

The Highland Council
Planning, Development and Infrastructure Committee
4 November 2015

Agenda Item	19
Report No	PDI 74/15

A890 Balnacra to Lair Road Scheme

Report by Director of Development and Infrastructure

Summary

This report presents the proposed A890 Balnacra to Lair road scheme. The scheme comprises 5.8 km (3.6 miles) of new single carriageway road to replace an existing narrow single track section. Previous design work on the scheme looked at three route options. A preferred option was progressed following public consultation and an options appraisal. The design of the preferred option was further developed until work stopped in 2010 following deletion of the scheme from the Capital Programme.

At the meeting of the Planning, Development and Infrastructure Committee on 3 June 2015, the scheme was named as a Major Road improvement within the Council's 10 year capital programme.

This report summarises the previous design work and sets out how the scheme can now be progressed. In order to progress the scheme, Members are asked to accept the preferred route option and give approval to proceed with the planning application and land negotiations for the road improvement scheme.

1. Background

- 1.1 The A890 provides a strategic link between the Moray Firth area and the communities of Wester Ross including the deep water facility at Kishorn which is currently used by Ferguson Transport for sea freight movements. As such, it forms a crucial route for local communities and businesses in terms of the provision and supply of services, as well as being a primary route for visitors to the area wishing to access the North West Highlands. The route runs 51 km (32 miles) from its junction with the A87 at Auchtertyre to the roundabout at Achnasheen.

The location of the road is illustrated on the plan in **Appendix 1**, with the section under consideration highlighted.

- 1.2 Since the 1960s, the A890 has been gradually upgraded from single track to single carriageway. The stretch between Balnacra and Lair is one of several remaining single track sections and is a particular bottleneck due to a low masonry railway bridge with poor road alignment and a rail level crossing.
- 1.3 The Balnacra to Lair scheme seeks to eliminate this sub-standard section by providing 5.8 km (3.6 miles) of new 6m wide single carriageway road with hard strips to current standards with a design speed of 100 kph (60 mph).

2. Options Appraisal

- 2.1 Previous design work was undertaken on the Balnacra to Lair scheme by the Council in 2008 to 2010. During a review of the capital programme at that time the scheme was removed from the list of projects being considered. The scheme was therefore not taken forward for planning permission. The Options appraisal work which was progressed at that time however is still relevant.
- 2.2 In 2009 a Route Options Appraisal was carried out by ASH consultants. Three alternative route options were included in the appraisal; a 'red' route, a 'green' route and a 'blue' route. These are illustrated in the drawing included in **Appendix 2**.
- 2.4 'Green' Route: The new road would pass north of the housing at Balnacra and utilise the existing level crossing. The route would then follow the existing road between Loch Dughail and the rail line to a point west of Achnashellach Station. From there the road would then cross the railway line via a new bridge and continue to the north of the railway line to tie into the existing A890. The existing rail bridge at Lair would remain open for local access.
- 2.5 'Blue' Route: The new road would cross to the south side of the railway and the housing at Balnacra via a new railway bridge. The route would then follow the existing road between Loch Dughail and the railway line to a point west of Achnashellach Lodge. From there the road would pass to the south of the community at Lair passing through the croft ground and then cross the railway line via a new bridge to tie into the existing road.
- 2.5 'Red' Route: The new road would pass north of the housing at Balnacra and would remain to the north of the Dingwall to Kyle of Lochalsh railway line for the whole length and would tie into the existing A890 east of Lair railway bridge. The existing level crossing and railway bridge would be maintained unaltered for local access.

3. Options Appraisal Findings

- 3.1 The routes were evaluated on Landscape and Land Use, Visual Amenity, Cultural Heritage, Ecology and Nature Conservancy and Leisure and Recreation.
- 3.2 The red route to the north of the existing railway line was considered to be the most favourable option when considering all aspects of the options appraisal.
- 3.3 On the 28 May 2008 a public consultation meeting was held at Lochcarron Community Hall seeking views on the three options. Around three quarters of respondents favoured the red route. Only three respondents were opposed to the red route.
- 3.4 Further work was undertaken on the design of the 'red' route including an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). The scheme was developed to a

standard almost sufficient to support a planning application. However, work stopped in 2010 and no planning application or further progress was made.

