

Report to Partnership Meeting 13 November 2020

CONSULTATION

A83 Rest and Be Thankful

Purpose of Report

This report updates Members on HITRANS input to the A83 consultation launched by Transport Scotland following the Scottish Government commitment to look at options which provide a permanent alternative solution to the current route at the Rest and Be Thankful.

Background

Following further landslips earlier this year on the A83 at the Rest and Be Thankful, the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity confirmed that the response needed to move beyond the current landscape mitigation strategy. The Scottish Government has now committed to looking at options which provide an alternative solution.

In September 2020 Transport Scotland published 11 options, inviting public feedback. This report provides a short review of those options and invites Members to formally support HITRANS response outlined in this report and which was circulated to our Chair and local Member in advance of the 30th October deadline for submitting responses to the consultation.

Route Corridor Options Review

Transport Scotland have outlined eleven route corridor options which are all illustrated in Figure 1 on the following page of this report. Feedback has been invited both on the merit of the different options and for further information on any local issues or constraints that should be taken into consideration in design and assessment work. A recommendation for a preferred route corridor with alignment options will be made in Spring 2021 following this consultation and initial work by Jacobs on behalf of Transport Scotland.

Having reviewed the eleven route corridor options, it is HITRANS view that a permanent solution within the existing 2km corridor of the A83 is the only realistic solution to prevent ongoing disruption at the Rest and Be Thankful, and that this option should be progressed as a priority. Argyll and Bute Council has already taken this position through their own submission and we are fully supportive despite the various potential benefits offered by some of the alternative options.

Some of the alternative options could offer transformational benefits to the wider Kintyre and Islands economy and we would like to see some of these options fully considered as part of the Strategic Transport Projects Review 2. These include option 5 which would dramatically reduce journey times between from Cowal and Kintyre to the Central Belt. However, this and several other options which would realise similar benefits would take years to develop and construct over which time the increasing impact of closures to the A83 would continue to adversely impact on the Argyll economy. In addition, any options other than Option 1 through the existing Glen Croe corridor would have a significant impact on local journey times in the Lochgoilhead and Arrochar areas.

Fig 1. Project Corridor Options – Access to Argyll and Bute (A83)

