

HITRANS urges A9 dualling between Kingussie and Aviemore

Upgrading the A9 between Perth and Inverness would inject almost £1.3 billion into the Scottish economy, whilst selective dualling of the section between Kingussie and Aviemore could bring national economic benefits of almost £400 million.

The figures were revealed in a new study commissioned by HITRANS, the local regional transport partnership for the Highlands and Islands, and Highlands and Islands Enterprise.

Now HITRANS is to press the case for the section between Kingussie and Aviemore to be made a priority for dualling in the short term.

HITRANS Chair Duncan MacIntyre commented on the findings of the report, saying: "The A9 is absolutely vital to the economic well-being of the Highlands and Islands as it provides the most direct route to the central belt for people in a large part of the region.

"This is the second report that clearly demonstrates the large economic benefits that would arise from improvements to the road.

"Clearly our preferred option would be to dual the entire length from Perth to Inverness, but we appreciate this will have to be carried out in sections and will take time.

"This report clearly shows the first priority for the sections in the Highland area should be between Kingussie and Aviemore. We would urge the Government to take early action and start detailed design work and procedures on this section to ensure it can be built soon and without unnecessary delay."

The new report measured the impact of dualling different sections of the A9 and the overall route in terms of journey times, vehicle operating costs and carbon emissions. Within the Highlands, the Kingussie to Aviemore section emerged as a clear favourite, providing 44% of the overall economic benefit. The second most important section is between Aviemore and Slochd summit.

Transport and communications, financial services, tourism and manufacturing are identified in the report as some of the key industry sectors that would benefit from dualling.

From Inverness, up to 96 per cent of all passenger journeys to the central belt and almost all freight traffic travels south on the A9.

Only 45km of the 174km of the A9 between Perth and Inverness is currently dual-carriageway. The section between the A86 junction at Kingussie and the A95

junction at Aviemore is 21.5km and is all single carriageway. Platooning – when the vehicles end up bunched together – is common on the single carriageway sections of the route and overtaking can be difficult. This raises driver stress and fatigue, creating the conditions that lead to the large number of serious crashes on the road.

The average journey time between Perth and Inverness is just under 2 hours, but as traffic volumes grow the average speed is decreasing.

Another research study for HITRANS on the A96 has demonstrated that by-passes at Elgin, Nairn and Keith on the A96 would boost the regional economy by £107 million a year, as well as creating up to 6,600 long term jobs, reducing local congestion in the towns, and cutting up to 30 minutes from local and long distance journeys.

Ends

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