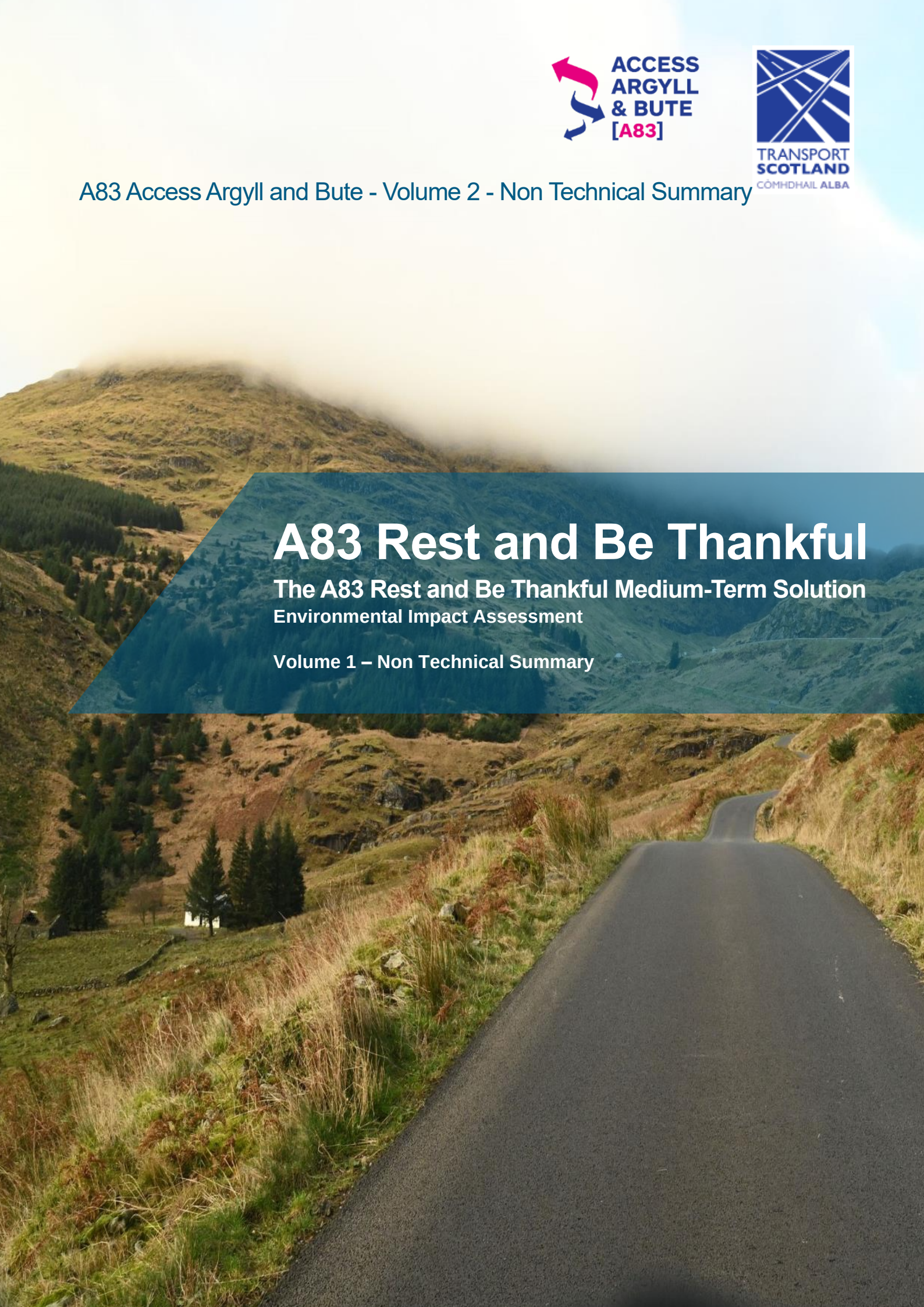


A83 Rest and Be Thankful

The A83 Rest and Be Thankful Medium-Term Solution

Environmental Impact Assessment

Volume 1 – Non Technical Summary

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

1.1.1. The A83 Trunk Road is one of two east-west strategic trunk roads that connects Argyll and Bute to the central belt of Scotland, making it a vital link in the region's transportation infrastructure. The A83 is a 98 mile (158km) road originating in Tarbet, where the A82 and A83 meets at the junction on the western side of Loch Lomond. It then ends in Campbeltown, near the southern tip of the Kintyre Peninsula.

