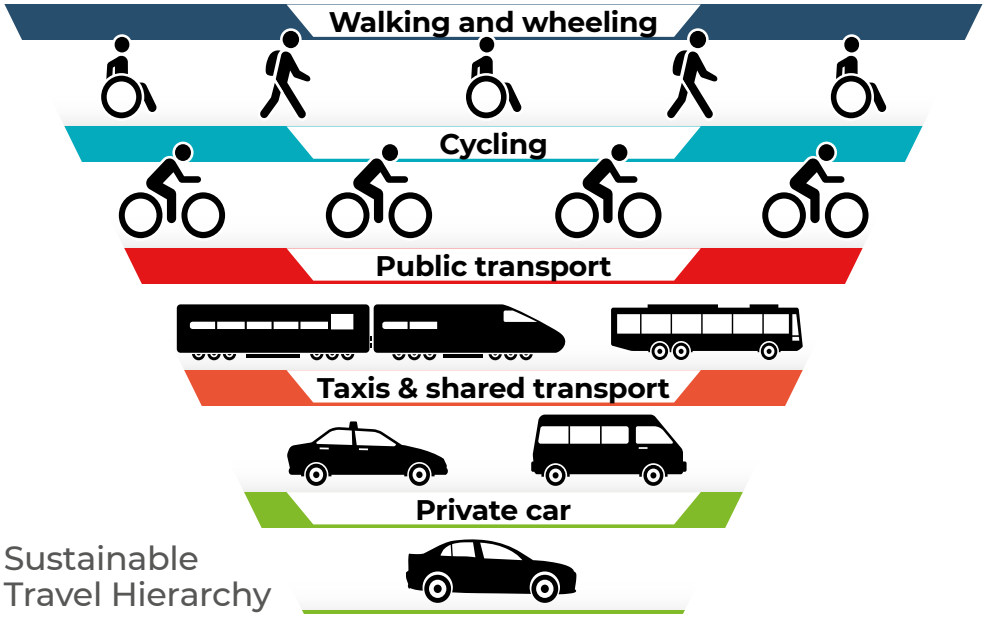
- Reduce the accident rates and severity of transport related casualties in line with reduction targets.
- Improve resilience to disruption (from climate change events and maintenance activities) through adaptation of the corridor's trunk road and rail infrastructure.

Development and assessment of options

Although over 11,000 ideas were generated and considered, these included duplicates, options that were out of scope, options considered in other projects such as STPR2, options that did not address the identified problems and opportunities and options which were considered undeliverable. This 'cleaning' and 'sifting' process resulted in 16 options across all modes progressing to Preliminary Appraisal.

Preliminary appraisal of options was undertaken against the A96 Corridor Review TPOs, the STAG criteria (Environment, Climate Change, Health, Safety & Wellbeing, Economy, Equality & Accessibility), and established policy objectives as well as other deliverability criteria such as feasibility, affordability and public acceptability.

As part of the appraisal, options were aligned with NTS2 to ensure consistency with current national transport strategy, in particular the sustainable travel hierarchy and sustainable investment hierarchy.



Sustainable Travel Hierarchy

Sustainable Investment Hierarchy

Following consideration at Preliminary Appraisal, 13 options were taken forward to Detailed Appraisal. In recognition that several of the retained options were complementary, and therefore may give greater net benefit if delivered as a package rather than stand alone options, multimodal 'packages' were developed and appraised against the TPOs, STAG criteria, deliverability criteria and Statutory Impact Assessment criteria. As Full Dualling of the A96 is the current plan, it has also been considered as part of the Detailed Appraisal to assess its performance against current criteria.

Parallel to the STAG appraisal, a statutory Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) has been undertaken to ensure the potential significant effects of the options and packages on the environment are considered. Statutory Impact Assessments (SIAs) covering aspects such as equality and children's wellbeing have also been undertaken.

A Climate Compatibility Assessment (CCA) has also been prepared, which seeks to establish the alignment or otherwise of the packages and Full Dualling with the identified climate change criteria, in addition to the assessments undertaken as part of the STAG appraisal.

The packaging approach identified the benefits or otherwise for a series of locations throughout the A96 corridor. However, it was acknowledged that there would be added value in separating out the benefits of individual options within each package to determine which provide the greatest contribution for both local communities and the wider corridor.

