

Birnam to Ballinluig A9 Dualling Community Group

Birnam to Tay Crossing: Towards a Benefits Focused Co-Creative Community Engagement Process

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*'Collaboration rather than conflict - inclusion and empowerment.
'Key outcome from Review of Scottish Planning System 2016'*

Executive Summary

The BtoB A9 Community Group is the community group representing the communities in the Birnam to Tay Crossing section of the A9 as demarcated in Transport Scotland's A9 dualling programme. We propose a community engagement process between the community and Transport Scotland. The *outcome* of the process will be a solution for dualling the A9 in this section that is acceptable to both Transport Scotland and this community. The engagement process will be developed by the community and Transport Scotland. The *function* of the process is to facilitate this co-creative activity between the community and Transport Scotland. The *purpose* of the community engagement process is to satisfy the requirement for meaningful public engagement in government planning projects. We believe this process will also produce the best solution, broadly conceived, to the challenge of dualling this section.

The process we propose is given in outline. The first step is to establish the viability of and mutual willingness of the community and Transport Scotland to engage in a process of this kind. The next step is to agree facilitator(s) and work with them to agree the process parameters, e.g. its scope, methods, etc. With mutual consent to the process thus developed, we can begin.

We propose that an elapsed time of six months is allowed for the process itself. With goodwill, the preliminary steps described above can be completed quickly. Allowing for December holidays, a completion date in the second quarter of 2017 (2Q17) seems realistic.

We describe a process with several stages, oriented around key events as a starting point for discussion with Transport Scotland. A key event is likely to be day-long and involve a small party from Transport Scotland and the community group working with facilitator(s). These events will use proven decision-support tools and frameworks to consider the design challenges of the dualling. Previous work by Transport Scotland and its agents—as well as additional expert advice where available—will provide context for the discussions. Later stages are for decision-making about the best solutions. In the intervening periods between key events, each party will have work to do. For Transport Scotland, this may involve gathering or developing new information. For the community group, this will involve community outreach activities to maintain an ongoing mandate for our contribution and to ensure ongoing community engagement throughout the process.

We acknowledge that our proposed process brings challenges. First, it requires commitment by both parties to accept the process and its outcomes. Second, the expense of the process is significant and will have to be borne by Transport Scotland. Third, the timeframe proposed conflicts with the current timetable and expectations for detailed route selection in this section. However, we do not believe there is a quick-fix for the deficiencies of the public engagement to date. The six-month timeframe is the shortest we consider viable. Fourth, a central challenge we identify is successfully combining community members with professional road-designers in a co-creative process. We believe the process and tools we propose for consideration can meet this challenge when undertaken in the spirit of co-operation and goodwill. There are many benefits to be gained from the creation and successful completion of the process proposed. We can “bring” the community with us by contributing their priorities and concerns to the co-creative process. Their engagement by these means—it is their engagement that this process is about after all—should produce support for the solution at which we arrive. Where a solution is conceived as good because it satisfies to the greatest extent possible the concerns and priorities of the community, this process will produce the best solution. This should diminish the impetus to challenge the current process. Considering the formal requirements for consultation and engagement, this process is a remedy for the deficiencies in prior attempts at engagement.

A process collaboratively conceived, enacted and concluded by the community and Transport Scotland, demonstrably responds to the urgency and priority the Scottish Government has given to community engagement in its recent review of the planning system. Transport Scotland can lead in this area through this process. The development of this co-creative process is an innovation of its own. If successful, it would bring valuable institutional knowledge for Transport Scotland and other agencies to use in engaging communities at the outset of other major infrastructure projects.

1. Context and Background

In January 2016, new proposals for dualling the A9 through the community from Birnam to Ballinluig were set out in a local exhibition. These proposals departed dramatically from those that had been set out and ‘consulted’ upon previously. At a packed public meeting hosted by the Community Council in February 2016, the level of concern, number and breadth of questions, lack of awareness and understanding of the proposals and their significant impacts on the community and the integrity of its natural, cultural, historic and visual heritage, and flood risk became evident. The feedback opportunity for the community was too close, before requested information would be supplied. Six months on some residents have still not received answers to their written and verbal questions submitted after this event.

