

## A82 Tarbet to Invernarnan upgrade project – alternative proposals

### Description



Section of A82 north of Tarbet heading south: slow, busy, dominating the loch shore and spoiling the oak woods

I am writing this post in my capacity as Convener of Helensburgh and District Access Trust (HADAT), a Scottish incorporated charitable trust which seeks to improve countryside access in the Helensburgh and Lomond area. The trust manages the Three Lochs Way Great Trail and for many years has had ambitions to see that route extended further north from its present northern terminus at Inveruglas as far up as Invernarnan, where it could link with The West Highland Way.

At the start of October a consultation was launched on Transport Scotland's proposals to upgrade the A82 ([see here](#)) which is supported by an online interactive Story Map including a fly-through visualisation of the proposed scheme. There is an online survey ([see here](#)) for the public to respond which is open until 19<sup>th</sup> November. It is focussed on asking people about how to improve travel times

rather than the impact of the proposals on the natural environment and landscape.

## **Helensburgh and District Access Trust's concerns about the proposals**

Having examined the online information on the A82 upgrade from Jacobs/Fairhurst, HADAT trustees are of the view that the proposals are fundamentally flawed and do not represent the best available solution.

The upgrade of the A82 between Tarbet and Inverarnan is long overdue, but considering its central position in Scotland's premier National Park as well as the concomitant scenic, recreational and ecological importance of this beautiful northern stretch of Loch Lomond, we believe the upgrading of this road offers a tremendous opportunity to address a whole host of important related issues, but the proposed scheme doesn't do any of that. Here are our reasons for saying so.

The upgrade will essentially follow the line of the existing road which hugs the shoreline, so continuing the noise and disturbance which has long damaged this sensitive area of great ecological significance, scenic beauty and importance for recreation.

The ironing out of bends will involve the removal of many areas of irreplaceable Atlantic oak woodland – a staggeringly insensitive and short-sighted proposal, especially so at this time when the UN COP on the global climate crisis has come to Scotland and also especially so, as this is a stunningly beautiful area at the very core of the National Park. It is completely at odds with everything we know about the importance of preserving such scarce remnants of Atlantic Rain Forest.

Viaducts across the bays bring the road into even closer proximity to the loch and will ruin the character of the shoreline in the bays that they cross. In the previous upgrade works south of Tarbet, which were completed some decades ago, there are several long sections where the new road was essentially built right on the shoreline, completely obliterating its character and destroying important freshwater littoral habitat. It seems that in a number of areas the current proposals for the area north of Tarbet involve a very similar approach which is both puzzling and regrettable, particularly given the National Park status enjoyed by the area now.



The upgraded section of the A82 by Pulpit Rock, projecting out over the loch

The new road will be much faster than before and being close to the shore, noise from the traffic will be even louder and will be a constant intrusion for surrounding wildlife as well as for people trying to enjoy Loch Lomond along the shore or out on the water. Sound travels very efficiently along the interface between water and the atmosphere, so West Highland Way walkers half a mile away on the opposite bank will also have their experience of the loch spoiled by the constant traffic racket.

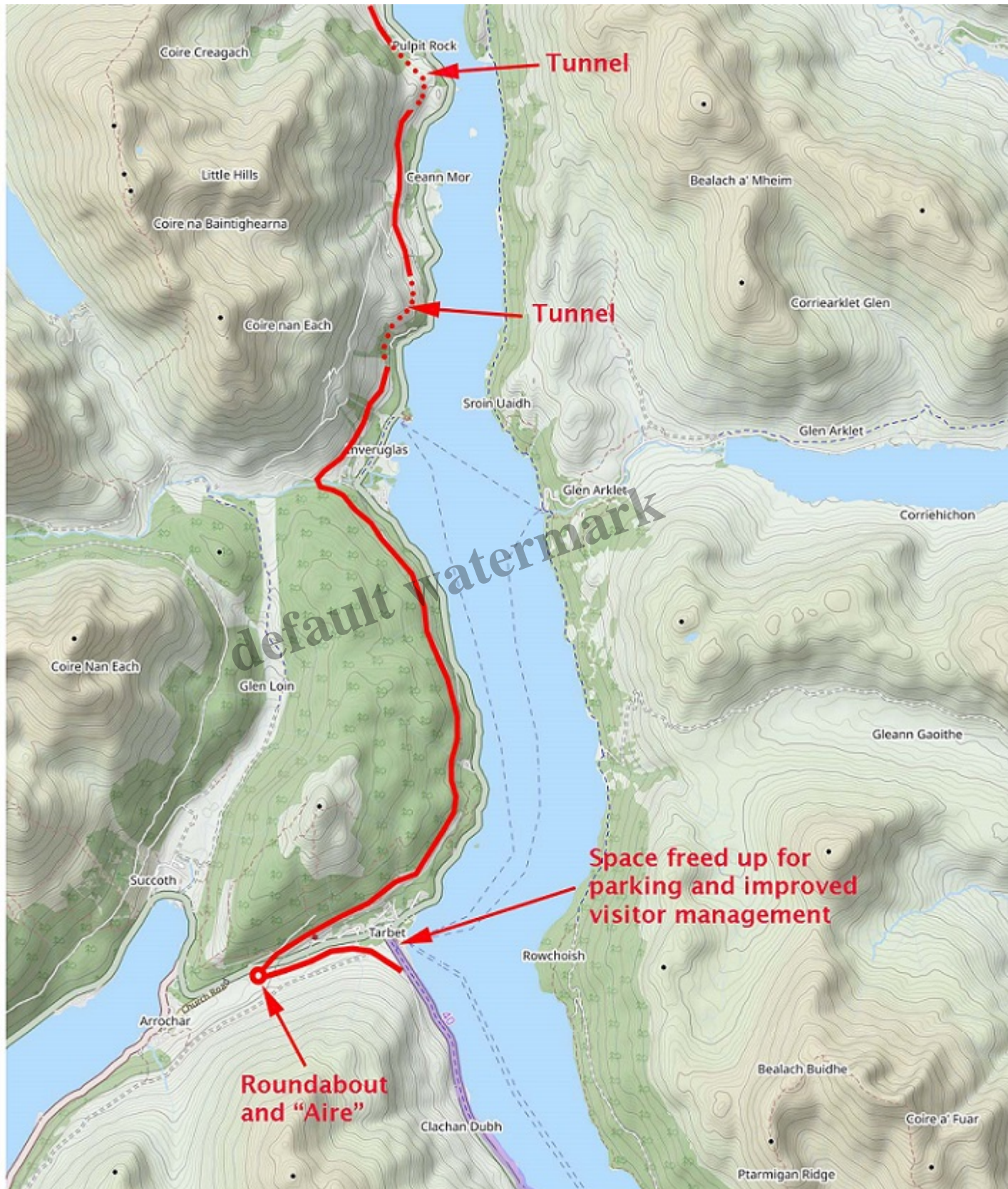
### **Helensburgh and District Access Trust's proposed alternative route**

