

Heading in the Wrong Direction

The M74 Northern Extension

The story so far

Glasgow's ruling Labour party are still following motorway plans cemented in the 1960s, despite contemporary critical and political agreement that new roads are only a short-term solution to transport problems. New roads generate more traffic, do not necessarily promote regional development or economic well-being, and lead to environmental damage. Ignoring a wealth of evidence, Glasgow City Council, South Lanarkshire Council and Renfrewshire Council with support from the Scottish Executive are taking forward the M74 Northern Extension – a 6-lane, five miles, elevated motorway through the southern suburbs of Glasgow, from Cambuslang to Kingston. This will mean the demolition of historic buildings, homes and 100 businesses, while creating more traffic noise disturbance for hundreds of homes in Rutherglen, Oatlands, Gorbals, Govanhill and Eglinton Toll.

In November 1999, the Scottish Executive told Glasgow City Council that it should “review alternative transport solutions for the [Glasgow] area” because of the “substantial volumes of car commuting” that would be encouraged by the M74.

But after a year of relentless lobbying from business groups, the Executive agreed in 2001 to pay £214 million toward the M74 – before any study of alternatives had been carried out. In 2003, it was announced that the motorway would in fact cost anywhere between £375 and £500 million, making it by far Scotland's largest single transport project. Then in January 2004 it emerged that the M74 could cost anywhere between £750 million and £1 billion if built through the Private Finance Initiative (PFI).

From December 2003 to March 2004, a Public Local Inquiry¹ was carried out. Joint Action against the M74 (JAM74) – a coalition of community, environmental and sustainable transport groups –

lead the opposition against the mighty juggernaut of big business groups, the Scottish Executive as well as entrenched local councils. The report from the inquiry was complete in July 2004 but was withheld until March 2005 when a Freedom of Information request forced the Scottish Ministers to reveal the inquiry recommendation that the M74 “should not be authorised”.

The inquiry cost £750,000 and comprehensively trashed the idea of the M74. Now Transport Minister Nicol Stephen has embarrassed Scotland by ignoring the inquiry's conclusions and committing us to an outdated, expensive and ineffective means of tackling road congestion. But it doesn't end here, Glasgow City Council has bid to build yet another road from the 1960's plan – ironically called the “East End Regeneration Route”.

Bad news for our city

The council says the motorway will be good for Glasgow. Why should we object?

The M74 will do nothing to help the majority of Glasgow households (59%) that have no access to a car. The project will soak up money that could be used to improve public transport, and assist the least well-off who need better trains and buses to get to jobs, education and recreation.

The conclusions of the public local inquiry stated: “[T]he new road would be of little assistance to those suffering exclusion, and would be likely to worsen travel opportunities for this section of the population by undermining progress towards major public transport improvements. The presence of the new road, largely elevated on embankments and viaducts, would increase community severance for those living along the route. [11.88]

Policies for environmental protection and improvement would be breached along various

sections of the route, where some adjacent and nearby areas would be affected by increased noise, visual intrusion, and airborne emissions, and severe noise and disruption during construction . . . There would be some offsetting benefits elsewhere, due to reduced traffic levels, although these would be thinly spread and generally not discernible.” [11.89]