- 3.5 Both the Green and the Blue routes involve constructing new railway bridge crossings. One new bridge in the case of the Green route and two new railway bridges in the case of the Blue. The cost of each railway bridge is between £1.5m and £2m. The red route therefore has a cost advantage when compared the other two routes as no new railway crossings are required for the red route.
- 3.6 The red route has the advantage that through traffic will not have to cross the railway line.

4. Next Steps

- 4.1 The 'red' route was previously identified as the preferred option and it is proposed that design should now proceed on this basis. Members are asked to accept the red route as the Council's chosen route option.
- 4.2 It is proposed to carry out public consultation on the details of the preferred route prior to the submission of planning permission to help mitigate any points raised by the local community.
- 4.3 Planning permission will be required for the scheme. The planning application would need to be supported by an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). The design and EIA for the 'red' route was previously developed to a standard almost sufficient to support a planning application. The previous work would require updating and completing prior to a new planning application.
- 4.4 It is proposed that all land for the scheme should be acquired by the Council under the powers of the Roads (Scotland) Act 1984. Acquisition would be by agreement. Should agreement not be reached a further report will be brought to committee to consider the use of compulsory purchase powers.

5. Implications

- 5.1 Resource:
PDI committee report 31/15 allocated £722k of the capital programme for the scheme. This forms part of the £29.3m allocated to Major Roads schemes in the capital programme to 2023. The proposed budget estimate for the scheme is currently c£12m, this figure will be reviewed and finalised as design works proceed. It is expected if land agreements and planning permission are completed that construction could commence in 2018/19.
- 5.2 Legal:
Construction of the scheme would require acquisition of land by the Council. The Council would use the powers under the Roads Scotland Act 1984 to acquire land by agreement. If compulsory purchase powers are required to progress the scheme then this will be the subject of further reports to Committee.

- 5.3 Equality:
Issues relating to equality would be addressed at detailed design.
- 5.4 Climate Change/Carbon Clever:
The detailed design will incorporate measures to minimise the importation of materials and make best use of natural materials encountered on-site. In addition measures will be put in place to minimise waste during the construction works. The procurement procedures for the construction of the project will be managed to maximise the use of locally sourced goods, services and materials.
- 5.5 Risk:
The level and type of risk on this scheme is currently considered to be normal for a road building scheme. Risks would be managed through the detailed design process and through supervision of works on site.
- 5.6 Gaelic:
The scheme presents an opportunity to use bi-lingual road signing.
- 5.7 Rural:
The scheme would improve road transport links to the west coast aiding the economy of the local area

Recommendation

The Committee is asked to:

- approve the 'red' route as the Council's chosen route option; and
- give approval for the scheme to progress through the following stages:
 - planning application
 - land acquisition
 - detailed design

The Committee is also asked to note that approval for budget allocation and construction programme will be sought following the detailed design and planning approval.

Designation: Director of Development and Infrastructure

Date: 12 October 2015

Author: G Smith

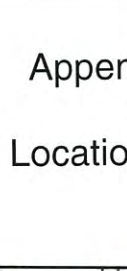
Background Papers: Planning, Development and Infrastructure Committee
Report No. PDI/31/15 (3 June 2015)

