

Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route

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Friends of
the Earth
Scotland

1. Introduction

Friends of the Earth Scotland welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the member's debate on the highly controversial Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route. We have significant concerns about the social and environmental costs involved – concerns which appear to be shared with at least 8,000 fellow objectors to the road. We also believe the suggested economic benefits have been overstated. Rather than push ahead with this highly controversial project we believe practical alternatives, based on just and sustainable solutions, should be pursued.

We are also concerned with the wording of the motion when it states: "That the parliament **notes with concern** the pledge given by the First Minister on 15 June to abide by the findings of the public inquiry". In the interests of democracy and accountability, it is imperative that Scottish Ministers abide by the First Minister's pledge to accept the findings of the inquiry. Given experience of the M74 case, this motion, if passed, would further undermine confidence in the public inquiry system.

2. Environmental Impacts

2.1 Traffic Growth and Greenhouse Gas Emissions

Aberdeen City Council has set itself the challenging target for 2011 of reducing total vehicle mileage by 20% of 2000 levels within the Aberdeen Area (a reduction of 30% on projected "do nothing" figures)¹. Yet the AWPR is in stark contradiction to this, resulting in a net increase in journeys and trip length. Moreover in terms of greenhouse gases, compared with a 'do nothing' approach, the AWPR will result in a 7% increase in carbon dioxide emissions of some 24,000 tonnes by 2025².

2.2 Local Impacts on air quality

Whilst some areas will benefit from increased air quality, investing public money in a project that actually reduces the air quality for 25,000 homes is both a perverse and unacceptable policy³. The 8,000 objections raised during the consultation lend weight to this assertion.

We also have serious concerns that the project does not take account of recent evidence on the impact of traffic-generated air pollution on public health, especially vulnerable groups such as children and teenagers. We note impacts have been modelled up to 200m from the road, whilst a recent study has shown effects within 500m of major roads⁴. In this respect we note the proximity of several schools and other educational establishments within 500m of the proposed road.

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2.3 National and International Impacts

Paragraph 128 of the National Transport Strategy states: “delivering carbon savings is a central feature of Scotland’s National Transport Strategy.”⁵ In this respect a project that increases carbon dioxide emissions by 7% is contradictory to both this and Scotland’s Climate Change Programme. The argument that because the AWPR is a relatively small part of the problem of rising emissions across Scotland/UK, and should therefore be ignored, is an unacceptable one and sends a message to other groups and areas of the country that national targets on CO₂ need not apply where inconvenient.

3. Suggested Economic Impacts

The Inquiry into the M74 Northern Extension demonstrated that the Scottish Executive, development agencies and local authorities systematically exaggerated the benefit of major road schemes in terms of economic multipliers and jobs. The evidence presented with the AWPR indicates that history is repeating itself. Due to the fact that traffic levels are continuing to rise, and the lack of restraining measures within the strategy, it seems highly probable that any economic benefits of the scheme will be impermanent and eroded over time. Moreover, latest costs from Transport Scotland estimate the project at between £295 and £395 million⁶.

4. Alternatives

We note with alarm that the AWPR has not benefited from the type of scrutiny offered by a Strategic Environmental Assessment. It may therefore be quite possible that all the claimed benefits of the AWPR could be delivered via alternative means without the environmentally negative consequences of the proposed scheme and at less cost.

In terms of alternatives it should be noted that the 1998 Scottish Office “Sustainable Transport Survey for Aberdeen” found that traffic levels in the city could be reduced by 29% through low cost measures, including parking controls, extended bus priority and better facilities for pedestrians and cyclists. Reinstating rail routes on radial corridors is another option that has not been given proper examination. The 1998 study concluded that the overall impact of the AWPR would be minimal and far less cost effective than a combination of demand management and improved public transport⁷. Growing evidence about the environmental and social costs of transport has in the intervening time reinforced and not diminished these conclusions.

5. Conclusion

The effect of building the highly controversial Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route would be to increase greenhouse gas emissions, vehicle trips and vehicle mileage; thus running counter to national and local strategies and international agreements. The benefits have been overstated and the costs, especially the environmental costs, have been downplayed. Scottish Ministers must keep their pledge to abide by the findings of the public inquiry into the scheme.

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¹ Aberdeen City Council (2000) *Local Transport Strategy for Aberdeen*
<http://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/ACCI/nmsruntime/saveasdialog.asp?IID=836&sID=2869>

² Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route, Environmental Statement, Part E, Cumulative Impact – Air Quality CIA

³ Ibid

⁴ Dr W James Gauderman et al, (2007) *Effect of exposure to traffic on lung development from 10 to 18 years of age: a cohort study*, in ‘The Lancet Early Online Publication’

⁵ Scotland’s National Transport Strategy, online at <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/12/04104414/0>

⁶ Scottish Government website, news release, online at: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/News/Releases/2005/12/01094349>

⁷ The Scottish Office (1998) *Sustainable Transport for Aberdeen* online at <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/1998/12/7200227f-3177-4d96-b87f-810d9eea1cb5>