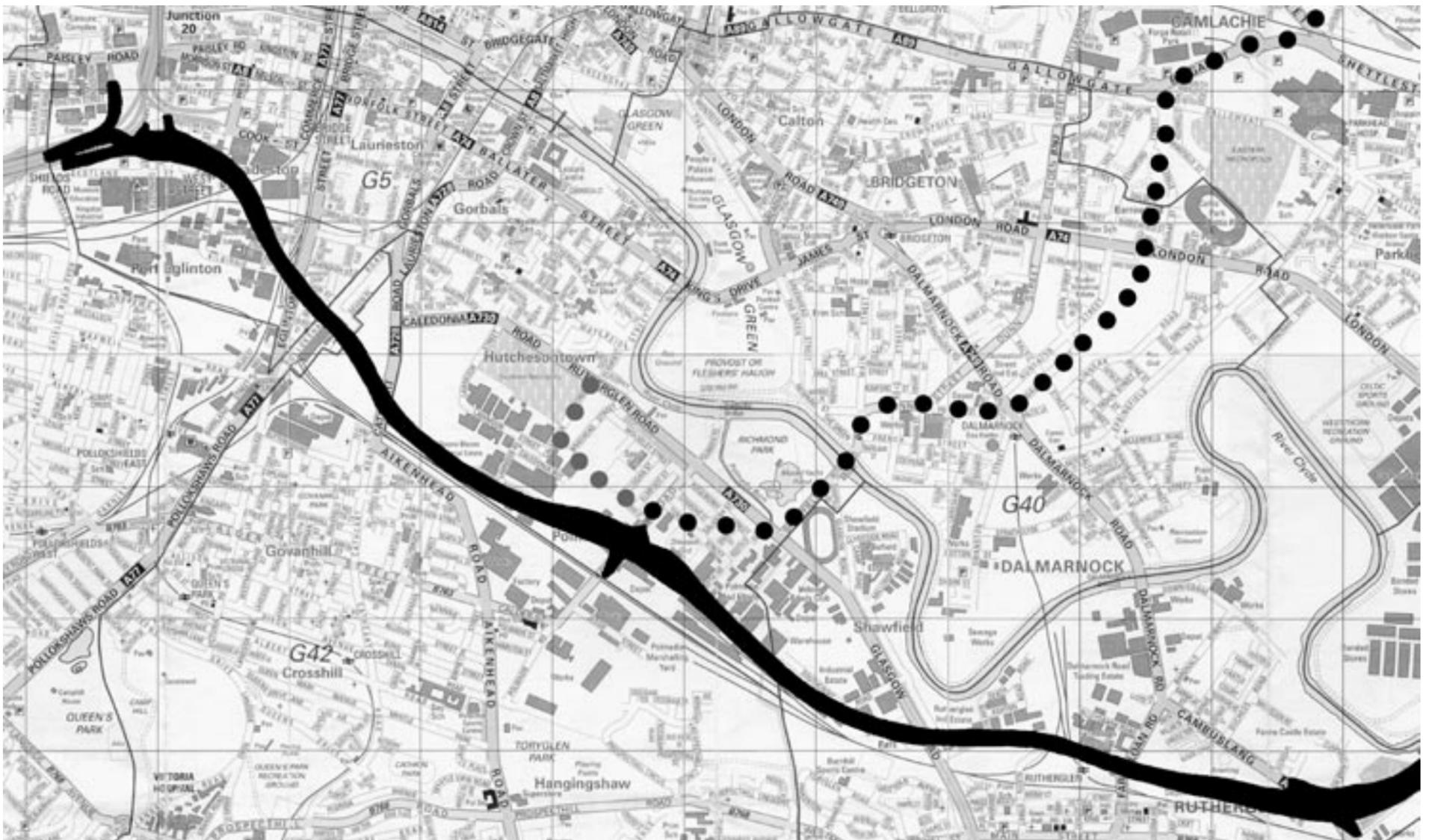
Therefore “those living along the route would suffer from the adverse environmental impacts, with little benefit, while the main advantages of the new road would accrue to non-resident vehicle users passing along the new motorway, and to businesses located mainly outwith the area.” [11.90]

The road will be hugely damaging:

- London's M25 demonstrates that building urban motorways generates even more traffic.
- Traffic will rise on feeder roads. That means more pollution, more road crashes and more noise – in Rutherglen, Oatlands, Govanhill, Eglinton Toll and beyond.
- Cancer-causing chromium waste litters the route, and disturbing it will send clouds of contaminants into the air and the river Clyde during construction.
- Pollution will affect everyone – already 2,000 people a year die in Scotland from air pollution related illnesses. Ozone from pollution is strongly linked to asthma, which affects one in seven children.
- Glasgow City Council is closing swimming pools and pursuing cut backs to other services such as parks, playgrounds and social services. Where do you think its contribution (between £33.4 - £44.5 million) to this road is coming from?

Glasgow has next to no public support for its road building:

- only 36% of people would prioritise road building over public transport.



- 80% see traffic noise and pollution as significant problems.
 - 65% believe public transport should receive priority over cars.
 - 56% want traffic reduced on main roads.
- (source: Glasgow City Council survey, 2000)

Bad news for Scotland

What's so bad about one more urban motorway?

Imagine Glasgow in 20 years time with 40% more cars and lorries on the roads. The M74 will carry an estimated 110,000 vehicles per day. If only a third of this traffic comes off the M74, that means almost 40,000 more cars on Glasgow's roads every day. The M74 will lead to more congestion and more air pollution.