In late February, after the Community Meeting hosted by the Community Council and in response to the concerns raised at that meeting a Community Group was established to help coordinate more representative community engagement with Transport Scotland. In April, without adequate information to work with, the Community Council submission to the public exhibition and public meeting was unable to conclude a preferred option or alternatives. It constructively suggested a meeting with Transport Scotland.

At the end of June, a meeting was held between the Community Group and Transport Scotland where it was agreed that a ‘co-creative’ or ‘charette-like’ process, enabling meaningful engagement with the community would be considered by Transport Scotland to help reach a positive solution. Transport Scotland indicated that if a timeline extension to their process was required to undertake this co-creative engagement exercise then it should be requested. After valuable insight from independent planners including PAS (formerly known as Planning Advice Scotland) and after a review of current Scottish Government policy, proposals for the development of a co-creative process for discussion with Transport Scotland are set out in this report.

The A9 cuts through a large part of this community, an area with unique environmental and cultural attributes, which it depends on for the sustenance of its local economy. Given the predominance of the route in this area; the widespread community concern at the current online solutions; the lack of effective engagement to date (leading to some disenfranchisement of the local community) and an ongoing lack of information on mitigation measures or examples, there is an urgent requirement for a different approach to the A9 upgrade in this area.







2. The Benefits of A Co-Creative Process

“participatory planning method is not a magic trick, which is a cure to all problems, but participatory planning is a democratic, integrating planning method, which creates cohesion among communities and stakeholders during the programme

periods to create a sustainable environment for the users.”

Source: SURE Toolkit on Participative Planning 2012

Co-creative, participative planning processes are increasingly well established in ensuring planning works to the maximum benefit of the communities concerned, through early and effective engagement of local communities in visioning solutions and supporting the planning system in achieving specific objectives. These processes, including the “Charrettes” are commonly applied to local development and community level planning in many countries across the world. There is less evidence for participative processes being applied to complex infrastructure projects. This provides an opportunity for Transport Scotland and the local community working with others (including PAS) to innovate in designing a bespoke co-creative process that achieves the following:

-  uses local knowledge to foster creative ideas and solutions ensuring community buy in to the choice and design of solutions
-  fully understands and addresses community concerns
-  builds consensus rather than conflict
-  supports community development and empowerment of the community
-  builds trust in institutions
-  helps to ensure that the community feel that they have achieved an improved asset or some gain from the process

The process will also need to ensure that any conclusions are informed and supported by the wider legislative and policy framework which should be understood by all participants through the process (water, flooding, landscape, natural, cultural, historical designations etc). This needs to be done in ways accessible to the community.

In specific terms the engagement with the community in redefining options and in helping choose an agreed solution will help ensure the preservation of a unique social, environmental and cultural place - avoiding a protracted, harmful and unnecessary conflict with this community and damage to the integrity that makes this such a special place.

3. The Scottish Planning System – A process under review

The Scottish Planning system is currently undergoing a wide independent review. It is worth noting here that this independent review, commissioned by the Scottish Government, has relevant context in respect of the situation we are addressing here.

The report makes 48 recommendations for the improvement of the Scottish Planning system. Notable in our specific context are the following:

40. Skills development is required in a number of priority areas.

Project management, development finance, mediation and information technology are of critical importance. This applies to all those involved in planning, including the key agencies, developers and their agents as well as local authority planners. Training of elected members should be mandatory, monitored and enforced. A programme of training in community engagement for the development sector should also be rolled out.

43. There should be a continuing commitment to early engagement in planning, but practice needs to improve significantly.

Front loading engagement remains a valid and attainable goal and must be at the core of the planning system. Planning authorities and developers need to promote innovation, which empowers communities to get actively involved in planning their own places. Much smarter use of information technology, including 3D visualisation and social media could support a step change in the transparency of planning decisions.

47. A working group should be established to identify barriers to greater involvement in planning, taking account of measures contained in the Community Empowerment Act and the Land Reform Act.

More effective and continuous engagement in the planning system is required. At present, the majority of Scotland's public are unaware or uninterested in planning, even although it affects everyone's quality of life. Although we expect that there are examples of good practice, during this review we saw little evidence that disabled people, young people, minority ethnic groups, or disadvantaged communities are being effectively and routinely involved in the planning system. We recommend a short-life working group is established to follow up on this and if necessary to identify how engagement can be broadened and diverse groups can be more fully included in planning.

