



Save Bennachie Campaign
Preliminary Report

March 2016

1 Background and **Introduction**

1.1 In line with Scottish Government policy of dualling routes between Scotland's cities, Transport Scotland is currently progressing the programme to upgrade the A96 to dual carriageway standard by 2030.

A number of route options near Inverurie are being considered, two of which will impact upon Bennachie and its surrounding areas.

1.2 "Is this the most loved hill in Britain?", Royal Geographical Society, 2013.¹

An unspoiled wilderness area, rich in biodiversity and history, Bennachie is a unique range of hills near Inverurie. Aberdeenshire's most iconic landmark, Bennachie has inspired generations of people to fall in love with it. Over 150,000 visitors come to Bennachie annually, whether to walk, run, cycle, ride or otherwise enjoy the environs.² There are over 40 miles of waymarked trails on the hill and surrounding area, some of them offering wheelchair access.

1.3 Formed in December, the Save Bennachie Alliance is working to protect and defend Bennachie and its surrounding areas from any encroachment by the new A96 dual carriageway.

Whilst respecting the decision to dual the A96, the Save Bennachie Alliance aims to demonstrate, through positive means, the factors which make it inappropriate to site it in the Bennachie area, whilst highlighting the very considerable opportunities which would be created by siting it to the north and east of Inverurie.

The Save Bennachie Alliance is a rapidly expanding group including the highly regarded Bailies of Bennachie, local community associations and individuals, who are all joining forces to protect their beloved hill. The groundswell of public opinion backing the fledgling campaign has been overwhelming.

Details of the Save Bennachie Alliance and Campaign can be found at www.savebennachie.com and our Facebook page, Save Bennachie, and our Twitter account, @SaveBennachie. In under a month since a soft launch of our website and social media presence, hundreds of people and groups have signed up. e.g. Facebook alone has over 1780 likes, the website has 407 subscriptions. (14/03/2016)

There has already been considerable media coverage of the Campaign with BBC Radio Scotland, BBC Reporting Scotland, Aberdeen Press and Journal, Evening Express and Inverurie Advertiser all approaching us and running articles.

2 Route Options

2.1 Please refer to the attached map to view the potential routes, discussed below.

Having completed DMRB Stage 1 of their assessment and public consultation, Transport Scotland is moving towards a DMRB full Stage 2 Route Options Assessment. The following options will be taken forward, with the preferred route to be chosen at the end of Stage 2 in 2018:

1 Route B- Inverurie Bypass (Inner)

2 Route B Inverurie Bypass (North)

¹ Royal Geographical Society, Discovering Britain Walks (2013). Walk entitled, "Is This the Most Loved Hill in Britain?"

² Forestry Commission Scotland

3 Route B Inverurie Bypass (South)

4 Route C Huntly-Blackburn

5 Route D Inveramsay -Glens of Foundland in combination with Option 1 or 2

Routes B, Inverurie South, potentially Route B Inverurie Inner, and particularly Route C would have a devastating impact upon the Bennachie Massif.

2.2 The Save Bennachie Alliance believe that the following factors make it inappropriate to site the A96 dual carriageway in the Bennachie area:

- The local, national and international iconic status of Bennachie as an unspoiled wilderness area
- The wildlife, ecology and geology of Bennachie, which has led to its shortlisting as a Special Landscape area
- Bennachie's unique folklore, history and archaeology
- The public's affinity with Bennachie, including recreational use by over 150,000 visitors annually, through walking, running, cycling and riding amongst other leisure pursuits
- The physical and mental health benefits provided by the Bennachie area
- The educational benefits of Bennachie, across the generations
- The economic value of unspoiled Bennachie as a tourist destination
- The safety of journeys and costly maintenance issues and winter resilience of such a high level route
- The additional climate change impact of increasing emissions by creating and using a route over higher ground
- The detrimental impact upon sustainable economic growth of siting the A96 dual carriageway at such a distance from centres of population and industry
- The lack of integration between different forms of transport, including the bus and rail networks.

2.3 Whilst DMRB Stage 1 report has taken into account the traffic densities on the A96 itself, it has not factored in the traffic flows off the A96.

There are 27,300 daily vehicle movements on the Aberdeen side of Inverurie, and 9,500 movements on the Huntly side of Inverurie. The majority of the estimated 17,500 vehicle movements on and off the A96 turn north into Inverurie, causing major traffic congestion in the town.³

Figures indicate that only 1% of traffic makes the entire journey between Aberdeen and Inverness. The highest volumes of traffic are between Aberdeen and Inverurie at the Eastern end, and entering Inverness on the Western end.