An assessment of the benefits and contribution of the individual options has been undertaken, with the better performing ones combined to form an additional package, referred to as the 'Refined Package'. Further details of the options that performed less well and the rationale for them not being included in the Refined Package can be found in the Strategic Business Case – Transport Appraisal Report (Draft). The Refined Package seeks to maximise the level of potential benefits in terms of contribution to the TPOs, STAG criteria and impact assessments, whilst optimising investment within the corridor and delivering the best value for money. A description of the options forming the Refined Package can be found on Page 18.

This Refined Package outperformed the majority of other packages whilst optimising investment within the corridor. It also outperformed the Full Dualling option, particularly in terms of impacts on the environment and climate change.

Summary of Outcomes

Summary of Transport Appraisal Outcomes

The following provides a comparative overview of the key outcomes from the appraisal of the Refined Package and Full Dualling against the appraisal criteria. Each assessment criterion was evaluated without applying any weighting, and both the Full Dualling and Refined Package options were independently appraised against a Reference Case (i.e. assuming no improvements or enhancements to the corridor).

Transport Planning Objectives (TPOs)

TPO1 – A sustainable strategic transport corridor that contributes to the Scottish Government's net zero emissions target

The Refined Package would result in a marginal increase in vehicle kilometres travelled (with a marginal increase in greenhouse gas emissions), however the Refined Package includes measures to promote a shift towards sustainable transport modes throughout the corridor. Full Dualling would have a much larger increase in vehicle kilometres travelled and an increase in emissions approximately 15 to 65 times larger than the Refined Package.

TPO2 – An inclusive strategic transport corridor that improves the accessibility of public transport in rural areas for access to healthcare, employment and education

The Refined Package would make public transport more accessible, especially with improvements to rail services and investment in Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) and Mobility as a Service (MaaS). This would help encourage people to use public transport instead of driving. Full Dualling would not significantly improve access to public transport. However, it might slightly reduce traffic and congestion in towns, leading to minor improvements in public transport travel times.

TPO3 – A coherent strategic transport corridor that enhances communities as places, supporting health, wellbeing and the environment

The Refined Package would have some environmental impact during construction, but it would benefit communities by encouraging more walking and cycling in towns, which supports better health, wellbeing, and environmental outcomes. Improvements in public transport would also help reduce social isolation and make it easier for people to access healthcare services. Full Dualling would have more significant adverse environmental effects and outweigh any benefits to communities such as improved air quality, reduced division and the potential for increased active travel within the bypassed town centres.

TPO4 – An integrated strategic transport system that contributes towards sustainable inclusive growth throughout the corridor and beyond

Both provide minor positive contributions. The Refined Package would provide a degree of journey time benefits to business road users and would provide businesses with sustainable access to job opportunities and improved rail freight capacity encouraging more sustainable movement of goods. Full Dualling would provide greater benefits in terms of reliability and efficiency for business road users and road freight movements, however it would predominantly benefit road users and would be unlikely to increase sustainable transport choices.

TPO5 – A reliable and resilient strategic transport system that is safe for users

The Refined Package would reduce accidents at specific locations through the targeted road safety improvements intervention and the bypasses of Elgin and Keith, whilst also enhancing the resilience of the road and rail networks. Full Dualling would result in a larger reduction in accidents overall as well as a greater reduction in high severity accidents and would improve the resilience of the road network to disruption through the provision of a new dual carriageway.

Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance (STAG) Criteria

Environment

The Refined Package would have a minor negative impact on the environment although the scale of infrastructure and the physical works required would be much less significant than Full Dualling. This would outweigh any benefits of reduced noise and air quality impacts, such as those resulting from traffic reductions within Elgin and Keith.

Full Dualling would have major negative impacts on the environment as the scale of physical works required for the new infrastructure is much greater than for the Refined Package. This would significantly outweigh any benefits attributed to reduced noise and air quality impacts from the traffic reductions created as a result of bypassing communities along the route.

Climate Change

The Refined Package would result in an increase in greenhouse gases including emissions from the materials and energy used in construction associated with the Elgin and Keith bypasses and the rail intervention, and through the minor increase in vehicle kilometres travelled during operation. There would be some benefits in terms of adaptation of the transport network to the effects of climate change where infrastructure improvements are introduced.