1.1.2. The section of the A83 through Glen Croe, between Ardgartan and the Rest and Be Thankful car park and viewpoint at the A83 / B828 junction includes the highest point along the A83 where hillsides have a history of instability leading to regular road closures and diversions.

1.1.3. The location of the Proposed Scheme, as it passes through Glen Croe is shown below.

Figure 1 – Location of the Proposed Scheme

1.1.4. In line with the recommendations of Strategic Transport Projects Review 2 (STPR2) and following major landslip events at the Rest and Be Thankful in August and September 2020, the then Cabinet Secretary instructed Transport Scotland to investigate a long-term, resilient, and sustainable solution to the problem of landslips in Glen Croe. The Access to Argyll and Bute (A83) project team was commissioned with developing a resilient and sustainable road to Argyll and Bute to address landslip issues at the Rest and Be Thankful.

1.1.5. In addition to the development of a permanent solution to address the landslip and debris flow risk to the A83 Trunk Road (known as the 'Long-Term Solution' (LTS)), interventions are proposed to the existing Old Military Road (OMR) which runs parallel to the A83 Trunk Road (known as the 'Medium-Term Solution' (MTS). An image of the OMR is shown in figure 2.

Figure 2 – A view along the Old Miliary Road within Glen Croe

1.2. Environmental Impact Assessment

1.2.1. The Proposed Scheme EIA was undertaken in line with the Roads (Scotland) Act 1984 as amended by The Roads (Scotland) Act 1984 (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 (hereafter referred to as the 2017 Roads EIA Regulations).

1.2.2. An Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) of the Proposed Scheme is required under European and Scottish legislation. The EIA Report details the findings of the

EIA which has been undertaken in line with the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (DMRB). The purpose of the EIA is to investigate the likely effects of the Proposed Scheme on the environment, people, communities and businesses.

1.2.3. This Non-Technical Summary (NTS) describes the Proposed Scheme and the development of the design. It provides a summary of the findings including those key aspects and impacts documented in the EIA Report which are deemed to be of particular importance. The environmental assessment involves three key steps:

- assigning a value / sensitivity to receptors;
- determining the magnitude of impact upon the receptors; and
- determining the significance of the effect the Proposed Scheme would have.

1.2.4. The significance criteria referred to in the EIA Report and this NTS are on a scale (very large, large, moderate, slight, neutral) and can be considered positive (beneficial) or negative (adverse).

1.2.5. EIA is an important design tool which, through development of the Proposed Scheme design, has provided the opportunity to avoid or limit adverse effects upon the environment.

1.2.6. To inform the EIA process, information gathered through consultation (including public exhibitions and a regular meeting with key environmental bodies), surveys and technical studies have all informed the decision making throughout the design process. This has provided opportunities to lessen adverse effects where practicable, for example by incorporating measures to avoid or reduce potential adverse effects (called mitigation).

1.3. Need for the Proposed Scheme

1.3.1. The Proposed Scheme is supported by the following national policies:

- National Transport Strategy 2 (NTS2)
- Strategic Transport Projects Review 2 (STPR2)
- National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4)

1.3.2. Published in 2020, the NTS2 sets out a transport strategy for Scotland. The Proposed Scheme would improve the safety and resilience of the transport system; a key aim of NTS2.

1.3.3. STRP2 was published in 2022 and aids in the delivery of the priorities outlined in NTS2. In line with Recommendation 29 in STPR2 and following major landslip events at the A83 in Glen Croe in August and September 2020, Transport Scotland started progressing proposals for a long-term, resilient, and sustainable solution for the A83 Rest and Be Thankful.

1.3.4. NPF4 was adopted in 2023 and sets out, through Spatial Principles, where development and infrastructure are required across Scotland. This framework identifies the connection through Argyll and Bute as one of Scotland's 'strategic connections'.

1.3.5. Additionally, the Proposed Scheme is supported by the Scottish Government's Infrastructure Investment Plan (IIP) which states that the government is "*committed to an infrastructure solution to address the A83 Rest and Be Thankful landslip risks*".