³ Transport Scotland

Save Bennachie Campaign Preliminary Report

This means that Routes B Inner and South, as well as Route C would not alleviate the major problems experienced by traffic flowing north off the A96 to and beyond Inverurie.

2.4 Aberdeenshire Council are currently considering options from AECOM to improve safety on the notorious A947 Aberdeen-Banff road. One of their options is to dual carriageway the route at a cost of £500 million. (Press and Journal, 17.02.2016)

Integrating Transport Scotland's programme for the A96 along with AECOM's report to Aberdeenshire Council on the A947 would offer a long term, cost effective solution for the traffic problems for Inverurie and the wider Garioch area and beyond. The alternative would be to generate a massive burden on the public purse.

2.5 The Save Bennachie Alliance has begun contacting Local Councillors. Early suggestions following meetings indicate considerable support for our aims, both in terms of protecting Bennachie, and for 'joined up thinking' between Aberdeenshire Council and Transport Scotland to get the most effective and economically sound solutions for the A96 and A947 projects.

2.6 Scotland's National Transport Strategy introduced 3 key strategic outcomes:

- Improved journey times and connections between our major cities and towns and our global markets, to tackle congestion and the lack of integration and connections in transport
- Reduced emissions to tackle climate change, air quality, and health improvements
- Improved quality, accessibility and affordability of transport, to give a choice of public transport, better quality services, and value for money, or alternatives to car use.

2.7 Siting the A96 to the North and East of Inverurie would readily meet each of these strategic outcomes.

However, Routes B Inner and South and Route C would cause:

- A detrimental impact upon sustainable economic growth by siting the dual carriageway so far away from centres of population and industry
- The lack of integration between different forms of transport including the bus and rail networks
- A high level route would impact upon climate change and air quality through increased emissions
- A serious reduction upon Bennachie's appeal as a tourist destination contributing to the economy of the area
- A disastrous impact upon the wildlife, ecology and geology of the Bennachie area, which has led to its shortlisting as an Area of Special Landscape
- A public outcry at permanently ruining their much loved hills
- A significant reduction in the recreational use of Bennachie, with negative impact upon physical and mental health and educational outcomes.

3 Government Policy and the Health, Educational and Recreational Uses of Bennachie

3.1 The Scottish Health Survey 2014 states,

- “The health benefits of a physically active lifestyle are well recognised. Being active on a regular basis puts a person at reduced incidence of chronic conditions of particular concern in Scotland, including cardiovascular disease, obesity and type 2 diabetes. The benefits of being regularly active extend beyond physical health, with evidence that certain forms of increased activity may also improve mental wellbeing, another key priority in Scotland
- Exercise is now recommended by the Royal College of Psychiatrists as a treatment for depression in adults, and the Scottish Intercollegiate Guidelines Network(SIGN) national clinical guidelines for non-pharmaceutical management of depression states that structured exercise programmes may be an option for depressed people
- Among older people, physical activity is associated with better health and cognitive function and can reduce the risk of falls in those with mobility problems
- High activity levels in childhood provide both immediate and longer term benefits, for example by promoting cognitive skills and bone strength, reducing the incidence of metabolic risk factors such as obesity and hypertension, and setting in place activity levels that endure into adulthood.....In Scotland it is estimated that low activity contributes to around 2,500 deaths per year, and costs the NHS £94 million annually
- The “Active Scotland Outcomes Framework” states “Vision: a more active Scotland-Physical activity is about getting people moving”
- “2020 Challenge for Scotland’s Biodiversity: a strategy for the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity in Scotland” (2013) outcomes state “Improved health and quality of life for the people of Scotland, through investment in the care of green space, nature and landscapes”. The strategy goes on to state one of the key steps is to “provide opportunities for everyone to experience and enjoy nature regularly...” The introduction leads with the statement “Connecting with nature enriches our lives”
- The Scottish Government’s strategy on health and the environment, “Good Places, Better Health” (2008) recognises that the physical environment has a significant impact upon the health of Scotland’s people
- Increasing the number of visits to the outdoors has been identified as a key Scottish Government indicator of success
- 2020 Challenge for Scotland’s Biodiversity: a strategy for the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity in Scotland” (2013) continues “The role of outdoor learning is firmly established in the new Curriculum for Excellence”. Two key messages from the strategy are “Scotland’s nature and landscape are key assets for public health and wellbeing and more should be done to use the natural world to help improve the quality of our lives. There is a strong case for investing more in nature close to where people live, work, or go to school as this can improve public health and reduce pressure on health budgets in the longer term.

