A12. SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT PETITION – SHERIFFHALL ROUNDABOUT

Report by Ian L Young, Director Strategic Services, Midlothian Council

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 On 2 December 2008, the Depute Provost of Midlothian Council, Councillor Margot Russell, submitted a public petition regarding Sheriffhall roundabout on the A720 Edinburgh City Bypass for consideration by the Public Petitions Committee of the Scottish Parliament. On 16 December, the Committee agreed to seek a response to the issues raised from Transport Scotland and a number of local authorities.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 The petition calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to bring forward a timed and costed programme of works for the grade separation of Sheriffhall roundabout. Previous to this, the local MSP Rhona Brankin had written to the Transport Minister on this issue but with no resolution to the problem.

2.2 In October 2007, Midlothian Council approved unanimously a motion calling on the Scottish Government to ensure that the ongoing difficulties caused by the inadequacy of the Sheriffhall roundabout would be addressed when the Strategic Transport Projects Review (STPR) was published. The Council has long campaigned for grade separation of this strategic junction as it is the only at-grade junction on the A720 despite it being one of the busiest, most congested intersections (currently 70,000 vehicles per day). Grade separation is regarded as the only remedy to deal effectively with this pinch point on the trunk road network; the recent package of improvements was designed to alleviate immediate problems anticipated with the opening of the A68 Dalkeith Bypass but has not delivered a long-term solution. Transport Scotland has no current plans for the grade separation of the roundabout.

2.3 The Edinburgh and the Lothians Structure Plan 2015 and the Regional Transport Strategy identify the grade separation of Sheriffhall roundabout as a key infrastructure project essential for the delivery of the development strategy. The STPR refers to junction improvements on the A720 to reduce conflict between strategic and local traffic, improve journey times and reduce traffic impact on local communities but it does not give any commitment to the grade separation of Sheriffhall roundabout.
2.4 The roundabout in its current form does not have the capacity to accommodate the major housing and economic growth anticipated, and provided for, in current development plans not only in Midlothian but also in neighbouring Council areas. The continuing lack of Scottish Government commitment to grade separation at Sheriffhall will impact inevitably on the ability of Midlothian, East Lothian, south-east Edinburgh and central Scottish Borders to contribute fully to the drive for Scotland’s economic recovery. Economic growth in West Edinburgh will continue to rely on commuters utilising the City Bypass and the National Planning Framework 2 acknowledges the importance of connectivity with the north of England. The significance of securing the grade separation of the Sheriffhall intersection to the achievement of these objectives cannot be underestimated.

2.5 Responses to the public petition were to be submitted by 16 January, 2009. Appendix 1 sets out Midlothian Council’s response.

3. RECOMMENDATION

3.1 It is recommended that the Joint Committee:

a) notes for its interest the submission of this public petition to the Public Petitions Committee of the Scottish Parliament;

b) notes Midlothian Council’s response to the petition as contained in Appendix 1 to this report; and

c) considers adding the support of the SESplan Joint Committee to this response.

Janice Long
Planning Policy Manager, Midlothian Council

APPENDIX

Appendix 1: Midlothian Council Response to Scottish Parliament Petition PE1218

BACKGROUND PAPER

Background Paper 1: Scottish Parliament website at:

www.scottish.parliament.uk/business/petitions/docs/PE1218.htm
MIDLOTHIAN COUNCIL
Response to Scottish Parliament Petition 1218

Principal Petitioner: Margot Russell

Petition
Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to bring forward a timed and costed programme of works for the grade separation of the Sheriffhall Roundabout on the A720 to alleviate pressure and traffic problems on the new A68 Dalkeith Bypass.

Policy Context
Grade separation of Sheriffhall Roundabout is a key infrastructure project identified in the Edinburgh and Lothians Structure Plan 2015, the Midlothian Local Plan, SEStran’s Regional Transport Strategy, Midlothian Council’s Local Transport Strategy and a number of other strategy documents.

Transport Scotland’s recently published “Strategic Transport Projects Review” identifies junction improvements on the A720 Edinburgh City Bypass within its aim to reduce conflict between strategic and local traffic, as well as improving journey times and reliability as well as reducing the impact of traffic on local communities.

Background
Although Midlothian is the smallest of the three landward authorities in the Lothians, it occupies a key location on the southern boundary of Scotland’s capital city, Edinburgh. Midlothian comprises a number of small and medium sized towns with many villages and hamlets. While much of the area lies to the south of the A720 there are a number of communities on the north side and these are separated from the county town, Dalkeith and the remainder of Midlothian by the Sheriffhall Roundabout.

