

New plans needed for A9 road dualling

Description

On 21 Oct the Herald newspaper published a letter from myself about the need for the Scottish Government to revise the plans for dualling the A9 trunk road, currently under construction, so that new rest and parking areas can be provided. Such areas are the norm in many other European countries. To bring Scotland up to modern European standard the Government needs not only new plans but also a commitment to use compulsory purchase powers to acquire the necessary land from the adjacent landowners. With much of this road project located within the Cairngorms National Park, where new developments should be of the highest quality, Transport Scotland have the responsibility to make substantial improvements on what has gone before.

Rethink A9 dualling works and take chance to provide proper parking and rest facilities

IT is not only France which has better provision for roadside rest and overnight parking ("Plan for motorhomes to carry on camping... but French style", The Herald, October 16). Several years of campervan travel in many European countries, from Belgium to the northern tip of Norway, has demonstrated to me that every country on the other side of the North Sea is better than the UK in its provision of facilities associated with the road network. Once I am over the water I know that good places to stop, free of charge, will be available every 20 minutes or so. They will all be well separated from the traffic, many with picnic benches and toilets and, less frequently, include regular service stations with full café, fuel and waste disposal provision. My 2020 Complete Europe road atlas shows what to expect: a green triangle for a rest area with limited services, a black triangle for the full range.

So Highland Council is to be congratulated in its determination to expand the existing facilities beside the A9



Dualling work on the A9. Picture: Glen Wallace

just north of Inverness by the Kessock Bridge. It should be an exemplar of what is required across most of the Scottish road network. This requires strong leadership from the Scottish Government. It is well placed to learn not only from new ideas in the Highlands but also from decades of experience in continental Europe. But the starting point for the Government

must be a rethink of the parking facilities currently being built as part of the A9 dualling project. What is being built today, immediately north of Perth, for example, is pathetic – a parking facility fit for the 1960s, completely inadequate for today's requirements.

Transport Secretary Michael Matheson needs to issue new instructions to his officials. Every

existing or potential lay-by on the A9 should be examined to see which ones can be expanded over the adjacent ground to provide continental-standard parking and rest facilities. And we all need to realise that the reason why Scotland does not have these facilities already is because of landowner pressure. Landowners and their highly paid lawyers have resisted the loss of land to meet such wider public needs, with too many feeble politicians caving into this pressure. Today the message from the Scottish Government to the landowners must be "enough is enough – these rest and parking facilities will be built, to the highest European standard, within a few years". Any landowner who refuses to make the essential land available should find that they are subject to the early application of compulsory purchase powers by the relevant roads authority. Politicians, both local and national, need to grasp the thistle and deliver, without any further delay.

**Dave Morris,
Kinross.**

In a published response to my letter, on 23 Oct, Allan Martin indicated that he was in full support of my concerns over the current plan but also explained that such rest areas were part of the original plans for the current A9 until these were torpedoed by local businesses and politicians. They wanted any traffic that required such facilities to be diverted into nearby communities.



A9 gripes

I NOTE the letter from Dave Morris (October 21) regarding providing rest areas when dualling the A9.

As one who was involved in the original rebuild of the A9 in the 1970s, I well recall the furore there was from the towns and villages on the chosen route with consequential pressure from

councillors that this route would deprive the shops and restaurants of passing trade.

This resulted in the proposed rest areas being deleted from the initial proposals put forward then. This was to force traffic into the aforementioned towns to placate the business owners at that time.

This in turn led to travellers becoming stranded in blizzards and other poor weather conditions with no ready places of safety readily available, but the councillors of that time did not appear too distressed nor did the business owners.

Hopefully the rebuild now will take full account of this issue. I

I also recall these pressures. As an Aviemore based local staff member of the Nature Conservancy Council in the late 1970s, I participated in the planning process and public inquiry that accompanied the passage of the new A9 through Badenoch from Drummochter Pass to north of Aviemore. That experience revealed the pressure exerted on transport officials to both divert traffic into local communities for access to facilities but also the pressure exerted by landowners to secure what they wanted from the road construction process. The opening day of the public inquiry featured a whole battery of lawyers representing the top flight of the Scottish and UK legal profession, all representing those who owned land along the route and were objecting to the new road. During the next few days this phalanx of legal expertise slowly melted away. Overnight deals were being done as officials caved in and agreed to every landowner request for a bridge, underpass or direct private access to the new road. No modification of any sort to provide better parking and rest facilities for the general public emerged from this overnight wheeling and dealing. Only one landowner remained, for the rest of the

inquiry. He was trying to stop the road going anywhere near his estate. In his persistence he had no legal representative to back him up. He only had his wife beside him to help. At no point did she refer to any report or appear to pass him any advice. She appeared to spend the whole public inquiry quietly knitting. The knitting did not stop the road going through Kinrara estate.

And so the present A9 was built, with no adjacent facilities. Except for Ralia which did get a large car park, set back from the road, with toilets and an information centre. The present cafe came later, once local interests realised that such a facility was needed by the road and it would also provide good job opportunities for local people who could walk or cycle to work from nearby Newtonmore. But the Ralia facility was not built with landowner cooperation. It is only there because at that location was an abandoned quarry and ownership was not an issue as the road builders simply incorporated the land into the road alignment, restoring the remainder of the quarry with landscaping followed by the construction of the Ralia facility and provision of an electricity supply.

But today, away from Ralia, the same landowners, or their successors, with the same high powered legal teams, will confront the Scottish Government over any attempt to modify any of the A9 dualling plans between Perth and Inverness in order to provide parking and rest areas. This challenge will only be overcome if the Transport Secretary, Michael Matheson MSP, makes it clear from day one that compulsory purchase powers will be used, as a matter of course, not as a last resort, to secure the land needed for these essential facilities. Use of such powers can be easily justified – they are needed to meet modern European road network standards, especially when a national park is involved.

To show what is expected, here is a photo, taken last month, of such a parking and rest area in Denmark.

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This facility, set back by 100 metres or so from the main dual carriageway (E45), lies between Hamburg (Germany) and Aalborg (Denmark). It provides for lorry parking separated from car and campervan parking, toilet and wash facilities, campervan waste disposal point, litter bins plus a large roofed skip, picnic benches and short walks looking out over the nearby countryside, electric charging points plus an automatic fuel dispensing facility. At this particular facility no staff were present on site to dispense food or drink or manage the fuel facility. Elsewhere full cafe, shop and supervised fuel facilities may be present, or less, with just parking and toilets provided. At 7 am a vehicle appeared with a maintenance person who emptied all the litter bins into the big skip, checked out the toilets and other waste facilities and with a shovel repaired some of the grass verge damaged by lorry wheels. He left behind an immaculate facility ready for another day of public use and enjoyment. When will Scotland see the same?

Category

1. Cairngorms

Tags

1. CNPA
2. Tourism
3. transport
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