It was encouraging to see Ministerial support for this report, with strong support for each of the six key outcomes including "Collaboration rather than conflict – inclusion and empowerment". It is also clear that in the consultation on a White Paper to address the recommendations of the report a specific focus will be given to "more meaningful and inclusive community engagement".

We firmly believe this offers all parties a genuine opportunity to work together in creating an innovative co-creative process that can greatly improve on the engagement process to date and build on the Scottish Government's efforts to improve community empowerment. In this way, the A9 upgrade for the section between Birnam and Ballinluig could be an exemplar in the future application of co-creative processes as applied in complex infrastructure projects.

4. Co-Creative Process Design Requirements

We suggest that the following 10 principles need to guide any co-creative design process:

1. The process must identify the reasonable and realisable objectives (both strategic and operational) of both Transport Scotland and the Birnam to Balinluig A9 community at the outset. Critical to this will be honest dialogue about what the public can and cannot influence as part of the technical design process.
2. The co-creative process should allow consideration of derogations from scheme-wide design standards and off-line solutions in identifying and reviewing options for the A9 process.
3. The process needs to allow a review of existing options and identification and investigation of new options to achieve the objectives of the A9 upgrade.
4. The co-creative process should allow for engagement on potential mitigation measures for any final option at different parts of the route.
5. The co-creative process should be adequately resourced and allow sufficient time to facilitate a solution that meets the requirement of both the local Community and Transport Scotland.
6. The process should enable the complexity, diversity and future visioning of different community stakeholder groups to be represented.
7. The participation of statutory consultees such as SEPA, SNH and Perth and Kinross Council, should be sought during the engagement process.
8. The process should be *independently* facilitated by an organisation with experience of design thinking and community engagement in infrastructure development projects, with both the community and Transport Scotland sharing oversight on the role and management of the facilitators. Both the community and Transport Scotland should agree to the choice of independent facilitator. Our suggestion is to use PAS as an independent and impartial engagement specialist for this, bringing in additional technical resources and community facilitation capacity as necessary.
9. There should be a presumption that both the Community and Transport Scotland will commit to the final outputs in the event an agreed final option is reached.
10. That an agreed mechanism (rules of engagement) is put in place to resolve conflicts that threaten an impasse.

5. Process Options

It is not the purpose of this report to propose the detail of the engagement process. Rather, we offer some early ideas that will help delivery of a joint co-creative process development with Transport Scotland and PAS that enables Transport Scotland to reach their objective of the best technical option by working with the community.

The fundamental tension in a process of this nature is to enable a complex decision to be reached on an optimum design option through engagement with a local community who are not experts in planning, road engineering or many of the other disciplines involved. There are well established techniques that can help achieve this when used to support the extensive technical expertise that Transport Scotland have in delivering large complex transport infrastructure projects.

These techniques could include:

- ✚ Value Management
- ✚ Value Engineering
- ✚ Simple Multi-Attribute Rating Technique (SMART methodology)
- ✚ Options Evaluation Matrices
- ✚ Design thinking
- ✚ Target modelling/road mapping
- ✚ Weighting Techniques such as Pair Wise Comparison
- ✚ Community engagement techniques (modified as necessary) such as:
 - PAS Charretteplus® type process: <http://pas.org.uk/charretteplus/>
 - Place Standards methodologies: <http://www.placestandard.scot/#/home>
 - SP=EED: <http://pas.org.uk/speed/>

We suggest that these techniques, adapted as necessary, can provide useful mechanisms by which the objectives of and options for the A9 upgrade project can be explored and decided. The use of such techniques can help improve outcomes in the following ways:

- ✚ Ensure a more holistic assessment of what is meant by best value providing a precise basis for assessing options
- ✚ Help to reach agreement on differing stakeholder needs and expectations and improve communication between stakeholders so that each can understand and respect the other's constraints, expectations and requirements. This in turn supports better communication and collaborative working.
- ✚ Allow options to be more clearly expressed on the basis of verifiable value.
- ✚ Maintains the focus on achieving successful outcomes that address, in a transparent way, the long term costs and benefits of this major road project.