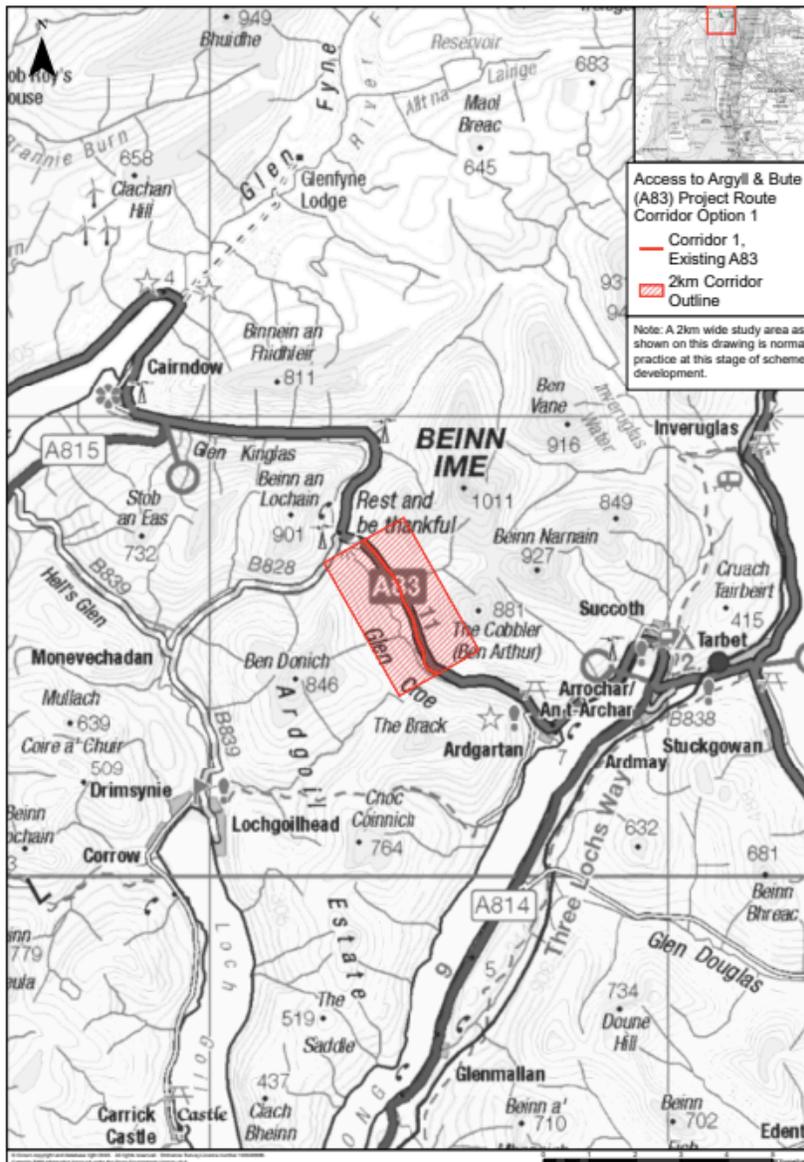


Corridor Option 1 - Glen Croe follows the line of the existing A83 and was the corridor identified in the A83 Trunk Road Route Study Report, published in 2013. The Glen Croe (A83 online) sub

corridor is adjacent to the existing road corridor starting from the bridge over Coire Croe Burn between the Cobbler and Beinn Luibhean. It is offset from the existing A83 Trunk Road and re-joins the alignment of the existing A83 Trunk Road before the bend prior to the junction with the B828 and the access to the Rest and Be Thankful car park. It is approximately 1.5 kilometres long and would generally follow a similar profile to the existing road.

The Glen Croe (southern side) sub corridor is an off-line corridor within Glen Croe in the area of forestry on the south-west side of the valley. The corridor is approximately 4.3 kilometres in length and ties-in to the existing A83 Trunk Road approximately 3.2 km north-west of Ardgartan, in the vicinity of the A83/Forestry Commission Track & the Old Military Road junction, and the north side of the Rest and Be Thankful car park at the B828. The corridor generally follows the Forestry Track and road structures and ground engineering measures would potentially be required to fit the new road into the topography of this side of Glen Croe.

Fig 2 Route Corridor Option 1



Resilience of Strategic Transport Network

Following discussion on the impact of most recent closure of the A83 at the HITRANS Partnership meeting in September 2020, Members agreed that the HITRANS Chair should write to the Cabinet Secretary highlighting both our support for a permanent solution for the A83 but also the wider challenges relating to the resilience of the strategic transport network as a result of adverse climatic events. Below is an extract from the letter;

The communities of Kintyre and the Islands for which the A83 serves as the principal route in and out of the area have suffered not just from the economic impact of the closure but also from the longer term impact it has on user confidence even when the route is open. HITRANS welcomes the consultation on alternative solutions and offer our support and any assistance we may be able to provide in identifying a preferred option. However, while we welcome some of the ambitious options proposed we would urge that a viable option which provides a solution to those journeys affected by any closure of the Rest and Be thankful is identified and advanced at the earliest opportunity.

We also welcome that resilience has been identified as a key theme in NTS2 and is one of the package headings under which schemes proposed for the Strategic Transport Projects Review 2 are being considered. Recent events such as on the A83, Stromeferry, the West Highland Line or through damage to harbours such as Gardenstown are happening with an increased regularity. When the impacts occur on lifeline infrastructure, where there are no viable alternatives, the social and economic impact suffered by the affected communities is much more severe and could result in permanent damage to the economy and depopulation.

It is therefore vitally important that the relative severity of this impact is recognised in assessing priorities and there is an opportunity for the STPR assessment to prioritise according to those infrastructure or services for which the loss for an extended period of time would have the widest impact.

Recommendation

Members are asked to:

1. Support HITRANS response to Transport Scotland's route corridor consultation on alternative solutions to the current A83 at Rest and Be Thankful, noting in particular HITRANS support of Argyll and Bute Councils call for a permanent solution to be delivered within the term of the next Scottish Parliament.

Risk Register

RTS Delivery

Impact - Positive

Comment – A permanent solution for the A83 at the Rest and Be Thankful was identified as a priority in the RTS Delivery Plan - 'Advancement of a programme of investment in Key regional and trunk road pinch points including A95, A82, A830, A816, A83 and A9 North of Inverness'

Policy

Impact - Positive

Comment – The Scottish Government commitment to finding a permanent solution to the A83 is welcomed. The A83 provides a lifeline route serving the Mid Argyll, Kintrye and the Argyll Islands

Financial

Impact – Neutral

Comment - There is no direct financial impact relating to HITRANS as a result of this report.

Equality

Impact – Positive

Comment – The A83 acts as a lifeline route for both Kintyre, Mid Argyll and the Islands. Ensuring a resilient connectivity is vital to sustaining the fragile local population of this region.

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Date: 13th November 2020