3.2 Bennachie has been providing the ideal the environment for all of these strategies to be put into action, attracting over 150,000 people annually. A snapshot of the activities which take place on

Save Bennachie Campaign Preliminary Report

Bennachie show that there are a range of events which help physical and mental health, social inclusion, education, social skills, appreciation of wildlife. These are recorded events, with very many unrecorded visits.

These are just some of the events taking place regularly on and around Bennachie

- Bennachie Hill Race, as well as other hill races
- Bennachie Cycle Race
- Inverurie Bike Ride
- Orienteering events
- Torchlight runs
- Rambling Clubs
- Mountain biking
- Programme of educational walks
- School outings e.g. sponsored walks
- Duke of Edinburgh Awards Scheme
- Equestrian endurance events.

3.3 The Bailies of Bennachie, along with Aberdeenshire Council Ranger Service and Forestry Commission Scotland Rangers all run regular events on the hill from guided walks, wildlife identification to teddy bear picnics, all encouraging an interest in the hill. However numerous additional events are independently organised.

For example, looking at the work of the Garioch Ranger Service alone, in the year November-October 2015:

Schools

Some 828 children from 31 schools visited Bennachie, including 113 playgroup/nursery children, 576 primary 1-7 children and 139 secondary school pupils. 2 John Muir Awards were delivered. Sessions with schools included promoting biodiversity, environmental education, natural and cultural history and the Scottish Outdoor Access Code (SOAC).

Groups

357 people from 16 groups visited Bennachie, of whom 160 were adults, and 197 were children up to 18 years old, with 1 John Muir Award delivered to an adult mental health group. Sessions included walks promoting biodiversity, natural and cultural history, health and wellbeing, environmental education and SOAC.

Events

343 people attended 15 public events held at Bennachie, of whom 186 were adults and 157 were children up to 18 years old, with the events promoting natural history, biodiversity, health and wellbeing and SOAC. School holiday events promoted biodiversity, natural and cultural history and SOAC⁴.

3.4 From the above it is clear that an unspoiled Bennachie represents a key tourist destination in Aberdeenshire. It is one of very few free to enter tourist attractions close to Aberdeen. Whilst tourism is presently an important industry, it has been highlighted as going to have even greater significance for the North East as the oil and gas industry declines.

4 Conclusion

4.1 The Bennachie Massif is beloved by people across Aberdeenshire, Scotland, and globally.

Even at this very early stage there is a rapidly growing groundswell of public opinion strongly opposed to any infringement of these iconic hills.

In truth, the Save Bennachie Alliance has not spoken to a single person in favour of Option C in particular.