Full Dualling would result in a significantly greater increase in greenhouse gases in comparison to the Refined Package, including both emissions from the materials and energy used from construction and through the larger increase in vehicle kilometres travelled during operation. Similarly, the new route would provide benefits in terms of adaptation of the trunk road network to the effects of climate change.

Health, Safety and Wellbeing

The Refined Package would reduce accidents, improve health outcomes through active travel improvements within towns, and improve access to health services by active modes and public transport. There would be some adverse impacts on visual amenity through the construction of selected interventions including the Elgin and Keith bypasses.

Full Dualling would provide greater accident reductions and improved reliability to access health services by road but would have a much greater negative impact on visual amenity and a more limited effect on improving health outcomes.

Economy

The Refined Package would provide a lower value of economic benefits but at a significantly lower estimated cost than Full Dualling, and the benefits are largely derived from the sustainable transport modes, including rail journey time savings and health benefits from the active travel intervention.

Full Dualling is estimated to cost significantly more than the Refined Package and although it would provide a higher value of total benefits, these predominantly arise from road journey time savings as well as accident benefits and a reduction in driver frustration.

Equality and Accessibility

The Refined Package would increase the active travel network coverage and make it easier to access key services by public transport, which would be of particular benefit for disadvantaged and vulnerable users. The rail and DRT interventions would contribute to expanding public transport accessibility into more rural areas along the corridor.

Full Dualling would largely benefit those who have access to a private car and although bypassing communities could enable placemaking to encourage more active travel, it is unlikely to have a direct impact on improving the accessibility to key services by public transport, with improvements in rural areas likely to be minimal.

Statutory Impact Assessments (SIAs)

Equality Impact Assessment

The Refined Package would provide safer and more affordable access to key services through improvements to active travel and public transport modes, benefiting those in transport poverty and more vulnerable users. The Elgin and Keith bypasses would provide air quality benefits by reducing through traffic but would also have negative impacts on noise, vibration, air quality and division during construction and in operation.

Full Dualling would also improve safety of road users and air quality in bypassed settlements by reducing through traffic, but the accessibility benefits of the option would mostly impact those with access to a car. It would have negative impacts on noise, vibration, air quality and severance during construction and in operation.

Child Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment

The Refined Package would improve public transport connectivity to education for children and young people, with the public transport improvements also benefitting leisure travel as children and young people are more likely to depend on buses. The Elgin and Keith bypasses would reduce traffic-related health impacts where through trips are removed and there is an uptake in active travel, though there could also be adverse health outcomes for children living in local communities close to the realigned routes.

Full Dualling would improve access to education for children and young people however this is likely to be minor and would mainly affect those with access to a car. It would reduce traffic-related health impacts in bypassed communities with reduced traffic volumes, but the provision of a dual carriageway could also result in adverse health outcomes for children living in local communities close to the realigned route.

Fairer Scotland Duty Assessment

The Refined Package would improve public transport access to essential services such as education and employment that would particularly benefit socio-economically disadvantaged groups across the corridor. The improved public transport connectivity would help to reduce social isolation and the active travel interventions in conjunction with bypasses could remove barriers to the uptake of active travel and reduce health inequalities in disadvantaged communities through improved air quality.

Full Dualling would improve access to employment and education for those from socio-economically disadvantaged groups through reductions in journey times and improved reliability, but this would mainly benefit those with access to a car. There would be limited direct benefits for public transport and active travel through reduced levels of congestion.

Overall, the Refined Package performs better than Full Dualling in terms of the appraisal criteria, particularly with respect to the impact on the environment, sustainability, equality and inclusivity. A summary of the Transport Appraisal outcomes can be found in the Table below.

	Transport Planning Objectives Assessment					STAG Criteria Assessment					Statutory Impact Assessments		
	TPO 1	TPO 2	TPO 3	TPO 4	TPO 5	Env	CC	HSW	Eco	Eq&A	EqIA	CRWIA	FSDA
Refined Package													
Full Dualling													

Positive Contribution — Negative Contribution

Scoring in the table represents the 'With Policy' Scenario only. For full details on information on the 'With Policy' and 'Without Policy' scenarios and scoring, please refer to the Strategic Business Case - Transport Appraisal Report (Draft).