At the outset a choice must be made on the joint objectives, choice of option evaluation/decision techniques and independent facilitation.

Specific tools exist to support each of these stages. We need to identify the right tools to use and ensure the process is easily understood and usable at a community level. In doing so, it will be important not only to look at issues at a strategic level but to take the issues to a more local level with accessible materials to stimulate and enhance meaningful and inclusive community engagement and buy-in.

6. Engagement Structure: 5 key workshops/events over a 6-month period

The final development of the engagement process needs to be developed in collaboration between the community, Transport Scotland and PAS. This is more likely to produce a viable process that has the support and buy in of all parties. To this end we are simply outlining some ideas of what the process might look like at this stage. Any final process will need a considerable degree of detailing prior to commencement. Community engagement as a process will occur across the key phases of this engagement exercise. Each event would need careful preparation and planning with the intervening periods allowing work to be done at each stage, preparation for the ensuing stage and undertaking appropriate community engagement activity.

Prior to this engagement design process commencing it is essential that the community has all the information necessary to inform its engagement with Transport Scotland. This has not yet been provided and risks delaying the process.

W1. Assimilation, Base-lining and Defining Objectives

- Assimilation of all work to date (and documentation) and current concerns. Review of current options. Baseline Creation. Everyone up to speed and up to date
- Stakeholder layering exercise (e.g. young people, residents, businesses, visitors, statutory consultees, geographic communities) with further opinion gathering during the process to elicit fresh stakeholder perspectives on options. This will be important at the outset to establish a clear sense of what the community wants, building on existing survey work to identify what its strategic priorities are and identifying issues with options proposed to date.
- Assessment and confirmation of the communities' objectives
- Assessment and confirmation of Transport Scotland's objectives
- Agreement of options evaluation criteria
- This phase could borrow much of its work in developing common objectives from the A9 Community Groups survey and consultation work to date.

W2 Options Identification process

- This stage initiates the co-creative community engagement process to help identify a set of initial alternative options, including options identified at earlier parts of the process
- Agreement of options evaluation criteria and a clear approach (application of principles) for discounting any particular options from further consideration
- Development of a short list of options for options appraisal

W3 Refinement of options

- Continue the co-creative community engagement process to help refine –

short list to a list of refined options. This should also include potential mitigation actions for options to improve consideration in context.

W4/5 Decision Processes (2 stages)

Stage 1:

- Use of option appraisal and choice selection techniques to propose a co-created and agreed solution
- Community Consultation.

Stage 2:

- Final revisions and report on solution agreed by the co-creative process.

The key to success in the final process will be to set clear and achievable objectives and the micro design of the process e.g. the tools we use, process design and facilitation, provision of the necessary technical support and information resources, adequate resourcing of facilitation, good will and sufficient time to undertake a meaningful process.

7. Managing Expectations and Resolving Conflict

Any process aimed at achieving outcomes agreeable to a wide range of stakeholders is likely to encounter conflicts. In this instance we may face conflicts and differences of opinion within the community or between the community and Transport Scotland. It will be important at the outset to agree mechanisms for the management and resolution of any such conflicts.

Managing expectation will only be possible if we are clear what the community want to achieve from the outset and put in place a process that provides a realistic chance of achieving mutually acceptable objectives.

8. Timescales and Next Steps

Ensuring adequate time to deliver the process in an efficient and meaningful way and respecting the limitations on the communities voluntary resource will be essential to this process working. We should adopt a "stitch in time philosophy". Time spent undertaking this process now will save time in the future. The time requirement will be set by the process design in negotiation with Transport Scotland. With adequate resourcing and good organisation we estimate the time required to undertake the process would be in the region of 6 months at a minimum. This time investment is essential to fully and adequately engage the community in the process and will, we believe, pay dividends in the time taken for later stages in the process. Having community buy in and a clear understanding now will restore trust in the process and resolve conflict and disengagement throughout the remaining process.

The next step should be a meeting between the BtoB A9 Community Group, Transport Scotland and PAS to discuss this proposal and map out steps to develop and initiate the process.

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