



REPORT TO: ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES COMMITTEE ON 13 MARCH 2002

SUBJECT: ELGIN BYPASS

BY: DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

1. Reason for Urgency

- 1.1 In terms of the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 the Chairman is of the opinion that this report requires to be considered on the grounds of urgency in order to give early consideration to the concerns being expressed by the community of Elgin.

2. Reason for Report

- 2.1 A request has been made for a report on the merits of an Elgin Bypass to be brought to this Committee.

3. Background

- 3.1 This report presents a preliminary summary of the technical merits of an Elgin Bypass based on traffic information currently available.

- 3.2 There are various references to an Elgin Bypass in Council policy documents.

- The Council's Corporate Plan identifies the need to maintain and improve the roads network and to lobby for better strategic transport links within its economic and environmental programmes.
- The Moray Community Plan identifies the improvement of the trunk road infrastructure as a strategic action in delivering its agenda.
- The Moray Development Plan sets out the Council's position in relation to an Elgin Bypass. The Moray Structure Plan includes Recommendation S/T2: Trunk Road Improvement which states "The Secretary of State is recommended to enhance the trunk road network both within and to/from Moray. In particular, priority should be given to:-

- i) the dualling of the A96 Aberdeen to Inverness route, providing bypasses at Keith, Fochabers/ Mosstodloch and Elgin;
- ii) the improvement of the A95 Keith to Aviemore route.”

- The Moray Local Plan goes on to seek the reservation of bypass lines in Policy L/T1: A96 which states “Bypass lines will be reserved for Keith, Fochabers/Mosstodloch and Elgin; development to the south of Alves and Brodie will be restricted. Development on new sites will not be permitted within 70m of the present carriageway of the road, outwith the settlement boundaries, and no additional vehicular access points formed. Road improvements should seek to minimise or mitigate their potential impact on the natural environment.”
- The Local Plan identifies two alternative route corridors for the Elgin bypass TSP1 for the northern route, and TSP2 for the southern route.
- The Moray Local Transport Strategy also identifies the need to maintain and improve the existing road network. It sets down the provision of bypasses for Fochabers/Mosstodloch, Keith and Elgin as one of its key actions for delivery.

- 3.3 In Elgin the A96 trunk road has to pass through an urban area over a length of more than 4 km. This section of the route is entirely single carriageway, speed restricted with no opportunity for overtaking, and it has to negotiate 7 urban roundabouts (soon to increase to 8) and a number of major priority junctions where traffic delays are incurred. The combination of trunk road ‘bypassable’ traffic and local traffic causes significant delays for both, and not only is congestion along the route increasing at peak times, but there is evidence that as more development takes place in Elgin, daily peak traffic conditions are experienced for longer periods of time, both on weekdays and Saturdays.
- 3.4 When the Fochabers-Mosstodloch Bypass is provided the only settlements of significant size on the A96 between Aberdeen and Inverness which will not have been bypassed are Nairn, Elgin and Keith. The concept of an Elgin Bypass has been considered for many years and the current Local Plan identifies two alternative route corridors, TSP1 for the northern route and TSP2 for a route to the south of the town.
- 3.5 The main technical justification for providing a bypass is based on quantifying how much traffic would use it, and therefore as a result, how much traffic relief would be provided for roads in the town which currently carry east-west through traffic. In all probability the Scottish Executive is primarily interested in the volume of trunk road traffic wishing to bypass the town and the resultant reductions in travel time for that traffic. This ‘benefit’ would be calculated and then compared with the cost of providing a bypass.
- 3.6 The Scottish Executive has stated in previous publications that whilst the trunk road network has an important contribution to make to an integrated strategy, the continued approach of ‘predict and provide’ in which road capacity is increased to match forecast traffic growth is environmentally unsustainable, unaffordable and self-deflating.

- 3.7 In publishing their Travel Choices for Scotland – Strategic Roads Review in 1999, the Scottish Executive emphasised that five themes underpinned their view on integrated transport strategy – namely **economy, safety, environmental impacts, accessibility and integration**. Any consideration to an Elgin bypass, or traffic relief scheme would have to be evaluated under all of these headings.
- 3.8 In 1988 Grampian Regional Council carried out a limited traffic survey on behalf of the then Scottish Office Roads Directorate (now the Scottish Executive – Development Department) to identify the volume of traffic in Elgin at that time which would use an Elgin Bypass. This was in advance of a ‘low cost desk study’. More recently, in 1997 the Babbie Group of Consultants were commissioned jointly by Moray Council and the then Scottish Office to undertake traffic studies in Elgin and to create a computer-based traffic model for the town. Part of this project included a very preliminary traffic assessment of an Elgin Bypass. This assessment did not include the current South Elgin development proposals, the recent B&Q development nor the proposed Tesco development at Blackfriars Road.
- 3.9 Whilst the Consultant’s report indicated that there were differences in volumes of traffic likely to be attracted to a northern bypass route as opposed to a route south of the town, the main finding was that at peak traffic times only 35% - 40% of the traffic on the A96 on either side of Elgin would use a bypass. When the traffic is assessed further into the town a bypass would result in only a 20% reduction of traffic on Alexandra Road. This is due to the fact that much of the traffic currently using the A96 within the town is not through traffic but has business in the town i.e. recorded in the surveys as either a trip into Elgin from elsewhere, or a trip starting in the town travelling to a destination outside, or simply a short trip within the town using the A96. In addition, the traffic model showed that a bypass would provide a reduction in traffic on other routes in the town and this would be dependent on whether a northern or southern route was constructed. The 1997 report concluded that, based purely on technical justification, it would be unlikely that a bypass would be supported by funding from Central Government. These proportions are unlikely to have changed significantly since 1997.
- 3.10 The impact of new developments on, or in the vicinity of, the A96 in Elgin will not only add to traffic volumes, but by increasing the proportion of ‘local’ traffic this may effectively reduce the 20% figure further even though the volume of strategic traffic is also increasing at the same time. Developments that have obtained planning consent recently within the town have been required to make improvements to the road network to ensure that the traffic situation is not made worse than it would have been without the development. It is important to note that this provides no net benefit to what is an otherwise deteriorating traffic situation. This is an approach known as *no net detriment* and it has been adopted by the Scottish Executive for use on the A96. After the road improvements associated with the proposed Tesco development are completed there is little scope left for minor improvements which can be made to the ‘loop’ which is formed by Maisondieu Road, Station Road, Hay Street, Alexandra Road and South College Street. This has implications for future development in Elgin, including the Elgin South housing development.