Summary of Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Outcomes

This section summarises the appraisal of the Refined Package and Full Dualling against the SEA objectives.

The Refined Package is likely to have a cumulative minor negative effect. Moderate negative effects are predicted for natural resources and biodiversity, whereas minor negative effects are predicted for air quality, water quality, cultural heritage, and landscape and visual amenity. Due to the predicted greenhouse gas increases associated with constructing and operating transport infrastructure, a minor negative cumulative effect is predicted for the greenhouse gases SEA objective. As there is considerable uncertainty associated with the future impacts of climate change and any construction design is yet to be developed, an uncertain score was assigned for the climate adaptation SEA objective.

Full Dualling of the A96 would be considered to have a cumulative major negative effect. There will be opportunities to improve safety, placemaking, and accessibility, hence some minor positive effects are predicted for these SEA objectives.

However, there are still likely to be major negative effects on many environmental receptors. This is mainly due to the construction footprint but also adverse effects of greenhouse gas emissions and local air quality from traffic emissions during the operational phase. As there is considerable uncertainty associated with the future impacts of climate change and any construction design is yet to be developed, an uncertain score was assigned for the climate adaptation SEA objective.

For the Refined Package, the likely minor and moderate negative effects are expected to arise from some of the physical works, mainly due to the construction of two bypasses, public transport, freight capacity and road safety improvements and their potential impact on the natural environment.

In general, the Refined Package has fewer negative effects and lower magnitude negative effects than Full Dualling in terms of potentially significant cumulative effects. Both the Refined Package and Full Dualling have positive effects predicted for the Population and Human Health topics, for example due to targeted road safety improvements.

For Full Dualling, the considerable amount of land-take, raw materials requirements and greenhouse gas emissions associated with constructing a fully dualled road has led to this being assessed as having major or moderate negative effects for most of the SEA Objectives.

In contrast, the Refined Package was assessed to be likely to lead to minor negative effects for most SEA Objectives, albeit with moderate negative effects predicted for natural resources and biodiversity due to the raw material demand and land-take associated with constructing the Refined Package bypasses.

There are also several minor positive environmental effects predicted for the Refined Package, including for the Population and Human Health SEA objectives focused on quality of life and sustainable access, high quality places and the Material Assets SEA objective relating to sustainable transport networks. Moderate positive effects were also predicted for the SEA objective relating to safety due to the proposed road safety improvements.

The Refined Package

The Refined Package includes eight options, which are listed below along with a description and a selection of their key benefits. All individual interventions are assumed to be introduced corridor wide; where specific locations are identified at this stage, these are noted.

Refined Package

- Active Communities
- Improved Public Transport Passenger Interchange Facilities
- Investment in Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) and Mobility as a Service (MaaS)
- Linespeed, Passenger and Freight Capacity Improvements on the Aberdeen to Inverness Railway Line
- Elgin Bypass
- Keith Bypass
- Targeted Road Safety Improvements
- A96 Electric Corridor

Summary of Refined Package Interventions

Active Communities

Delivery of networks of high-quality active travel routes and placemaking improvements within key communities along the A96 corridor such as Nairn, Forres, Elgin, Lhanbryde, Mosstodloch, Fochabers, Keith, Huntly, Inverurie, Kintore and Blackburn. These active travel interventions would:

- Drive modal shift and reduce the need to travel unsustainably
- Help reduce the number of short-distance car journeys
- Improve air quality in town centres, contributing to Scotland's net zero emissions target
- Contribute to place-making and 20-minute neighbourhoods
- Deliver improvements to physical and mental wellbeing of those who adopt active travel modes
- Potentially deliver economic benefits through increased cycling and walking tourism

Improved Public Transport Passenger Interchange Facilities

Improvements to public transport passenger facilities, including accessibility and quality enhancements at bus stations and railway stations. Improvements are likely to include smaller scale interventions such as placemaking enhancements, improved wayfinding, enhancements to the waiting environment and / or improved accessibility, including lifts and step-free access, however, they may also include the construction of new interchange facilities. These interventions would:

- Deliver accessibility and inclusivity enhancements to the public transport network
- Contribute towards Scottish net zero emissions targets by encouraging the use of public transport
- Encourage modal shift away from car
- Improve actual and perceived user safety and security
- Promote interchange between sustainable travel modes