1.4. Proposed Scheme Objectives

1.4.1. The following objectives have been developed by Transport Scotland based on the challenges and opportunities relating to the Proposed Scheme:

- increase resilience of a temporary diversion route by reducing the likelihood of closure due to landslips, flooding, or other incidents
- maximise the operational benefits of a temporary diversion route, for all vehicles, by providing a route that achieves a proportionate balance of time to implement, cost and impact
- reduce the likelihood of accidents on a temporary diversion route.

1.4.2. The purpose of the Proposed Scheme is to protect and improve the A83 trunk road at Rest and Be Thankful, Argyll and Bute by constructing emergency diversion lanes, by improving and widening the Old Military Road, and constructing landslip protection measures above and below the A83 trunk road.

1.4.3. The introduction of these interventions will improve safety, operational capacity and resilience, and reduce journey times during period of debris flow risk. There will also be an increase in the capacity through road widening and bend improvements to improve journey times and reliability.

1.5. Consideration of Alternatives

1.5.1. An initial options assessment was undertaken of eight alignments within Glen Croe to provide a proportionate, resilient and safe alternate route when the A83 is closed. These options are outlined in the Medium Term Strategy (MTS) Options Assessment Report.

1.5.2. The options were further assessed and three options were taken forward for further development and assessment:

- targeted interventions on the existing OMR, called ‘OMR Interventions’;
- an option aligning with the Forestry Track south-east of the OMR, called ‘Single Lane Forestry Track Upgrade’; and
- an offline OMR option within Glen Croe, called ‘Two Way Offline MTS’.

1.5.3. The assessment of these three options considered environmental, engineering and economic factors as well as the advantages and disadvantages of each. From this assessment, it was determined that the ‘OMR Interventions’ was recommended as the preferred option for the MTS. Subsequently, the preferred option for the MTS was announced in December 2022 by the then Cabinet Secretary for Transport.

The Proposed Scheme

2. The Proposed Scheme

2.1. Background

2.1.1. At present, the privately owned OMR is used as a diversion route by way of an agreement with the current landowner when the A83 Trunk Road is or has the potential to be, as identified through regular monitoring, impacted by a landslip or a debris flow event.

2.1.2. The OMR diversion (including both convoy operation and two-way running) provides a shorter route than the alternative diversion via the A82, A85 and A819. The longer diversion, travelling from Tarbet to Inveraray, adds 26 miles onto a 23 mile journey and can take approximately 60 to 70 minutes, which is approximately 25 to 35 minutes longer than when the A83 is fully open to traffic. For journeys between Cairndow and Tarbet it adds 46 miles onto a 13 mile journey and can take approximately 80 minutes, which is approximately 60 minutes longer than when the A83 is fully open to traffic.

2.1.3. The frequency and severity of landslip events affecting the A83 has increased markedly since 2012. As a result, there has been a significant increase in the number of days traffic has been diverted onto the OMR. Between 2012 and 2017, diversion via the OMR was required on 13.5 days and 13 nights, however between 2018 and 2023, traffic was diverted via the OMR on 169 days and 228.5 nights.

2.1.4. The increased frequency and severity of landslip events has also given rise to an increased risk of damage to the OMR. In recent years, various works and measures to protect it have been carried out.

2.1.5. There is now an immediate need to improve the resilience and operation of the OMR and for Transport Scotland to have full control of, and responsibility for, the OMR as roads authority, with access to all necessary statutory powers.

2.1.6. Following option development and assessment, a preferred route was announced in December 2022 by the then Cabinet Secretary, where it was proposed to take forward improvements to the existing OMR.

