

Open Letter to Greame Dey MSP 17 September 2021

Dear Graeme,

I am writing to you to summarise our feedback from the meetings we have had with you and your team over the past 4 weeks. In that time we have met you and your Transport Scotland colleagues, have walked the forestry road with TS and attended the RABT Taskforce last week. We have not seen a change in approach, a discussion about how things could be done differently to speed up the delivery of a robust solution, or any real recognition of the impact delays, closures and diversions are having on the businesses and people of Argyll.

In response to our questions we have repeatedly been presented with what your officials are doing, rather than to discuss what could be done differently or to engage on any meaningful level to deliver a rapid solution. What Transport Scotland is doing is not rapid and we still do not have a short, medium or long term solution that you could guarantee to be “shovel ready” by Christmas 2022. The mitigation works on the A83 have failed to keep the road open every year since they were started and nothing we have seen is likely to change this winter. We need a robust temporary route now, not in 4 years’ time.

We have asked you and your advisors what robust temporary solution can be delivered before 2022 and what actions need to be taken to achieve this?

We have had the following responses in the course of the past month:

- £3.5 M on an additional catch pits that will not be complete until June 2022, and we are told by TS are likely to be overwhelmed in the next landslide anyway.
- Once a permanent solution is in place the spending will be redundant, leaving a permanent scar on the hillside.
- Tree Planting on slopes for future mitigation from October which is going to be next to useless in preventing landslides for the next 10-20 years by which time they will be washed away.
- Resurfacing the OMR, but no improvement to the sharp bends and gradient, which slows speed and causes HGV’s to lose traction.
- We heard at the Taskforce meeting that there are no guarantees the road will open for 2 way traffic by June next year, as this will be subject to review!
- Lots of reasons why the Forestry track cannot be upgraded until all ground investigation works for the whole glen are complete sometime autumn 2022.

What we have been told is the mitigation work completed so far and planned for the next year will not stop the road from being closed and does not provide a robust alternative that gives Argyll a safe 2 way road that remains open when it rains. We are baffled as to why this work is being



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undertaken at all, would it not be better to spend the money on something useful like upgrading the bends and slopes on the OMR?

In effect what you are telling us is we will continue to face delays for the next 4 years when a the medium term solution could be built, but based on the current rate of progress, our confidence levels that this will happen are low. The A83 has now been affected by a further 4 sets of long term roadworks between Arrochar and Inveraray adding to business costs, increased emissions and social impact of delays. Your Government is doing nothing to support the economic impact on the area which continues each day with the delays on the road.

We also asked what are the obstacles to delivering a permanent solution within this parliament?

We have been told your advisors need another year of ground investigation works for the whole glen before they can be sure which solution to adopt which we think is an excessive timescale. In business you have to make judgement calls with incomplete data, we do not believe you need to study the whole glen to pick the most robust solution. We believe you have information to make a decision about the best solution but TS seem unwilling to take any decision without perfect data, and have extended the survey work to provide 2 permanent solutions, a medium term solution in 4-5 years and a long term solution delivered sometime before 2030. Do we need 2 roads?

We are unsure under what circumstances your Government would consider this an emergency. Climate change is obviously having an impact drying the hillside during the spring and summer with excessive rain events in the autumn and winter destabilising the hillside causing greater landslide events each year. We already know there are estimates of 100k tonnes of unstable material in what could be the biggest fall yet. Do we have to wait until this happens with the obvious risk to life before the current emergency is recognised as such and the permanent solution is accelerated? All we have heard from TS are lists of problems which will impact the speed of delivery, what we have not heard is how these problems could be overcome at pace. The Genoa bridge collapse was demolished redesigned and rebuilt within 2 years, other countries are able to design and build infrastructure in similar terrain quickly. We have heard from many of your consultants, saying what the problems are, nobody impressed me with a response of how these can be overcome quickly.

We need the Scottish Government to deliver on their pre-election promise of a rapid solution for the RABT, we will now seek help from our MSP's to raise this in Parliament to hold your Government to account for your election promises, and will continue to campaign for a change in approach by Transport Scotland or lobby for a change in who is responsible for maintaining a safe 2 way access into Argyll.

Kind regards

John

Chair of The RABT Campaign Group



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