Investment in Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) and Mobility as a Service (MaaS)

Improved access to flexible travel opportunities in locations with low bus network connectivity or where conventional fixed route services may not be suitable or viable. Includes digital transport service improvements. New DRT and MaaS would:

- Improve travel accessibility and inclusivity by delivering more flexible transport options for those without access to a car or with limited transport options
- Result in faster journeys and increased affordability for users due to improved integration of modes
- Encourage modal shift away from car
- Pilot a corridor-wide DRT and MaaS scheme, combining flexible services with a digital transport platform

Linespeed, Passenger and Freight Capacity Improvements on the Aberdeen to Inverness Rail Line

Three distinct improvements to the railway between Aberdeen and Inverness - linespeed improvements to reduce end-to-end journey times to two hours (currently approximately two hours and 25 minutes), the provision of passing loops to enable a more frequent passenger service and the provision of freight facilities to enable intermodal freight growth. These rail interventions would:

- Deliver faster and more frequent journeys
- Improve access to key settlements containing a rail station
- Enhance reliability and network resilience
- Improve connectivity between communities along the corridor
- Contribute towards Scotland's net zero emissions targets by encouraging the use of public transport
- Encourage modal shift away from car
- Enhance freight capacity by introducing intermodal facilities

Targeted Road Safety Improvements

Improvements to the A96 Trunk Road to address both real and perceived road safety concerns. This could be achieved through the provision of improved overtaking opportunities, junction improvements and improvements to the alignment of the carriageway at targeted locations along the route. These safety interventions would:

- Increase road safety through reduction of accidents and their severity
- Improve resilience and reliability through reduction of disruption during incidents
- Deliver economic benefits due to improved reliability and less road closures

Elgin and Keith Bypasses

Provision of a bypass around the towns of Elgin and Keith. These bypasses would:

- Improve safety, resilience and reliability of the A96
- Improve air quality in the town centres
- Support access to tourism and employment opportunities
- Improve connectivity between towns
- Deliver economic benefits for all car users through shorter journeys, reduced congestion and fewer delays
- Potentially increase attractiveness of active travel and enhance placemaking by reducing through-traffic in town centres, thus facilitating the Active Communities intervention
- Address real and perceived severance within these communities by removing through trips

A96 Electric Corridor

Improve the provision of alternative refuelling infrastructure and facilities along the A96 corridor and its interfacing local roads. The Electric Corridor would:

- Support the decarbonisation of the transport sector
- Improve resilience and standard of charging infrastructure along the route
- Increase confidence and uptake of using zero-emission vehicles
- Contribute towards Scotland's net zero emissions targets
- Improve air quality across the corridor

Next Steps

The draft outcomes of the A96 Corridor Review have now been published for public consultation. Your feedback is important and will help a final decision to be reached on the A96 Corridor Review by the Scottish Government and in turn assist Scottish Ministers in planning how transport improvements along the corridor are prioritised.

A96 Corridor Review Project Pages

You can share your views on the new A96 Corridor Review consultation

Address details:

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This summary report is part of a series of materials produced as part of the A96 Corridor Review, including:

- A96 Corridor Review, Strategic Business Case - Transport Appraisal Report (Draft)
- A96 Corridor Review, Strategic Business Case - Summary of Main Report (Draft)
- A96 Corridor Review, Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Draft Environmental Report
- A96 Corridor Review, Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Draft Environmental Report Non-Technical Summary
- A96 Corridor Review, Climate Compatibility Assessment Report (Draft)
- A96 Corridor Review, Fairer Scotland Duty Assessment (FSDA) Report (Draft)
- A96 Corridor Review, Child Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment (CRWIA) Report (Draft)
- A96 Corridor Review, Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) Report (Draft)
- A96 Corridor Review, Partial Business and Regulatory Impact Assessment (BRIA) Report (Draft)
- A96 Corridor Review Initial Appraisal: Case for Change (Dec 2022)
- A96 Corridor Review Stakeholder & Public Engagement Consultation Report (Dec 2022)


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Further copies of this document are available, on request, in audio and visual formats and in community languages. Any enquiries regarding this document / publication should be sent to us at info@transport.gov.scot


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