The public inquiry revealed the amount of traffic the road will generate was significantly greater than the proponents had previously stated. Leading the report from the inquiry to conclude: "[t]he benefits of the new road would be progressively eroded by the continuing traffic growth which would be facilitated and induced by the new road." [11.83]

The proponents also admitted that no funds had been set aside to tackle such huge volumes of congestion and that plans for improvements to Glasgow's public transport were only "aspirations".

Labour was elected on a platform of cutting car traffic and its transport policy requires Councils to "demonstrate that they have looked at alternative or complementary solutions, such as public transport improvements and traffic management measures." (Scottish Executive Guidance on Local Transport Strategies, 2000)

The M74 makes a mockery of that policy, because the alternatives have never been investigated. As a result, Scotland is being left behind the rest of Britain and Europe. Scotland is one of the few places in Western Europe still bulldozing urban motorways through its cities.

Won't the motorway free up traffic elsewhere?

Not in the long term. Motorways fill up fast. The M77, built in 1996, already has commuter traffic jams. The M74 will be no different.

An independent study commissioned by the Scottish Executive concluded that the M74 will worsen congestion and environmental conditions in Glasgow. It concluded that in 2010 with the M74 built there would be a "network which is more congested (even with the additional capacity provided by the M74) than in 2000." (Central Scotland Transport Corridor Study, Final Report on M74 Corridor, pages 35-48 and Figures 5.5-5.17)

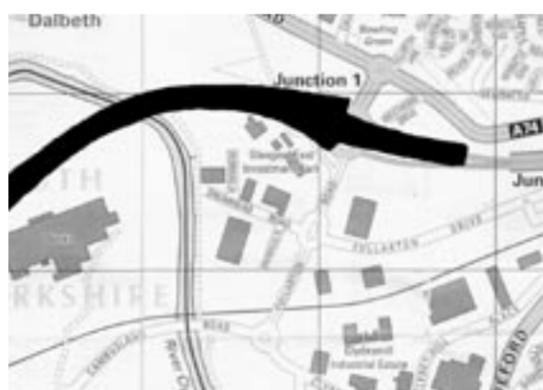
But the M8 is gridlocked at the Kingston Bridge during the rush hour...

So let's find ways to reduce congestion – 47% of Scottish car users say they could make their journeys by public transport. The problem is that buses and trains are not clean or attractive enough and are too expensive. If even a quarter of car users switched to public transport, the existing motorway through the city could cope.

What are the alternatives?

Instead of wasting money on the M74, serious investment is needed cleaning up public transport, improving rail lines, creating new stations and boosting rail freight.

The cost of just 1.5 miles of a £500 million extension would fund safe routes for walking and cycling to every one of Scotland's 3,000 schools. The cost of the other 3.5 miles could fund 2,000 'Home Zones', reclaiming urban space for people, transforming quality of life and saving thousands of injuries and deaths.



Bad news for jobs

But we'll benefit from new jobs surely?

What jobs? The Government's own expert advisors say the economic benefits from road-building are uncertain. During the Inquiry it became clear that the claims of anything up to 44,000 jobs could not be substantiated. What is likely to be relocation of jobs has been presented as new employment. Most of the predicted job creation would be drawn from other neighbourhoods, many of which are areas of deprivation that have already been given European money to encourage industry.

The inquiry highlighted this uncertainty and "the weak link between transport improvements and economic growth when dealing with a mature economy with well developed transport systems (which clearly applies to Glasgow) and the 2 way road effect." [11.58]

This motorway could easily suck jobs out of the areas along the route, as more people commute into the city or shop at Braehead.

What is certain is the "risk that a significant number of jobs (possibly about 750) would be permanently lost to the Glasgow area, and possibly to Scotland, if the scheme proceeds." The public inquiry report stated, "[t]hese potential job losses should perhaps carry more weight (job for job) than the uncertain prospects of attracting new jobs to the Glasgow area from other parts of Scotland." [11.60]

The M8 has not brought prosperity to the East End of Glasgow, and the M77 has done nothing for Pollok. The M74 would also sink the Councils' own plans for a 'green corridor' along the Clyde, plans that could make the derelict industrial land along the river more attractive and lead to more regeneration than just a few warehouse retailers in tin sheds.

(See the JAM74 briefing paper 'A Route to Prosperity?' debunking the myth that this motorway will bring thousands of jobs.)

Bad news for the planet

One more road isn't going to cause climate change, is it?

