

REST AND BE THANKFUL UPDATE

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Following further landslips earlier this year on the A83 at the Rest and Be Thankful, the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity is now of the view that the response needs to move beyond the landscape mitigation strategy. The Scottish Government has now committed to looking at options which provide an alternative solution.
- 1.2 In September 2020 Transport Scotland published 11 options, inviting public feedback by 30 October. This report provides a short analysis of those options and invites Members to consider the Council's response to the consultation.
- 1.3 On Monday 5 October a Member Seminar was held to consider the 11 published options. This report seeks an agreed Council position for the response to the ongoing consultation based on Members feedback from the Seminar.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 Members are asked to:
- (i) Welcome the Scottish Government's commitment to move beyond the landscape mitigation strategy and to look at options which provide an alternative solution to the ongoing problems at the Rest and Be Thankful.
 - (ii) Approve the consultation response as drafted at Appendix One of this report; noting in particular that:
 - 1. The Council calls for a permanent solution to be delivered within the term of the next Scottish Parliament [2021-2026];
 - 2. The Council considers the realistic solution to be Option 1, delivered as a permanent solution and not as a continuation of the ongoing mitigation measures. Option 1 should be progressed as a priority.
 - 3. The Council considers Option 5 may provide merit for longer term consideration to further improve connectivity and resilience into and out of Argyll and Bute.
 - 4. The Council also calls for other improvements along the A83 to deal with substandard alignment and drainage/flooding issues both of which can impact on availability of the route.

- (iii) Agree that the Leader of the Council should write to the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity and request clarity on the governance and decision making process for a permanent solution, and, in particular, to request that the Council should be represented on any project board or similar group.

3.0 DETAIL

Background

- 3.1 While members will be aware of the background to this issue, below is a short chronology of key events:

DATE	EVENT
2004	Transport Scotland undertook the Scottish Road Network Landslides Study which identified the A83 Ardgartan to Rest and Be Thankful as amongst the most highly ranked debris flow hazard sites in Scotland.
Oct 2007	A significant landslide occurred, closing the road for several days.
2007 - 2012	Numerous subsequent landslides occurred, leading to multiple road closures.
Mid 2012	Some preventative measures had been installed – the upgrade of culverts and the use of fences and debris flow barriers.
July 2012	Transport Scotland commissioned the A83 Trunk Road Route Study to examine the landslide problem at Rest and Be Thankful.
Aug 2012	To provide leadership and direction, the A83 Task Force was established. (This is ostensibly a consultative forum with decisions on improvements taken by the Cabinet Secretary and Transport Scotland).
Feb 2013	<p>The Jacobs Report was published, and the Red Corridor Option was selected. This involved the installation of additional debris flow mitigation barriers; improved drainage; and the introduction of hillside planting. The Jacobs report itself describes this option as one which would: “<i>significantly reduce the frequency of occurrence of landslide debris reaching the A83 Trunk Road.</i>”</p> <p>This, obviously, does not constitute a permanent solution which guarantees the route remains open. The 2013 route study included a Transport appraisal in accordance with Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance (STAG) which requires five main areas of impact to be considered: Environment, Economy, Safety, Integration and Accessibility & Social Inclusion. The preferred option (red corridor) was also the lowest cost solution and the summary report stated “<i>The Red Option is expected to significantly</i></p>

	<p><i>reduce the frequency of occurrence of landslide debris reaching the A83 Trunk Road at a much lower cost than the other options".</i></p> <p>Suggesting that cost was a factor in choosing this option.</p>
2013 - 2020	<p>Landslides and road closures continued despite further catch pit works. The Old Military Road (OMR) relief road was utilised as an alternative on some occasions.</p> <p>To accommodate the ongoing catch pit works the road was restricted to single file traffic for much of this period.</p>
Nov 2014	<p>Argyll and Bute Council agrees a clear and unanimous position on the Rest and Be Thankful. The Council agreed:</p> <p><i>That Transport Scotland and the Scottish Government be asked to provide a permanent solution for the Rest and Be Thankful.</i></p> <p>The minutes of this meeting can be found at:</p> <p>https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/moderngov/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=257&MId=6412</p>
June 2016	<p>HIE publish the Argyll and Bute Transport Connectivity and Economy Research Report. Among other things this report, identified the poor resilience of journeys between Lochgilphead, Campbeltown and Glasgow by road due to impacts of landslides and accidents on the A83 as a key transport issue. The report is available at:</p> <p>http://www.hie.co.uk/regional-information/economic-reports-and-research/archive/argyll-and-bute-transport-connectivity-and-economy-research.html</p>
Oct 2018	<p>Following a further road closure Argyll and Bute Council re-affirmed its position:</p> <p><i>The Council agrees that the failure of the most recent works to keep the road open through severe weather demands an urgent review of existing and future plans at the Rest and Be Thankful.</i></p> <p>The full meeting minute is available at:</p> <p>https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/moderngov/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=257&MId=8015</p>
Summer/ Autumn 2020	<p>Further landslides and road closures (including the OMR being unavailable)</p>
Aug 2020	<p>Michael Matheson MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Transport,</p>

	Infrastructure and Connectivity, announced at A83 Taskforce group (online) meeting that the Scottish Government was now committing to a permanent solution.
Sept 2020	Transport Scotland publish 11 Project Corridor Options: https://www.transport.gov.scot/publication/project-corridor-options-access-to-argyll-and-bute-a83/

3.2 There continues to be a concern that the lack of resilience on this key trunk road overshadows the wide and varied good work undertaken locally to create a place where people choose to live, work, visit and invest. Argyll and Bute faces a forecasted steady decline in its population and there is a sense that the ongoing issues at the Rest and Be Thankful, and the associated national media reports, are a significant barrier to attracting people to the area, both to live and to visit.