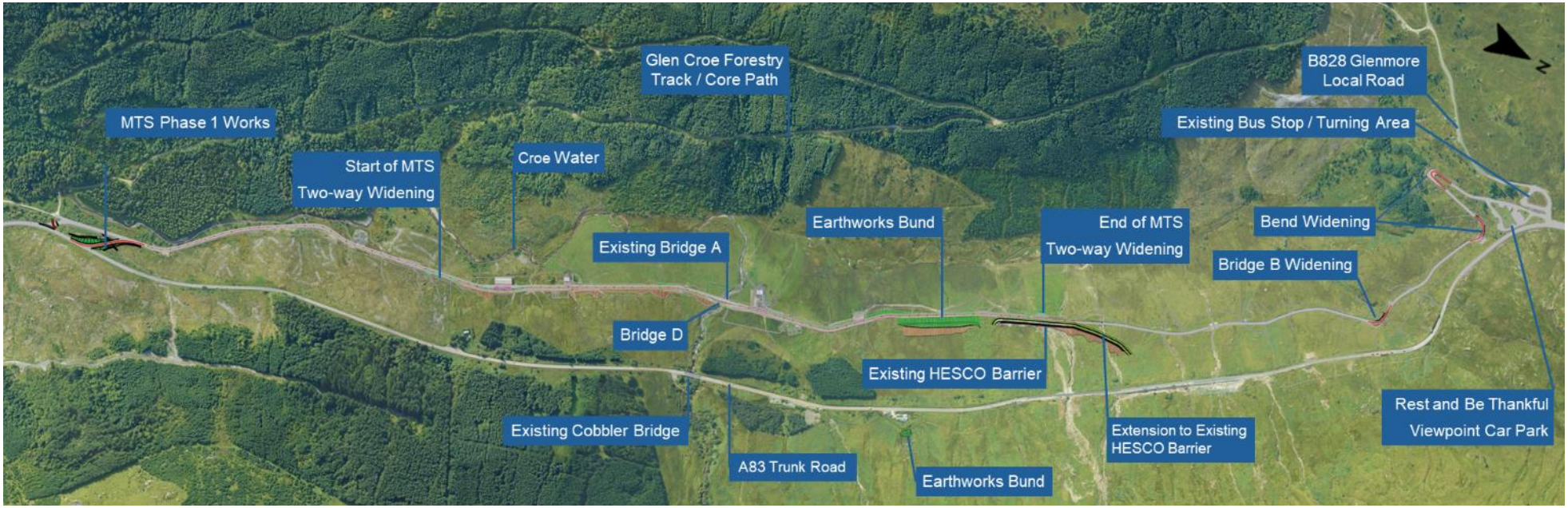
2.2. Key Design Elements of the Proposed Scheme

2.2.1. The Proposed Scheme aims to deliver a safe, proportionate and more resilient diversion route along the OMR when the A83 Trunk Road is closed due to landslip and debris flow risk.

2.2.2. It introduces a number of targeted improvements commensurate to achieve the objectives set out in Section 1.4 above. The improvements are outlined below and shown on Figure 3 overleaf:

- introduction of debris catch fences above the A83;
- extension of the existing HESCO Barrier by approximately 150m;
- construction of a new earth bund adjacent to the OMR, and within the disused quarry adjacent to the A83;
- widening of the existing single-track OMR over a length of 1.4km to provide a total two-way carriageway length of 2.1km;
- targeted widening at three sharp bends to ease movement for larger vehicles;
- installation of a new proprietary structure at Croe Water to facilitate two-way operation and widening of Bridge B;
- improved road and cut-off drainage throughout the widening works;
- installation of 14 new culverts and extension of three existing culverts to upsized diameters; and
- in-channel watercourse reprofiling.

Figure 3 - The Proposed Scheme



2.3. Delivering the Proposed Scheme

2.3.1. The Proposed Scheme will be submitted for approval to the Scottish Ministers through the Roads (Scotland) Act 1984 (as amended). If approved, construction is anticipated to last one year.

2.3.2. The final detailed design may be refined by the Appointed Contractor, but it must still meet the requirements of the EIA Report. Should the Appointed Contractor refine the design which has been assessed by the EIA, then an environmental review of those refinements will be required to assess whether impacts are greater (or significantly different) than reported in the EIA Report, and whether any additional measures to mitigate impacts are required.

2.4. Consultation

2.4.1. Consultation has been ongoing throughout the design development and EIA process for the Proposed Scheme. The purpose of this consultation was to:

- ensure that statutory consultees (i.e. those with responsibilities for protecting the environment and regulating any activities which may adversely affect existing environmental conditions), other non-statutory bodies with a particular interest in the environment, and the public are informed of the Proposed Scheme and are provided with an opportunity to comment;
- collect information regarding environmental site conditions;
- seek consultee input to the design to minimise impacts;
- inform the scope of the EIA and reporting; and
- help to establish key environmental issues and to identify potential impacts and mitigations to be considered during the EIA.