Appendix 1 Location Plan

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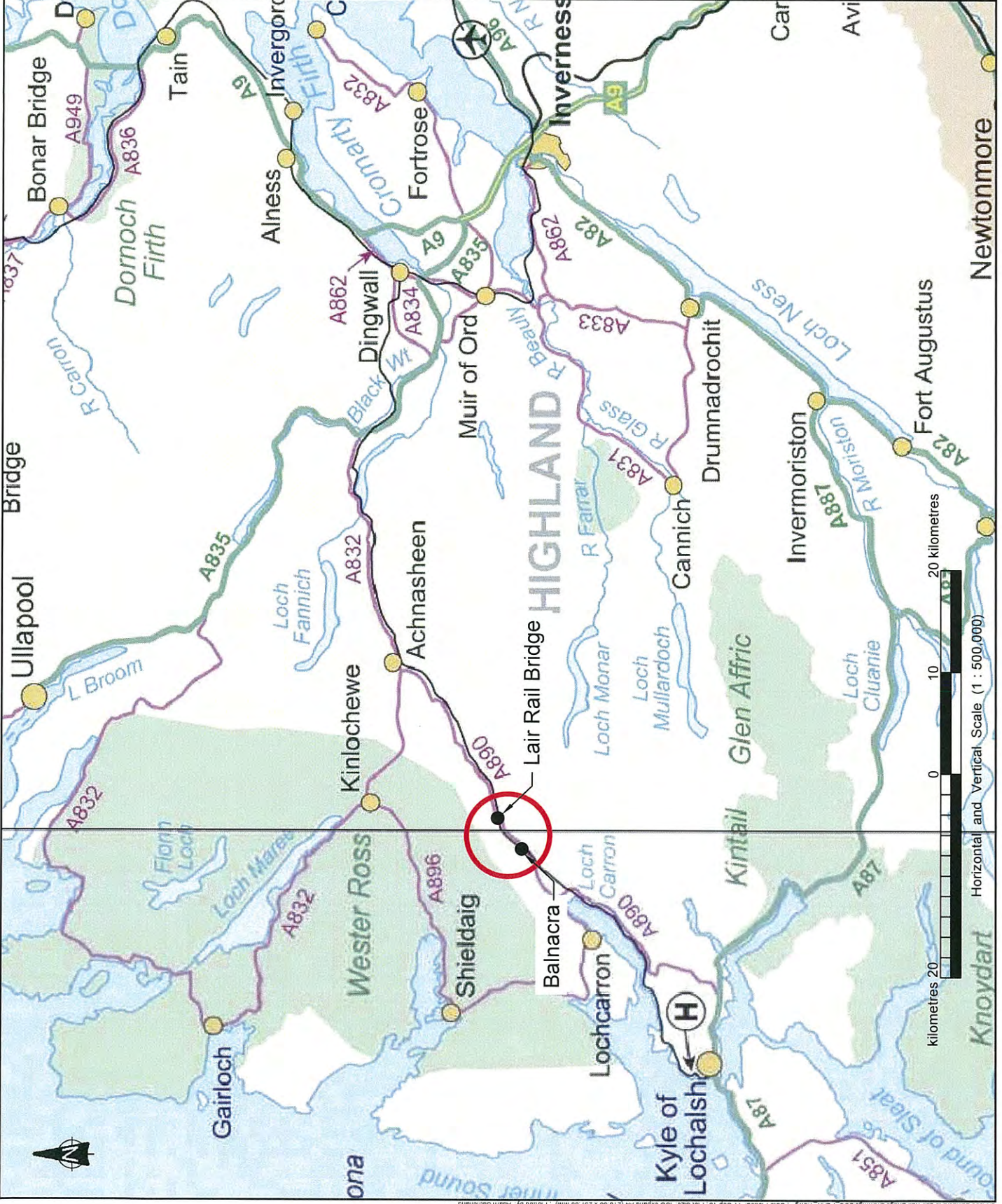
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Project: A890 Balnacra to Lair Rail Bridge

Location Plan	
Scale	1:500,000 (@ A4)
Drawn	AS
Checked	AT
Drawn Date	08/05/2015
Checked Date	08/05/2015
Project No.	RS7150
Drawing No.	Loc_Plan_1



Appendix 2

Options Appraisal Route Plan

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Revision Details

By	Checked	Date

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Options Appraisal Route Plan

Not to Scale (@A1)

Scale	AS	AS	AS
Scale	AS	AS	AS
Scale	AS	AS	AS

Project No. RS7150
Drawing No. OA-01