3.3 Uninhibited year-round access to Argyll and Bute is required to restore local confidence and provide confidence of connectivity to those potentially investing in the region. Some of the potential benefits include:

Increased Resilience

3.4 Having a consistently available through route would provide increased resilience for the area both in terms of that route and across the wider trunk road network within Argyll and Bute. There have been instances where the A83 has been closed and the standard diversion via the A85 has also been closed as a result of road traffic collisions etc. Having that consistent route would increase confidence in both business and personal journey planning and use.

Ability to Make a National Economic Contribution

3.5 Businesses in Argyll and Bute make a significant contribution to the national economy in spite of the ongoing trunk road resilience issues. In recent years the area has produced:

- 7% of Scotland's domestic tourism value
- £124million in Gross Value Added (GVA) from food and drink
- 7% of the nation's pure alcohol capacity (used in whisky production)
- £31million in GVA from aquaculture.

3.6 With initial support from the Scottish Government allowing Argyll and Bute the opportunity to thrive, the more the area can then contribute to the national and global economy, on top of the figures quoted, which are achieved in spite of poor transport resilience

Complementing Local Growth Initiatives

3.7 The Council has taken significant strides in recent years to attract people and opportunity to the area through initiatives such as the Rural Resettlement Fund,

major investments in our town centres through various regeneration schemes, and a programme of investment in the school estate which now see 98% of secondary pupils educated in new schools.

- 3.8 A resilient trunk road network is required to support that work and unlock the significant additional potential Argyll and Bute has for further growth.
- 3.9 Although the stated desire of the Council from its decision in 2014 has not yet been achieved in that no permanent solution is in place, the recent announcements constitute a change in the Scottish Government's policy position on the A83 Rest and Be Thankful, to move beyond mitigation work. This report provides recommendations for Members to consider which would effectively update the Council's 2014 policy position on the Rest and Be Thankful.

Route Corridor Options Analysis

- 3.10 Transport Scotland have outlined 11 options, all of which are shown in the following graphic, and have asked for consultation responses on these options by 30 October, in advance of making recommendations for a preferred route corridor with alignment options in Spring 2021.



- 3.12 Given that it is only the Scottish Government who can provide a solution to the ongoing issues at the A83 Rest and Be Thankful, aspects of engineering design, construction and affordability are a matter for them. That is not to say that questions of deliverability, while not the Council's responsibility, should not form part of the Council's response to the options at this stage. Our focus should be identifying the best strategic fit in terms of deliverability, connectivity and the potential for economic and population growth for Argyll and Bute from the

options presented.

- 3.13 Without any further detail at this stage it is difficult to make a professional judgement on the engineering deliverability or otherwise of any of the possible solutions within Option 1. That being said, Option 1, which takes in a 2KM corridor along the existing route of the A83 would appear, on the face of it, to be the most deliverable. While continuing to be ambitious for our area, the Council also needs to be realistic in the options it supports, with a key consideration being the delivery timeline – Argyll and Bute needs a solution to be delivered as soon as possible.
- 3.14 That is not to say that Option 1 would be without its own challenges. A permanent solution within this 2KM corridor would be a significant and complex undertakings. It is more likely that this option at least has the potential to be delivered within the term of the next Scottish Parliament.
- 3.15 Options 2 – 5 may provide merit for longer term consideration, further improving connectivity and resilience into and out of Argyll and Bute.
- 3.16 Options 6 – 11 would likely take much longer to deliver because of additional and significant challenges, some of these routes would elongate the journey time for some destinations. For these reasons

Other Options for the Future

- 3.17 Any options which would provide a more direct route from Mid Argyll to the Central Belt are, in theory, appealing. Clearly, since these options would include the provision of crossings over bodies of water, they would present additional engineering, environmental and other challenges and costs which may ultimately prove to be prohibitive. Medium to Long term Members have stated their ambition to see these options fully explored. However, in the short term Members wish to see a permanent solution delivered within the corridor identified in Option 1.

Consultation response

- 3.18 The consultation response (see Appendix One) has been drafted on the basis of the above analysis and feedback from the Member Seminar on 5 October. In summary it recommends that:
1. The Council calls for a permanent solution to be delivered within the term of the next Scottish Parliament [2021-2026];
 2. The Council considers the realistic solution to be Option 1, delivered as a permanent solution and not as a continuation of the ongoing mitigation measures. Option 1 should be progressed as a priority.
 3. The Council considers Option 5 may provide merit for longer term consideration to further improve connectivity and resilience into and out of Argyll and Bute.
 4. The Council also calls for other improvements along the A83 to deal with substandard alignment and drainage/flooding issues both of

which can impact on availability of the route.

Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (DMRB) Major Projects Process

3.19 This project, like all major road improvement projects across the UK, is being progressed according to the industry recognised and accepted DMRB procedures. These require a detailed assessment of schemes, covering their economic, environmental, and safety impacts. The stages of DMRB are outlined in the following graphic. At present Transport Scotland are data gathering to support work on Stage One:



3.20 After the Stage 3 – Scheme Assessment a preferred route will be chosen. It is our understanding that the decision will ultimately be made by the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Connectivity and Infrastructure. It remains to be seen to what extent, if any, the Council, local parliamentarians, the A83 task force

etc. will be part of that decision making process.

- 3.21 At present Transport Scotland have not committed to any firm timescale for the DMRB process other than to look to make recommendations for a preferred route corridor with alignment options in Spring 2021.

4.0 CONCLUSION

- 4.1 Following further landslips earlier this year on the A83 at the Rest and Be Thankful, the Scottish Government has now committed to moving beyond landscape mitigation works and looking at options which provide an alternative solution.
- 4.2 In September 2020 Transport Scotland published 11 options, inviting public feedback by 30 October. This report provides a short analysis of those options and invites Members to consider the Council's response to the consultation.
- 4.3 On Monday 5 October a Members seminar was held to consider the 11 published options. This report seeks an agreed Council position for the response to the ongoing consultation.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Policy – the recommendations in this report would see the Council update its policy position in respect of the A83 Rest and Be Thankful
- 5.2 Financial – any future de-trunking of the A83 at the Rest and Be Thankful would be a significant financial risk to the Council.
- 5.3 Legal – none for the Council although Transport Scotland may have to acquire land to deliver on some of the options.
- 5.4 HR – none known at this stage of the process in determining a preferred route.
- 5.5 Equalities – none known
- 5.6 Risk – no further risks
- 5.7 Customer Service – none known

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October 2020

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 - Argyll and Bute Council response to the Project Corridor Options –
Access to Argyll and Bute (A83) consultation.

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Argyll and Bute Council response to the Project Corridor Options – Access to Argyll and Bute (A83) consultation.

Growing Argyll and Bute's population and economy to secure its future success is the key driver for all of Argyll and Bute Council's activity as well as that of its communities and its partners. All are united on the absolute necessity for continual, uninterrupted and reliable connectivity and access to and from Argyll and Bute, so that growth can happen and success secured.

The council's position has been clear for many years that a permanent solution is urgently required for the A83 Rest and Be Thankful. With significant periods of disruption during 2019 and 2020, the resulting impact on all aspects of community life and the very real risk to the area's ambitions and need for growth, the council is calling for that permanent solution to be delivered within the term of the next Scottish Parliament, 2021 to 2026.

The Scottish Government's commitment to move beyond the landscape mitigation strategy and to look at options which will provide that alternative solution to the ongoing problems at the area is welcomed by the council.

It is within this overall context that Argyll and Bute Council considered Transport Scotland's Project Corridor Options – Access to Argyll and Bute (A83) at a special meeting called on 22nd October 2020.

The council's response to the consultation on the eleven corridor options is provided below.

Corridor Option 1 – Glen Croe (Existing A83)

Argyll and Bute Council is ambitious for its area. That ambition must be tempered with a degree of realism – Argyll and Bute needs a solution to be delivered as soon as possible and the delivery timeline is a key issue in considering all the options.

That is why the council supports Option 1 as offering realistic solutions which will increase resilience on the A83 and provide the uninterrupted year-round access that Argyll and Bute needs and deserves.

This route corridor appears, on the face of it, to offer the most deliverable set of solutions within an option, although these remain engineering projects of considerable significance and which will be complex to progress.

Corridor Options 2 to 5

These ambitious proposals have significant transformative potential for Argyll and Bute, increasing resilience as well as enhancing connectivity to, from and for all of Argyll and Bute, including opening up more direct connections to the central belt for communities like Mid Argyll and Kintyre.

If any of these options can be delivered or substantially progressed within an acceptable timeframe, then the council will support them. The opportunities arising from more direct access to and from the central belt could be truly transformational.

The scale and ambition of these corridor options would suggest that they are longer-term options. Should one of these be chosen, improvements would need to be made to the A83 Rest and Be Thankful to boost the short term resilience of the main route and to provide a reliable circular route in the longer term.

Out of these additional options, Option 5 would be the preferred additional route to further improve connectivity and resilience into and out of Argyll and Bute.

Corridor Options 6 to 11

The scale of these options, the timescales involved and the potential implications overall on communities combined mean that the council is not supporting any of options 6 to 11.

Alongside the progression of any option the council is maintaining calls for other improvements along the A83 route overall which can impact on connectivity and availability of the road, including but not restricted to substandard alignment and drainage/flooding issues. These too affect overall access to and from key areas of Argyll and Bute and the needs of its residents and they require to be addressed.