

Good Afternoon John

Thank you for your email of 26 April 2021 addressed to Hugh Gillies, Director of Roads, regarding the Rest and Be Thankful. Hugh has passed me your email to respond to as my team are leading on the project. I can confirm we have also received your letter to Roy Brannen and a response will be issued in due course. My team leads on project development and associated engagement so that we can make our dialogue current and meaningful. That obviously involves us having to manage keeping people informed through letters and meetings, as we have with your group, and progressing the project work. It is not a matter of volume of resource but making sure we use the right people to give the best information we hold at any time and the 20 days is to give us scope to balance that workload.

On the specific matters you have raised in your email to Hugh much of this was covered at our meeting and we will issue the note of that this week. It was helpful that you confirmed that you felt we were the “experts” in determining what the long term solution should be. However whatever the timeframe for whatever the route, the principles of being evidence led and data driven apply to all Civil Engineering and we were clear that without that information we are not certain that the Forestry Track in its current form is safe for use. We have committed to undertaking the appropriate survey work to investigate that further but to open up a route without that information would be inappropriate as both Roads Authority and professional Civil Engineers.

I also confirmed that there was no dispute from us that we needed to be pushing forward on an answer as quickly as possible and that if we felt something was immediately workable we have the resources in place to deliver that. As you point out we would ultimately be saving mitigation costs, however we must be satisfied that the answer is safe.

We also discussed the Norwegian tunnel methodology at the meeting and we are grateful for Sir William Lithgow’s offer. However as I explained at our meeting I do not dispute that there are some efficient construction methodologies available but our immediate interest is whether there are examples of savings to the consents procedures that can be made. You undertook to ask that question and we are also pursuing contacts in that regard. As you will appreciate given our experience in the development and promotion of roads schemes, we understand first-hand the delay that can be caused by procedural challenge (even without foundation) and accordingly there needs to be a careful balancing of accelerating development and procedural risk in order to ensure that we do not end up in the courts for several years. To that end it may well be that there are aspects of our programme and methodology that we will be unable to detail to you as we progress, in order to manage those risks.

Finally can I assure you that we are not waiting for anything and are pushing on with work at pace. The nature of our work will mean that activity is not always visible to you but we are moving forward on a range of short, medium and long term fronts to make sure that the essential development is undertaken as quickly as possible.

Regards,

Official at Transport Scotland