2.4.2. The A83 Environmental Steering Group (ESG) comprising statutory and non-statutory stakeholders has met bi-monthly throughout the EIA process. The purpose of this group was to provide an opportunity to discuss requirements relating to statutory responsibilities and other issues, and to provide regular updates on and opportunities for contribution to emerging design and assessment work.

2.4.3. Additionally, focused stakeholder consultations were also undertaken with statutory organisations, landowners and other non-statutory bodies which were reviewed by the project team and considered for informing the design and assessment process.

Environmental Impact Assessment

3. Environmental Impacts and Mitigation

3.1.1. In accordance with the EIA Regulations, a scoping assessment was completed for the Proposed Scheme. The purpose of the EIA Scoping assessment was to consult and agree with the A83 ESG on the scope and methods for undertaking the EIA and to ensure that the assessment focused on the key impacts likely to give rise to significant adverse effects.

3.1.2. The EIA Scoping assessment undertaken concluded that there was the potential for significant effects to occur for only select topics as reported below. The remaining topics were not considered to result in significant effects and were not considered further in the EIA process.

3.2. Population and Human Health (EIA Report Chapter 7)

3.2.1. The OMR provides resilience to the A83 through its role as a diversionary route during periods of planned and unplanned closure on the A83. This then ensures access to services for people in the region as well as to facilities they need and opportunities for social interaction with friends and family. The A83 is an important route for tourism, bringing in visitors to the wider area and its operation is of key importance to the health and wellbeing of the local and wider population. As such, improvements to the OMR act to improve resilience, minimise disruption and delay for users of the A83.

3.2.2. Consideration of construction impacts of the Proposed Scheme has shown that there would likely be adverse impacts associated with disruption or changes to access to a residential property, a farm holding and direct and indirect impacts on walking, cycling and horse-riding routes, including the OMR itself.

3.2.3. While these construction impacts are for the most part considered not to be significant, there would remain some impacts which could not be removed and could be considered significant. Significant residual effects relate specifically to permanent loss of land within the farm holding in Glen Croe and temporary severance issues owing to increased construction traffic on the OMR which would also significantly affect the amenity of journeys for walkers, cyclists and horse-riders (WCH). During operation, ongoing access and viability issues as a result of new field boundaries and changes to the ownership of the OMR are also attributed significant adverse effects. It is however important to note that discussions are taking place with relevant stakeholders to ensure that effects are minimised as much as possible.

3.2.4. The implementation of the Proposed Scheme would result in beneficial impacts in respect of improved access provisions along the OMR for WCHs and for the farm holding which benefits from layby provision which will serve a key agricultural building.

3.3. Geology, Soils and Groundwater (EIA Report Chapter 8)

3.3.1. Other than Groundwater Dependent Terrestrial Ecosystems (GWDTE), all other geology, soils and groundwater sub-topics were agreed to be scoped out, as it was not considered likely that the Proposed Scheme would result in any significant adverse effects.

3.3.2. National Vegetation Classification (NVC) survey results and mapping established that a small number of specific habitats met the characteristics of being potentially groundwater dependent GWDTE (in the case of the Proposed Scheme this relates to three areas of habitat classified as M10 located on steep slopes above and below the Proposed Scheme - shown overleaf).

3.3.3. Following review of site characteristics, existing features and available Ground Investigation information, a slight adverse (non-significant) effect is predicted for GWDTE in relation to residual impacts of construction and/or operation of the Proposed Scheme. This will be verified following receipt of further Ground Investigation information.

Figure 4 – Potential GWDTE Community (M10 Habitat) above the OMR

3.4. Landscape and Visual (EIA Report Chapters 9 and 10)

3.4.1. The OMR lies within Glen Croe with the 'Arrochar Alps' surrounding. The Croe Water crosses the central part of the glen. The rocky pass at the Rest and Be Thankful marks the gateway to Glen Kinglas and to the wider Argyll area beyond. Woodland is a key feature with extensive conifer plantations and some mixed woodland on lower slopes.