A better solution would have been to pull the road back from the water and where rock spurs exist, put it through a tunnel rather than having open cuttings backed by rock walls which reflect sound out over the water. Of course the presence of the West Highland railway line makes such a solution difficult, never mind the damage which would be done to the oakwoods. The route should therefore be above the railway line where the existing land use is dominated either by commercial conifer woodland or

poor quality rough grazing, both of which are severely degraded habitats of limited ecological value. Tunnels would be required at rock spurs or where slopes are particularly steep as they are above Creag a Phuirt and Pulpit Rock where some very steep and craggy ground is clothed in a substantial area of ancient birch/oak woodland.

The key advantages of our proposal are:

- It would spare the biodiverse oak woods below which are to be sacrificed under the present proposal.
- A second benefit of this approach would be that the old road could continue to carry traffic during the construction period and afterwards of course it would be available in its entirety as a safe walking and cycling route as well as for access to lochside farms and properties and the Sloy power station.
- Third, it would allow our organisation to realise its long held ambition to extend the Three Lochs Way Great Trail further north to link with the West Highland way at Inverarnan, so facilitating a Round Loch Lomond walking route which would enhance the recreation and tourism potential of the area.
- Engineering issues would generally be simpler as the route would be straighter with fewer problems accommodating existing buildings and infrastructure.
- Ardlui would be bypassed.
- A sixth benefit would be for the road users themselves as, being elevated, the road would afford stunning views across and up and down the loch. There would also be ample space for scenic lay-bys. We recommend that the consultants visit the A8003 between Glendaruel and Tighnabruach to fully appreciate the potential of the benefit being described here. The new road would be a scenic “tour de force” and would quickly develop a reputation as one of Scotland’s “must do” tourism experiences.
- There would also be opportunities to landscape the margins of the new road with plantings of native woodland species thereby doing something to improve the impoverished biodiversity in that area.



Proposed alternative route above the railway and the oak woodland

The obvious way to make the southern connection to the existing road south of Tarbet would be with a

roundabout and the obvious place to do that is on the low lying vacant land in the centre of the Tarbet – Arrochar isthmus, immediately south west of the point where the railway crosses the A83. A high embankment carries the railway across the valley floor here so there is good potential to bring the new road under the railway. At a stroke this would free up badly needed space for parking and improved visitor management arrangements at Tarbet Bay, while at the same time bringing a huge benefit to the residents of Tarbet, as it would mean the heavy traffic would completely bypass the village, resolving long standing quality of life, health and road safety issues, including the problem of the dangerous pedestrian footway by the A83 where it passes through the narrow railway bridge.

Toileting by road users is a serious issue along the A82 and there is a crying need for some kind of “Aire” where cars and more importantly, HGVs and buses can easily and safely pull off the road and park so that drivers and passengers can make use of services. This would be an excellent location for something like that. It is a brown field site having previously been used as a refuse dump, yet it has a wonderful view of the Cobbler and has great commercial potential. Developments along these lines would do much to address some of the blight that Tarbet and existing A82 lay-bys have had to suffer for far too long.

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Outline of potential alternative route on the northern section of the upgrade

At the northern end of the upgrade area (top diagram), the valley of the Alt Arnan provides an opportunity to bring the road back in below the railway again and down onto the Glen Falloch valley floor where there is plenty of space to make a connection with the existing road just north of Inverarnan Farm.

## Category

1. Loch Lomond and Trossachs

## Tags

1. conservation
2. landscape
3. LLTNPA
4. Local communities
5. Transport Scotland
6. visitor infrastructure

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