Scotland is already falling behind in cutting the CO₂ emissions that contribute to climate change. Between 1990 and 1999, Scotland's CO₂ emissions fell by only 3.5% while England's fell by 11.5%.

Climate change is real. Recent reports from the Met Office and others show that, unless emissions are reduced, the impact on Britain could be severe. Already we have seen coastal erosion, extreme weather, flooding and the loss of some bird species. Over one in twelve of Scotland's residential properties are in danger of flooding. Yet this is also an international social justice issue. The poorest countries least able to cope with environmental change will be worst affected, and up to 20 million people could be made refugees.

The Public Local Inquiry found, "the [M74] is predicted to increase [carbon dioxide] emissions by about 135,000 tonnes a year (an increase of 5.7% in the study area), compared with the Do Minimum case, for the year 2020. This would be a significant setback to the achievement of the Government's commitment to reduce greenhouse gases." [11.91]

Scotland's First Minister, Jack McConnell has recognised that "[w]e must all be prepared to change the way we lead our lives" and to take issues like climate change seriously. We have been encouraged to "do a little, change a lot"; drive a bit less, walk and cycle more, don't fill the kettle too full, switch off the odd light. In contrast the Executive is steamrolling through one of Europe's largest, most regressive and expensive civil engineering projects.

But won't the road regenerate areas of contaminated land?

Much of the land the motorway will cut through is contaminated with toxic waste, the legacy of Glasgow's industrial past. The M74's proponents have always said that building the road would be an efficient way of dealing with this waste. From the Inquiry we found out that only the land directly underneath the road will be 'treated' and this land would be covered in concrete, not decontaminated.

There are no plans to treat the land adjacent to the M74, and as local authorities are financially

constrained, site restoration will be left to developers. It is questionable whether developers would choose a highly toxic site to regenerate without more money from the taxpayer.

The route has been "safeguarded" for the motorway extension since 1988, and therefore Glasgow City Council would not give planning permission for building around this area. The Council is systematically killing the site, made worse by the Scottish Executive's pre-emptive purchases of land and businesses prior to the public inquiry recommendation that the M74 "should not be authorized".

More cost-effective and sustainable alternatives – all ignored

No-car lanes on the M8

Peak-hour congestion on the Kingston Bridge, which delays commuter buses and lorries carrying exports from Renfrewshire, Inverclyde and West Dunbartonshire, is primarily caused by cars. The most obvious early solution to congestion on the M8 – particularly as the urban M74 could not be opened for several years – is to introduce lanes giving priority to lorries and buses rather than single-person occupant cars.

Glasgow Crossrail

At present there are no cross-Glasgow rail services from Edinburgh or Lanarkshire to Renfrewshire, Inverclyde or Ayrshire – one of the key traffic flows that the motorway would carry. The Glasgow Crossrail scheme is a practical alternative which, although talked about for years, should be implemented before money is wasted on damaging road-building.

Rail electrification

The electrification of Glasgow-Edinburgh rail lines would further transform the speed and quality of train links from the west of Scotland to the east of the country.

Glasgow Airport rail link

Glasgow Airport is the largest in Britain (and one of the largest in Europe) without a passenger rail link. Passenger trains direct from Edinburgh, Lanarkshire and Glasgow would remove one of the main arguments for the new motorway.

The rail freight bypass

Feeder rail freight services from Renfrewshire, Inverclyde and West Dunbartonshire to the Scottish freight hubs at Coatbridge and Mossend would allow export containers to bypass completely the Kingston Bridge and M8 congestion, and bring environmental benefits to both Glasgow and Lanarkshire.

Road pricing

A controversial option, but after London's overwhelming success, many cities are realising that closing roads or congestion charging may be the only rational way to deal with traffic congestion. There are also realistic proposals for UK wide road pricing; motorists would be charged by the amount of distance they drive, in the same way that we pay for electricity or gas – definitely fairer than having a single yearly payment of car vehicle excise duty.

Get involved

JAM74 is a coalition of community, environmental and sustainable transport groups. Member organisations include: Terrace Community Council, Pollokshields Community Council, Residents Against the M74, Friends of the Earth Glasgow, Go Bike! Strathclyde Cycle Campaign, Railfuture, Scottish Association for Public Transport, the Scottish Green Party, the Scottish Socialist Party & TRANSform Scotland.

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Note

1. Read the full report from the Public Local Inquiry at: www.scotland.gov.uk/library5/transport/m74r-00.asp