3.4.2. The Proposed Scheme is entirely within the Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park. The Proposed Scheme has sought to achieve a best landscape fit design to fit with existing landforms to integrate with the surrounding landscape. For example, the HESCO barrier extension is designed to align with the existing HESCO barrier and seeding of the new earth bund to the south. Additional mitigation includes retention of existing trees and vegetation, where possible; planting to replace trees lost; and use of native species for replanting and seeding.

3.4.3. Significant adverse effects are predicted on localised areas of landscape character within the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Upland Glens Landscape Character Type during construction. This is mainly due to construction activity. During operation this will be reduced to non-significant.

3.4.4. Significant adverse effects are predicted on visual receptors (people) using the OMR, Forestry Core Path, Rest and Be Thankful car park and Ben Donich and the Special Landscape Qualities of 'tranquillity' and 'famous through routes' during construction activity. During operation there are predicted to be no significant adverse effect on landscape or visual receptors.

3.5. Cumulative Effects (EIA Report Chapter 11)

3.5.1. The potential for a combined effect of various environmental impacts on a single receptor was considered based on each of the environmental assessments carried out in the EIA Report. The assessment identified the potential for significant adverse cumulative effects during construction for the private farm holding within Glen Croe due to land loss and severance as well as disruption to the Special Landscape Qualities (SLQs) of 'tranquillity' and 'famous through routes'.

3.5.2. During construction, users of the OMR would also experience significant adverse cumulative effects due to amenity disruption in the area (including visual amenity) and to the experience of the SLQs ‘famous through routes’ and ‘tranquillity’.

3.5.3. During operation significant cumulative effects would be experienced due to anticipated operational access and viability issues to the private farm holding within Glen Croe.

3.5.4. The potential for cumulative effects of the Proposed Scheme in combination with other developments was also assessed. The potential for effects in combination with the A83 Rest and Be Thankful Long Term Solution (LTS) were considered however it was concluded that the assessment presented in the LTS EIA Report accounts for the OMR interventions which comprise the Proposed Scheme and as such it was considered that there would not be any in-combination effects. The LTS assessment accounts for the effects reported for the MTS in isolation.

3.6. Compliance with Polices and Plans

3.6.1. The assessments undertaken as part of the EIA process consider the Proposed Scheme’s compliance with planning policy. In principle, the development of the Proposed Scheme is supported in planning policy with the aims and objectives reflected in national policy, such as the National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) and the National Transport Strategy 2 (NTS2).

3.6.2. Mitigation measures are proposed to address the potential impacts as outlined in the relevant EIA chapters. The mitigation is expected to reduce potential impacts of the Proposed Scheme to a level that avoids almost all potential policy conflict with the exception of Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Local Development Plan 2017-2021 Policy 2 due to there being a residual effect on a number of landscape and visual receptors.

Review and Comments

A copy of the Environmental Impact Assessment Report may be inspected, free of charge, during normal opening hours from 13 December 2024 to 07 February 2025 at:

Transport Scotland, George House, 2nd Floor, 36 North Hannover Street, Glasgow, G1 2AD

Three Villages Hall, Arrochar, G83 7AB

Campbeltown Library, Aqualibrium, Kinloch Road, Campbeltown, PA28 6EH

Dunoon Library, Queen's Hall, 9 Argyll Street, Dunoon, Argyll, PA23 7HH

Lochgilphead Library, Lochgilphead Community Centre, Manse Brae, Lochgilphead, PA31 8XQ

Please note that normal opening hours might vary during this period

Copies of the EIA Report can also be obtained from Transport Scotland, George House, 2nd Floor, 36 Noth Hanover Street, Glasgow, G1 2AD at a charge of £150 for a hard copy. Requests for further information about the project may be sent to the same address.

A copy of the EIA Report is also available for inspection on Transport Scotland's website.

Any person wishing to make any representations about the project and the EIA Report may do so in writing to the Director of Major Projects, Transport Scotland, George House, 2nd Floor, 36 North Hanover Street, Glasgow, G1 2AD. Any such representations must be received on or before 7 February 2025.

The Scottish Ministers will take into consideration any representations so made before deciding whether or not to proceed with the project with or without modifications.

ACCESS ARGYLL & BUTE [A83]

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