

THE A82 PARTNERSHIP

Response to the National Planning Framework 2 Consultation

The A82 West Highlands and Islands Corridor

We are disappointed, surprised and concerned over the absence of the A82 and the West Highlands from any strategic role within the text of the Framework. There are two specific spheres of interest: Communications and Economy.

A significant emphasis of the Framework centres on **Communications** and we draw your attention to the following:

Many tourists follow a circular route around the Highlands by using the A90/A96 or A9, coupled with the A82. One of the most frequently asked questions in the Fort William Tourist Office is, "...we came from Glasgow on the A82, is there a better way back south?"

Paragraph 192 emphasises that, ".....We need to make journey times faster and more reliable; make connections which build and sustain economic growth; provide travel opportunities for employment, business, leisure and tourism; and improve links between cities towns and rural communities throughout the country...." which makes the case for A82. Paragraph 193 further reinforces this. There are sections of A82 where two large vehicles cannot pass each other without one reversing.

Paragraph 280 highlights that, "The Outer Hebrides are the principal heartland of Scotland's Gaelic culture and offer outstanding scenery and maritime habitats of international importance..... Realising the potential of the islands will demand improved connectivity and communications." The A82 West Highlands and Islands Corridor provides that vital link for Harris and the southern islands and its importance should be recognised.

Although Map 15, 'Strategic Transport Corridors' includes the route north and west from Glasgow as a national transport corridor (which we have called the A82 West Highlands and Islands Corridor) the Map gives the impression that the main route to the Western Isles is from Inverness via Mallaig. This is fundamentally incorrect and we emphasise that the West Highlands and Islands Corridor should be extended through Skye and towards North Uist/Harris. Such a change would follow the current designation within the Trans-European Transport Network (TENT), which is the A82 from Glasgow to Invergarry, then A87 to Uig.

Similarly, in Map 16, 'Freight Transport', the West Highlands and Islands Corridor should extend through Skye to the Uists.

We also emphasise strongly that the A82 from Fort William to Inverness, a very important road for the development of the West Highlands should appear in the maps.

For similar reasons, we find it illogical to omit the A82 from paragraph 216, which mentions the importance of improving nationally strategic trunk routes to give better access to rural areas. It should be included in a similar standing with the A9, A96 and A77.

Our recommendation is therefore:

That the case presented in the paragraphs referred to above must result in the A82 West Highlands and Islands Corridor being granted strategic prominence throughout the document, similar to the corridors containing the A9, A96 and A77 trunk roads.

Many aspects of the Scottish **Economy** are touched upon but links from these arguments that are of direct relevance to the A82 West Highlands and Islands Corridor have not been made and we draw your attention to the following:

The Fort William tourist office is second only to Edinburgh in visitor numbers and Oban follows some 7% behind, reinforcing the contribution that the West Highlands makes to the national economy. The tourism target growth is 50% by 2015, which will correspondingly increase traffic volumes.

Paragraph 36 confirms that, “.....the Highlands, Edinburgh and Glasgow are Scotland’s most popular tourism destinations....87% of overseas visitors to Scotland arrive in the UK by air and 62% of UK visitors to Scotland come by car.” While the development of Glasgow Airport is rightly recommended as a National Development, with 50% projected growth by 2011 and 100% by 2030, the A82 access to the Highlands that is directly linked with Glasgow Airport is not given a related status.

Paragraph 56 notes, “...some of the remaining gaps in the network are currently being addressed....” but the A82 is a very long way short of modern day standards; a fundamental gap in itself.

Paragraph 115 notes the need for infrastructure to be provided to support East coast population growth however the West coast also needs similar investment, to act in a complementary way with the tourism growth targets, in order to allow it to contribute to national economic growth. This point is further reinforced by paragraph 144 which emphasises the importance of transport connections for the economy and paragraphs 155 and 156 identify some potential growth areas but the West Highlands, Scotland’s prime tourism area, is omitted. Clear mention is both appropriate and essential.

While the National Parks have a certain designation, the internationally iconic areas of Nevis and the Cuillin make very significant contributions to the national economy through “.... businesses...based on Scotland’s distinctive environment and culture...” and should be mentioned in paragraph 160. This is more strongly reinforced towards the end of the document in paragraph 281.

Paragraph 164 mentions Glasgow as the host city for the 2014 Commonwealth Games, Lochaber will almost certainly host downhill mountain bike events and this connection should be mentioned.

Paragraph 188 mentions the importance of transport infrastructure to the “competitiveness of places” and the importance of supporting rural communities. Paragraph 191 develops this theme through the importance of setting a clear, long-term transport vision and the following paragraph emphasises the need to make journey times faster and more reliable. However, although paragraph 195 refers to the need for an analysis of certain key corridors, that to the West Highlands and Islands, our premier tourist area, is not mentioned. This omission must be corrected.

In Lochaber and North Argyll, we are acutely aware of our link with Glasgow. Indeed when the principle of ‘city regions’ was introduced a few years ago, there was some recognition that Lochaber’s link with Glasgow was as important as that with Inverness. This link with Glasgow is highlighted in Para 258 which indicates, “The Clyde’s rich maritime heritageand the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park provide the basis for a growing tourism and leisure economy....Good links through Glasgow to the rest of Scotland will be crucial in making this happen.” Again, the direct link with the A82 West Highlands and Islands Corridor is left unstated.

Our recommendations are therefore:

That the case presented in the paragraphs referred to above must result in the West Highlands and Islands being referred to as an important economic area throughout the document.

Further, that Map 19, ‘Strategy’, should show the Strategic Transport Route to the West Highlands as a key economic development corridor because of the importance of tourism.

Clearly the Draft National Planning Framework 2 document is very well researched in terms of economic indicators: the contribution of the islands; National Parks and Geoparks; the importance of tourism to the national economy; the anticipated growth of Glasgow Airport. The link between all of these is the A82 West Highlands and Islands Corridor and, for this reason, the references to its importance within the document must be increased.

The Annex to the National Planning Framework includes the Cabinet Secretary's statement to Parliament on 13 September 2007 that specified which factors would be taken into account in identifying projects to be taken forward in the national interest:

“Projects which may be identified as national developments are those which: make a significant contribution to Scotland's sustainable economic development; strengthen Scotland's links with the rest of the world; deliver strategic improvements in internal connectivity; make a significant contribution to the achievement of climate change, renewable energy or waste management targets; are essential elements of a programme of investment in national infrastructure; or raise strategic issues of more than regional importance.”

With the exception of achievement of climate change, renewable energy and waste management targets, the A82 West Highlands and Islands Corridor fully satisfies each of these factors.

Our recommendation is therefore:

Taking the above communications and economic issues together, we believe that there is a very strong case for including the A82 West Highlands and Islands Corridor as the Tenth National Development, in a similar way to which previous Governments have tackled the A90 and A9.

Submitted on behalf of

The A82 Partnership

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