2 Need for the Scheme

2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 This chapter sets out the national context for the programme to dual the full A9 from Perth to Inverness. The intention to improve the A9 along the section encompassed by the proposed scheme pre-dates the December 2011 Infrastructure Investment Plan (IIP) commitment to upgrade the A9 between Perth and Inverness by 2025, and this background is provided in Section 2.3 of this chapter.

2.1.2 The local context for the proposed scheme is also provided, together with an overview of the work underway at a programme level for the full route.

2.2 The A9 Trunk Road

2.2.1 The A9 is a strategic route linking the Central Belt to the north of Scotland. Currently, the A9 from Perth to Inverness comprises sections of both single carriageway and dual carriageway. In addition, there are a few short sections of Wide Single 2+1 (WS2+1).

2.2.2 The route is a vital link between the north of Scotland and the Central Belt for people, a major bus route and is used by freight traffic supporting key industries, such as food and drink, oil, waste and construction. During the holiday seasons, the route is used by tourists as a means of reaching locations in Perthshire and the Highlands.

2.2.3 It is considered that the upgrade of the A9 to dual carriageway would help assist economic growth in the north of Scotland. Dualling of the route would improve journey times, potentially saving costs for businesses and making the north of Scotland a more attractive short-break tourism destination, in line with the proposed scheme objectives provided in Section 2.4 (Programme Level Review).

2.3 National Context for Dualling

A9 Route Action Plan and Route Strategy (1995-97, 1996)

2.3.1 Studies into the potential for improving the A9 Trunk Road date back to 1995-97, with a Route Action Plan (RAP) and a Route Strategy (Scott Wilson Kirkpatrick, 1997) which considered opportunities to improve safety and relieve driver stress. The upgrade of the Luncarty to Pass of Birnam section to dual carriageway formed part of the preferred route strategy at that time.

A9 Route Improvement Strategy Study (2004)

2.3.2 The RAP was followed by a Route Improvement Strategy Study (RISS) (Scott Wilson, 2004) (Scotland), which aimed to identify a route improvement scheme for the Perth to Blair Atholl section of the A9. The study concluded that Pitlochry provided a definite split in the character of the route, primarily due to the reduction in traffic volumes to the north of the town. Part of the emerging strategy was to undertake a programme of upgrading between Perth and Pitlochry.

2.3.3 The findings of the RISS (Scott Wilson, 2005) were subject to appraisal as part of the STPR, which was first reported in 2009.

Strategic Transport Review and Subsequent Studies (2009)

2.3.4 The Strategic Transport Projects Review (STPR) has been undertaken by Transport Scotland to define the most appropriate strategic investments in Scotland's national transport network between 2012 and 2022.

2.3.5 Within the context of the Government's commitment to planning for dualling of the A9, the STPR has identified a number of targeted improvements as initial priorities. These improvements include

full dualling of the A9 between Perth and Blair Atholl and new grade separated junctions to reduce accidents and improve journey time reliability. Recent development of the A9 dualling has been within the policy context of the STPR.

National Planning Framework (2009)

2.3.6 The Scottish Government's National Planning Framework 2 (NPF2; June 2009) is intended to set out strategic development priorities for Scotland to 2030, promoting sustainable economic growth. In relation to trunk roads and specifically the A9, NPF2 states:

> *"For trunk roads, the Government is focusing on tackling congestion where it affects journey time reliability, targeted enhancement of capacity, managing demand on the network and addressing the accessibility needs of rural areas….*
>
> *The Government is already committed to further improvements to nationally strategic trunk routes, including the A9, A96, A75 and A77. Many roads in the Highlands and Islands and the South of Scotland are lifeline routes for rural communities and of critical importance to the local economy. Their continued maintenance and improvement is essential to ensure the safety of the network and to support long-term development."*

2.3.7 Further information relating to the national planning framework is provided in Chapter 18 (Policies and Plans).

Infrastructure Investment Plan (IIP) (2011)

2.3.8 The IIP, published on 06 December 2011, sets out priorities for investment and long term strategy for the development of public infrastructure in Scotland. Among the investments set out in the document the IIP provided a commitment to dual the A9 between Perth and Inverness by 2025.

2.4 Programme-Level Review

2.4.1 Following the IIP announcement in December 2011, two corridor-wide commissions were implemented to help develop a consistent approach to dualling design and assessment. These have informed progression of the proposed scheme from Luncarty to Pass of Birnam, and are explained further below.

Preliminary Engineering Services (PES)

2.4.2 The PES commission was awarded to Jacobs in September 2012 and involves engineering constraints mapping, corridor options work equivalent to a DMRB Stage 1 level of assessment, and other design strategies such as junction and access strategy, layby/rest area strategy, and non-motorised user strategies.

2.4.3 The PES commission also includes a number of early assessments to provide the basis for later progression of individual projects forming part of the overall A9 dualling programme. These include geotechnical and topographical studies, business case development and implementation of a stakeholder engagement strategy.

