### Key Issues –

The A9 Dualling Programme, Project 8, Dalwhinnie to Crubenmore EIA had to consider significant environmental constraint issues, including, but not limited to:

- Environmental designations – including the Drumochter Hills Special Area of Conservation (SAC), Special Protection Area (SPA) and Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI);
- Proximity to the River Truim (designated as part of River Spey SAC) and its associated floodplain;
- Landscape and visual characteristics of the route, which runs through the Cairngorms National Park;
- Lack of alternative routes to divert traffic, and proximity of railway and electricity transmission infrastructure;
- Sensitive habitats – including wet heath, blanket bog, and shallow and deep peat deposits
- Cultural heritage assets, including old sheilings, General Wade’s Military Road and associated watercourse crossing structures

Due to the constraining nature of designated sites and local environmental issues present, it was agreed the best approach was to advance with a series of environmentally-led workshops. These workshops fed into the iterative design development and the EIA process.

### Purpose of the project

The A9 is the main north-south trunk road between Perth and Inverness, connecting the Central Belt with the Scottish Highlands. The route is vital to the economy and communities of the north of Scotland.

During the 2008-2015 period, there were 32 accidents on the current A9 single carriageway between Dalwhinnie and Crubenmore, including seven serious and three fatal accidents. Dualling is anticipated to reduce accidents by improving overtaking opportunities and preventing right-turn manoeuvres across the carriageway.

### Description of the project

In 2014, Transport Scotland awarded the CH2M Fairhurst Joint Venture (CFJV) the design and supervision contract for the Central Section of the A9 Dualling Programme. This included the design and EIA for Project 8, Dalwhinnie to Crubenmore. Project 8 upgrades the existing single carriageway to a new dual carriageway with a continuous central reservation over approximately 11 km of the A9.

The Proposed Scheme upgrades include Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS), roadside shelter belts for winter resilience, an aqueduct diversion and provision of a new grade separated junction at Dalwhinnie.

The project is scheduled for completion by 2025.
Lessons learnt

The aim of the adopted approach was to ensure that a range of potential environmental impacts could, in the first instance, be addressed, avoided or minimised by embedding mitigation through revisions to the design.

Over approximately 18 months of iterative design development, the environmental assessment team worked closely with engineering teams, Statutory Consultees and Transport Scotland, to influence the developing design via knowledge gained through previous DMRB (Design Manual for Roads and Bridges) assessment stages and the EIA process, resulting in reduced environmental impact in the final DMRB Stage 3 design.

One example of how this approach informed the design, was the consideration of the junction layout at Dalwhinnie. When compared to a previous larger layout, a revision to a more compact form junction layout reduced peat excavation volumes by approximately 5,000 m³ and reduced disturbance of sensitive blanket bog habitats. Amongst other benefits, it reduced landscape and visual impacts (providing improvement in views from the road) and reduced floodplain encroachment.

This environmentally-led and iterative approach to embedding mitigation in the Proposed Scheme was then followed by EIA of the final design.

The EIA further presented ‘standard’ mitigation items (i.e. typical best practice items applied across all A9 Dualling projects) and project-specific mitigation (items required to further mitigate impacts) to be implemented prior to, during or following construction.

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Lessons learnt cont. –

The nature of the A9 Dualling Programme itself, which comprises 10 individual projects, spanning approximately 130 km, was one of the main challenges faced by the EIA.

The need for consistency in assessment topic approaches and on consideration of the potential cumulative effects across multiple projects within the Programme was difficult.

However, regular environmental working group and steering group meetings with Transport Scotland, CFJV, other consultancies on the Programme and the Statutory Environmental Consultees was critical to developing and agreeing the final approach.

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