- 3.11 The extent of road improvements associated with the Elgin South development proposals will also significantly impact on traffic conditions on the A96. Work carried out by the Babbie Group in 1998 in preparation for the Local Plan concluded that the route which would be upgraded between the A96 (East) and the A941 (South) to accommodate the housing development proposals must also act as a distributor road to improve traffic flow, both around the periphery of the town, and from the periphery into the town centre. This requirement is clearly incorporated into both the Local Plan and the Elgin South Masterplan and it is imperative for future traffic conditions throughout the town, and in particular on the A96, that the level of road improvements delivered by this development must satisfy this stated objective in full.
- 3.12 Notwithstanding the position regarding the proportions of local and strategic traffic on the A96, in order to determine a means of providing some relief from congestion on the route through the town it is recommended that further work examining different options is carried out. This should consider the bypass and southern distributor road options and assess them in line with the Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidelines (STAG) recently issued by the Scottish Executive. It may also be possible to develop a procurement strategy for the route to identify any possible European or Central Government funding together with developer finance.
- 3.13 In 1998 the Scottish Executive Development Department commissioned a study to develop a strategy for improving transport conditions on the 70 km section of the A96 between Inverness and Fochabers. This was carried out by Consultants and the traffic model information for Elgin, referred to in para. 2.5 above was fed into it. Whilst the Council has requested information on this study on several occasions, no reply has ever been received.
- 3.14 Members will also be aware of the significant time and resource which the Scottish Executive has put into progressing the proposals for a Fochabers-Mosstodloch bypass up to the current stage. The Scottish Executive would have to be convinced that there was no reasonable alternative to them undertaking a similar investigation for Elgin. Accordingly the Council should consider their role in developing, supporting and promoting the need for an Elgin bypass. This is unlikely to be achieved by requests or Ministerial support alone.

4. Proposal

- 4.1 It is proposed that appropriate Council Officers should meet with representatives of the Scottish Executive Development Department (SEDD) to discuss an Elgin bypass and to request information from the A96 study described in para 3.13 above.
- 4.2 It is proposed that further work should be commissioned to develop and promote the Council case for an Elgin Bypass or other such traffic management proposals which would reduce congestion on Elgin's main road network. This would also permit the development of road proposals for the Elgin South Development to continue. If Members are minded to agree, this would require the Committee to recommend to the Policy and Resources Committee that an allocation of £50,000 should be included for this purpose when considering the next review of the Capital plan.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1 The Council has engaged a firm of traffic Consultants for a number of years by negotiated extensions to the original tendered contract, all in accordance with the Council's Financial Regulations (Section 11.4(iv)). It is now considered appropriate to review these arrangements by inviting tenders for a term contract for traffic consultancy work for a period of some five years. The tendering procedure for such an engagement will take several months, and it is proposed that the current negotiated contract be further extended to provide the council with urgent consultations until such time as these revised contractual arrangements can be put into place.

6. Staffing and Environmental Implications

- 6.1 At this stage there are no staffing implications arising from this report. A decision to promote a robust case for an Elgin bypass will require the services of an external Consultant.
- 6.2 An Elgin bypass would create considerable environmental benefits for Elgin.

7. Corporate Plan

- 7.1 The report supports a strategic objective of the Environmental programme to maintain and improve the existing roads network.

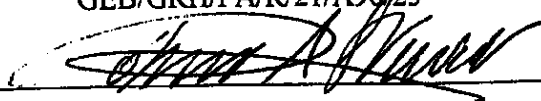
8. Consultations

- 8.1 The Chief Executive has been consulted.
- 8.2 The Chief Financial Officer has been consulted and agrees with the contents of the report.
- 8.3 Councillors Keith, Sim, Bisset, Ettles and Divers have been consulted and their views will be expressed at the meeting.
- 8.4 Martin Wanless has been consulted on this report.

9. Recommendations

- 9.1 **It is recommended that appropriate Officers of the Council are instructed to meet with representatives of the Scottish Executive Development Department to discuss an Elgin bypass and to request information from the aforementioned A96 study.**
- 9.2 **A recommendation should be made to the Policy and Resources Committee that an allocation of £50,000 should be made to commission work to develop and promote an Elgin bypass when considering the next review of the Capital plan.**
- 9.3 **It is recommended that the Council re-tenders the arrangements for the engagement of term traffic consultants as detailed in paragraph 5.1 of this report.**

Author of Report: Head of Direct Services
Background Papers: None
Ref: GEB/GRH/PA/R/21/A96/25

Signature:  _____

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