

The incidence of landslides disrupting the A83 trunk road in the vicinity of the Rest and be Thankful, Glen Croe, Argyll. A response to public consultations - Introduction

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My interest in the Rest and be Thankful was rooted originally in family history going back to the period between and first and second world wars when my grandfather regularly journeyed in his Swift motor car between Glasgow and Dunoon, along the Old Military Road up Glen Croe. As a small boy I was fascinated by the account of the cooling system of the car boiling over as the car approached the summit of the Rest and be Thankful Hill. The car had to be stopped and the radiator topped up with cool water from a nearby burn.

By the 1930s it was realised that the single-track Military Road did not fulfil a satisfactory role as the main means of communication between Glasgow, Mid Argyll and Kintyre. Work started in the 1930s to upgrade the route, including a new section of road to bypass the steepest part of the Military Road at the Rest and be Thankful. The outbreak of the 2nd World War hastened its construction for strategic reasons and it was completed in 1942. There is no natural route for a road across most of the north-east slope of the Glen Croe so a bench for the road had to be constructed by excavation of the slope. A 700 m section of the upper part of the road is particularly exposed to an uninterrupted steep slope above, it rising to crags below the summit of Beinn Luibhain (859m).



Fig. 1 A83(T) on 31st August 2017. Evidence of a landslide cutting the A83 at A and the Old Military road at B. Nets to catch landslips were placed at points marked n.

I became very familiar with the new road on frequent journeys to destinations including Inveraray, Glendaruel, Gigha and Campbeltown when delivering Continuing Education Geology lectures. These took place mainly between October and the following Spring so I experienced all sorts of weather conditions, daytime and often after dark, but over the period from 1967 until I retired in 2001, I did not experience any difficulties negotiating the A83 at the Rest and be Thankful, even under snow conditions. Thus, the incidence of landslips leading to temporary closure of the A83 is a recent phenomenon.

By 31st August 2017 it had already been temporarily closed (fig. 1) and the early attempts at ameliorating the problem have subsequently had little effect. The ongoing damage being done to the economy of Argyll and the danger to life and limb posed for road users prompted the government agency, Transport Scotland, to seek a viable solution to the problem. An initial public consultation paper, published in September 2020, sought opinions regarding various possible alternative routes avoiding Glen Croe. These were later adjudged to be unsuitable for a variety of reasons leading to the conclusion that a Glen Croe route was the best option but would require the modification or replacement of the existing road to protect it from risk of landslips. I had reached a similar conclusion in a case study which I submitted on 19th October 2020 in which I recommended that the possibility of re-routing the A83(T) along the SW side of Glen Croe should be investigated.

A further public consultation document, published in March 2021, suggested five options, including the building of an extensive viaduct to raise the road above the potential path of future landslips, a protective gallery above the road so that landslips would pass safely over it, two alternative routes involving the construction of long tunnels, and an entirely new route on the SW side of the glen. Advantages and disadvantages of each of these alternatives were listed.

Dr Chris Burton and I visited Glen Croe on two occasions in March 2021 to assess the practicality of a new route on the SW side of the glen, named in the consultation paper as the green route. Dr Burton provided me with invaluable help from his expertise in the field of Geology in Civil Engineering in compiling my response to the March consultation, which was submitted on 25th May. On 14th July I received a communication from Jacobs, the lead stakeholder consultants for Transport Scotland, which is broadly in line with the comments and recommendations in my response, and looking forward to my ongoing feedback regarding the project.

16th July 2021

Websites for the public consultations regarding the A83(T) at the Rest and be Thankful:

<https://www.transport.gov.scot/publication/project-corridor-options-access-to-argyll-and-bute-a83/>

<https://www.transport.gov.scot/projects/a83-access-to-argyll-and-bute/>