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)

2.4.4 The SEA commission was awarded to Halcrow in September 2012, to be undertaken in parallel with the PES commission. The Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005 requires SEA for all public sector plans, programmes and strategies with the potential for significant effects on the environment. As the A9 dualling programme provides the overall direction of the route alignment selection process, design, project-level EIA and later construction activities, it was determined that SEA was required.

2.4.5 SEA screening and scoping stages were completed by February 2013 and were followed by the environmental assessment stage. At the time of preparation of this ES, public consultation on the

SEA Environmental Report (Halcrow, 2013a) is complete. An SEA Addendum Report is due to be published in 2014.

2.4.6 The SEA process requires close working with key statutory bodies and a range of environmental stakeholders to identify the key environmental and landscape issues along the proposed route. The findings of the SEA process have informed the EIA process for the proposed scheme from Luncarty to Pass of Birnam, and the SEA is therefore referred to where relevant in this ES.

Other Strategic Reviews

2.4.7 In parallel with the PES and SEA work, a number of other strategic studies have been undertaken to consider potential effects of the wider programme of work, and/or to promote consistency between individual projects forming part of the overall A9 dualling programme. These are listed below and are referred to in this ES where they have been taken into account:

- Habitat Regulations Appraisal – Screening Report (Halcrow, 2013b);
- Habitat Regulations Appraisal - Appropriate Assessment (Halcrow, 2013c);
- Landscape and Access Environmental Design Principles (Halcrow, 2013d); and
- Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (Halcrow, 2013e).

Scheme Objectives

A9 Dualling Objectives

2.4.8 The following objectives for the dualling of the A9 as a whole have been set by Transport Scotland:

1. *To improve the operational performance of the A9 by:*
    - *reducing journey times; and*
    - *improving journey time reliability.*
2. *To improve safety for motorised and non-motorised users by:*
    - *reducing accident severity; and*
    - *reducing driver stress.*
3. *Facilitate active travel in the corridor.*
4. *To improve integration with public transport facilities.*

Objectives of the Proposed Scheme

2.4.9 The above objectives form the basis of the proposed scheme objectives, which are:

1. *Improve operation performance and level of service by:*
    - *reducing journey times; and*
    - *improving journey time reliability.*
2. *Improve safety for motorised users by:*
    - *reducing journey times and*
    - *improving journey time reliability.*
3. *Facilitate active travel in the corridor.*

4. *Improve integration with public transport facilities.*

5. *Mitigate the environmental impact of the new works and, where possible, examine opportunities for enhancing the environment and improving sustainability in design and construction.*

6. *Achieve value for money for both tax payers and transport users.*

2.4.10 Of particular relevance to the EIA process is Objective 5, regarding the mitigation of environmental impacts, enhancing the environment and improving sustainability. The proposed scheme addresses this objective through the inclusion of appropriate mitigation measures as described in the ES. This includes measures such as adherence to best practice during construction, in addition to mitigation 'embedded' into the design, for example, the inclusion of footways and cycleways to improve existing facilities and connectivity.

2.5 Local Context for Dualling

2.5.1 In addition to the national context explained above, the following local context considerations contribute to the need for the proposed scheme.

Safety

2.5.2 The current single carriageway section of the A9 between Luncarty and Pass of Birnam can lead to vehicles being held up by Heavy Goods Vehicles (HGVs) and other slower moving traffic. This can lead to driver frustration potentially resulting in dangerous overtaking manoeuvres. Upgrading the road from single carriageway to dual carriageway would reduce the occurrence of driver frustration and would provide opportunity for safer overtaking.

Existing Traffic Conditions

2.5.3 The A9 between Luncarty and Pass of Birnam has an Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT) flow of approximately 15,900 (based on 2012 figures), of which approximately 11% comprises HGVs.

2.5.4 Along the extents of the existing A9 from Luncarty to Pass of Birnam, there were 21 personal injury accidents between 2007 and 2011, including 2 fatal and 6 serious accidents. The majority of accidents on the A9 occur along sections of single carriageway, and generally near to junctions.

2.6 References

Halcrow (2013a). A9 Dualling Programme: Strategic Environmental Assessment – Environmental Report (June 2013).

Halcrow (2013b). Habitat Regulations Appraisal – Screening Report (May 2013).

Halcrow (2013c). A9 Dualling Programme: Habitat Regulations Appropriate Assessment (draft, September 2013).

Halcrow (2013d). Landscape and Access Environmental Design Principles (draft, August 2013).

Halcrow (2013e). A9 Dualling Programme: Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (October 2013).

Scottish Government (2005). Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act.

Scottish Government (2008). Strategic Transport Project Review (STPR), December 2008.

Scottish Government (2009). National Planning Framework 2.

Scott Wilson Kirkpatrick (1997). A9 (T) Perth To Inverness Development Of A Route Strategy - Phase 3 Final Report.

Scott Wilson (2005). A9 Perth to Blair Atholl - Route Improvement Strategy Study. Scott Wilson (Scotland) Ltd, December 2005.