

A9 Dualling Forum

Three people went from Carrbridge to the Dewar Centre in Perth on 26th May 2015 to attend a forum run by Transport Scotland. This forum enables Non-Motorised Users (NMU) to be involved in the planning of the project to dual remaining sections of the A9 from Perth to Inverness over the next decade. The meeting was under threat because of a possible railway workers' strike but accord was reached over that. We three participants had to drive to Aviemore to pick up the London train as it doesn't stop in Carrbridge (except on Sundays).

Transport Scotland employed a private firm to run the workshop. Capital Value and Risk Limited (CVRL) are, apparently, skilled in stakeholder participation, group problem solving and partnering. The speakers were from Transport Scotland together with representatives of the three design consultancies undertaking the work, perhaps a dozen in number:

- Jacobs for the southern section from the Pass of Birnham to Glengarry
- a consortium involving Fairhurst and CFJV (CH2M Hill) for the middle sections from Glengarry to Kincaig
- and Atkins/Mouchel for the northern section Dalraddy to Slochd and Tomatin to Moy.

The forum participants numbered 30 to 40 and came from Sustrans, John Muir Trust, Visit Scotland, British Horse Society and Ramblers etc. with me representing HCC and my husband, Dick Langridge, representing the CTC.

After words of welcome and explanation about the running of the meeting then an introduction from Andrew Mackay of Transport Scotland a spokesperson (1 male, 2 female) of each design consultancy described their section of the route and introduced the reasons and methodology behind their work. Unfortunately only one of the speakers projected her voice. This combined with difficulties in reading the slides meant two of the presentations were no use. I realise these workers don't have lecturing among their remit but a couple of basic pointers about voice projection and not facing the screen would have increased the value of their 10-15 minute presentations considerably. (We have been promised copies of these presentations.) All had sent out relevant annotated maps (with some dark photos) in advance.

Thereafter we were divided into 5 groups and each group sat around the five tables located around the hall and manned by 2, 3 or 4 representatives of the design consultancies dealing with their section of the route. Each group spent 30 minutes at each table then rotated, as a group, to the next table in turn. There we voiced our requests and suggestions and learned about obstacles and drawbacks to those decisions; for example land ownership, slopes, water problems, natural habitats, the railway line. The teams had enlarged maps on the table and annotated these with our requests. Again the middle section consultants, Fairhurst, appeared to take more on board but that is a subjective opinion. My main requests were for cycle-tracks alongside the A9 from Carrbridge south to Aviemore and north to Inverness. The former is commuting distance for at least a fairly enthusiastic cyclist and in a region with many 'outdoor' sorts but the next alternative road is the A95 which is windy,

narrow, fast and used by heavy lorries while the latter is beyond commuting distance for almost everybody but would shorten the current Sustrans route which goes via Balloch by at least 6 miles (20%). Dick and the third Carrbridge person (Roy representing Sustrans in the National Park) went further and suggested a transport hub near Carrbridge station for cyclists, buses and the train together with disability access which is currently not available on Platform 1 in Carrbridge. Currently the long-distance buses avoid many villages along their route! This seems to fit in with the desire of the planners to have 'super-laybys' at intervals along the road.

Having completed our round of the tables/consultants, three before lunch (a finger buffet) and two afterwards, we reconvened to hear a five-minute description of the key requests and main discussion points from each of the firms. Two firms (N & S) registered a desire for a segregated linear (parallel) route even where there is a close possible alternative. One participant described this as a Three-lane Carriageway i.e. north and south carriage-ways plus the (cycle) track. For one thing that would make a possible round-trip route for locals. There is also a fear that a parallel road could become a rat-run, including for those motorists wishing to avoid speed cameras. Existing crossing points should be retained at any junction used by cyclists, walkers and horse-riders by providing simple under passes or bridges. Cyclists should not be expected to cycle any extra distance (usually doubled) to divert to a crossing point and such a situation is even more difficult for walkers. They are usually intent on leaving the road, either east or west, heading for the hills and making it straight back to their vehicles at the end of an active day. Horse-riders seem to follow long-distance routes crossing the A9 in a west-east direction so again don't wish to linger with noisy traffic.

Unfortunately we were told that any improvements to the already 'dualled' sections will probably not come until after the current 'dualling' project is complete. (2025?)

This meeting is to be followed by another next November when the details from this meeting will have been collated. Work on some sections by then may have progressed enough for us to see if our requests have been taken on board. Meantime the current Newsletter for the route is available at transportscotland.gov.uk.

The noises made by all concerned with the project were generally very positive but the proof of the pudding

Watch out for exhibitions.