Arising from the provisions of the Edinburgh and Lothians Structure Plan, Midlothian has embarked on a period of sustained growth. This Structure Plan also identifies the need for proper investment in physical infrastructure including grade separation of the Sheriffhall junction.

Midlothian Council has long campaigned for grade separation of this strategic junction as it is the only at grade junction on the A720 despite it being one of the busiest, most congested intersections.

At a meeting on 23rd October 2007 the Council approved unanimously a motion stating “Midlothian Council calls on the Scottish Government to ensure that the ongoing difficulties caused by the inadequacy of the Sheriffhall Roundabout are addressed when the Strategic Transport Projects review is published in Spring 2008.”
The Council appreciates that the upgrading work which has recently been undertaken may improve conditions for drivers in the short term but remains convinced that this can never be anything other than an interim solution. As such, even in its present state, it will not be able to accommodate the anticipated major growth generated by the proposed development in Midlothian and in adjacent council areas, particularly Scottish Borders and East Lothian, a substantial proportion of which will generate traffic that will pass through Midlothian and place additional strain on the Sheriffhall junction.

In addition the Council has major concerns that the recent works have provided no priority for public transport, and the widening of the approach roads has exacerbated the existing difficulties for pedestrians and cyclists crossing the junction.

The Council remains convinced that only full grade separation of the junction will bring about improvements for public transport, walkers, cyclists and north/south traffic wishing to cross the A720. Full grade separation is the only way to achieve the Strategic Transport Projects Review’s aim of reducing conflict between strategic and local traffic, improving journey times and reliability as well as reducing the impact of traffic on local communities.

Midlothian Council Actions of Relevance to the Petition

- The Shawfair new community and Danderhall expansion are located very close to the Sheriffhall junction. Together they comprise a 4,000 house development with 2 new primary schools, 23.5ha of economic land and a new town centre. There is also potential for business uses on the site of the former Monktonhall Colliery. Work on the Shawfair Business Park, which is part of the Shawfair development, has already commenced with office development, a hospital, a hotel and a park and ride site under construction or already completed.

- The Midlothian Local Plan (2008) sets out planned growth of over 12,000 new homes. This represents a growth in the number of households in Midlothian by approximately one third. Of these 12,000 homes approximately 9,000 will be in the A68/A7/Waverley Corridor.

- Over 81ha of new economic land is identified in the Midlothian Local Plan (2008) along the A7/A68/Waverley corridor. This figure excludes the potential for re-development on the site of the former Monktonhall Colliery.

- Construction of a new Community Hospital at Bonnyrigg, adjacent to the A7 and close to Sheriffhall is about to commence.

- City of Edinburgh Council has proposed housing and economic land allocations in the area including nearly 3,000 houses in eastern and south eastern Edinburgh and 40ha of land for the Centre for Biomedical Research at Little France on the A7. Planning consent has been granted for a private hospital at The Wisp and a planning application has also been submitted for a care home and care village in the Edmonstone Estate at
The Wisp. Together with the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary at Little France, these developments will have implications for the capacity of the Sheriffhall junction. The Council understands that there is the prospect of additional major NHS facilities being located at Little France. This would put additional strain on the Sheriffhall junction.

- Significant planned housing and economic growth in Scottish Borders and East Lothian Council areas will put further pressure on the Sheriffhall junction. Of the effective land supply of just over 5,000 homes in the Scottish Borders, nearly 2,000 of these are planned for the central parts of the Scottish Borders, and therefore may use the Sheriffhall junction most frequently. It is uncertain as to what the effect of the approximate 7,000 effective housing land supply in East Lothian might be on the junction, or the approximately 70ha of land allocated for economic development in western East Lothian; but it is reasonable to assume that this scale of development is likely to have a noticeable impact on the junction. The housing and economic land allocations across the Lothians and south east Scotland need to be considered in terms of the strain they will place on the Sheriffhall junction through both work related (e.g. travelling to different parts of west and central Edinburgh and West Lothian) and private travel.

- The forthcoming new Strategic Development Plan (SDP) for Edinburgh and South East Scotland may identify further requirements for housing and economic land likely to impact on the functioning of the junction, or be constrained by its capacity to cope with such growth.