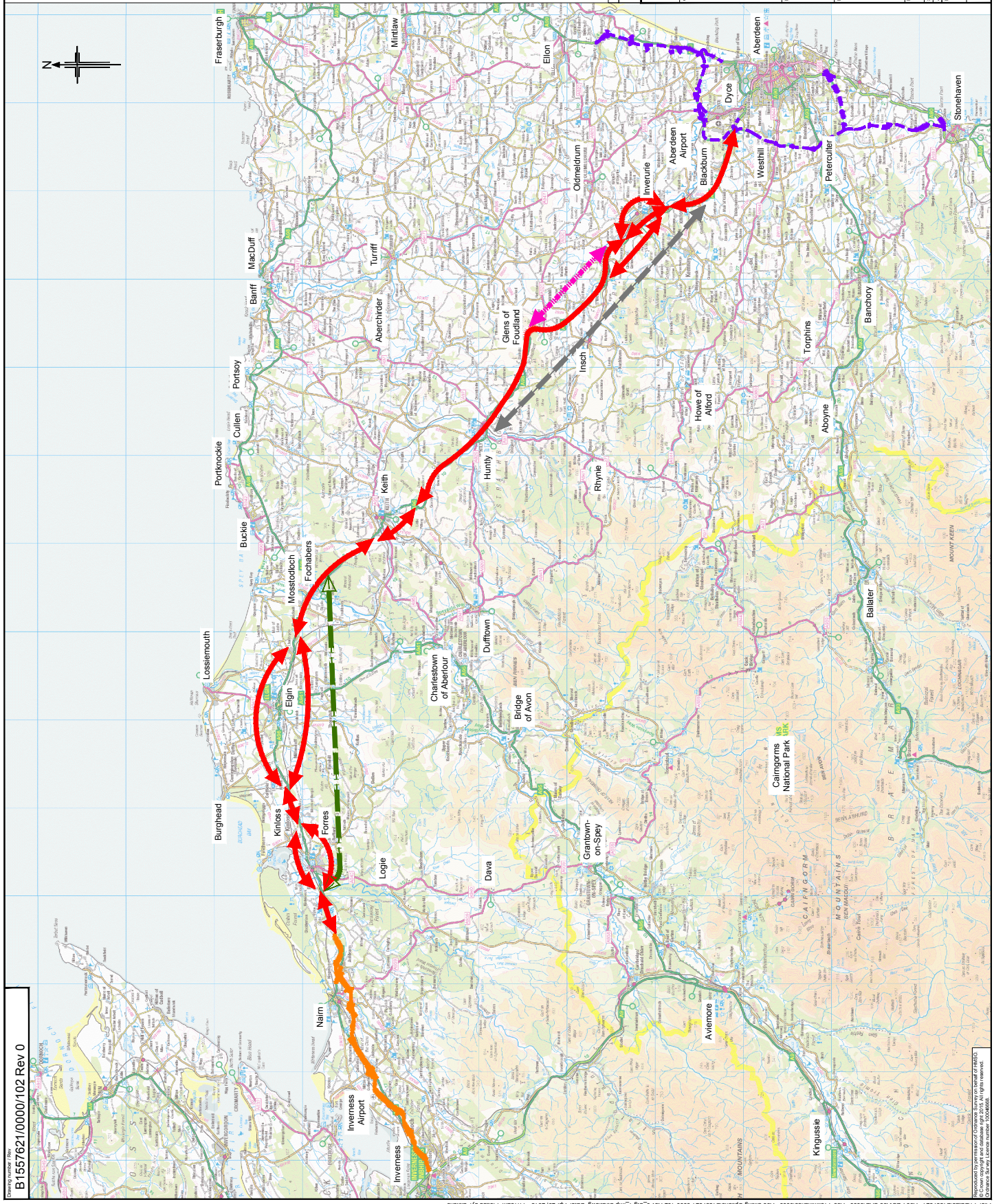
Apart from the compelling arguments centring on the ecology, history, folklore, recreational, educational, health and tourist importance of Bennachie, as well as the safety, maintenance costs and emissions associated with a high level route, by focussing on a route to the east and north of Inverurie, there is a massive opportunity to create a lasting legacy for the infrastructure of the Garioch area.

4.2 Transport Scotland has a rare opportunity, through joined up thinking, of creating an integrated solution to build a dual carriageway which would service both local, and trans-city traffic, thereby readily achieving both national and local strategic outcomes, whilst providing a springboard for economic development for future generations.

4.3 We therefore appeal to the Minister for Transport to intervene to remove Options C and B (South) from the A96 Dualling Project. By reducing the number of routes being taken forward to DMRB Stage 2, public funds can be saved, whilst focussing on routes which can truly add value to the local and national transport networks.

⁴ Aberdeenshire Council Garioch Ranger Service

B1557621/0000/102 Rev 0



Legend:

Improvement Strategies

- Option B (Red arrow)
- Option C (Green arrow)
- Option D (Purple arrow)
- Option N (Orange arrow)

AWPR Inverness to Naim (including Naim Bypass)

Aberdeen Western Peripheral Road (AWPR) route

Notes:

- Limits of indicative improvement strategies may be altered as options are developed.

FOR INFORMATION

Scale	1:200,000 @ A1	DO NOT SCALE
Drawing number	B1557621	
Revision	0	

This drawing is not to be used in whole or part other than for the intended project as defined on this drawing. Refer to the contract for full terms and conditions.

**DMRB STAGE 1
IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES**

Client: **JACOBS**
 1557621/0000/102 Rev 0
 Tel: +44 (0)1463 423333
 www.jacobs.com

**TRANSPORT SCOTLAND
OFFICIAL AEA**

**A96
Aberdeen to Inverness**

Rev	Date	Author	Checked	Approved
0				

Project: **DMRB STAGE 1
IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES**

Drawing No: **B1557621/0000/102**

Scale: **1:200,000 @ A1**

Revision: **0**

This drawing is not to be used in whole or part other than for the intended project as defined on this drawing. Refer to the contract for full terms and conditions.