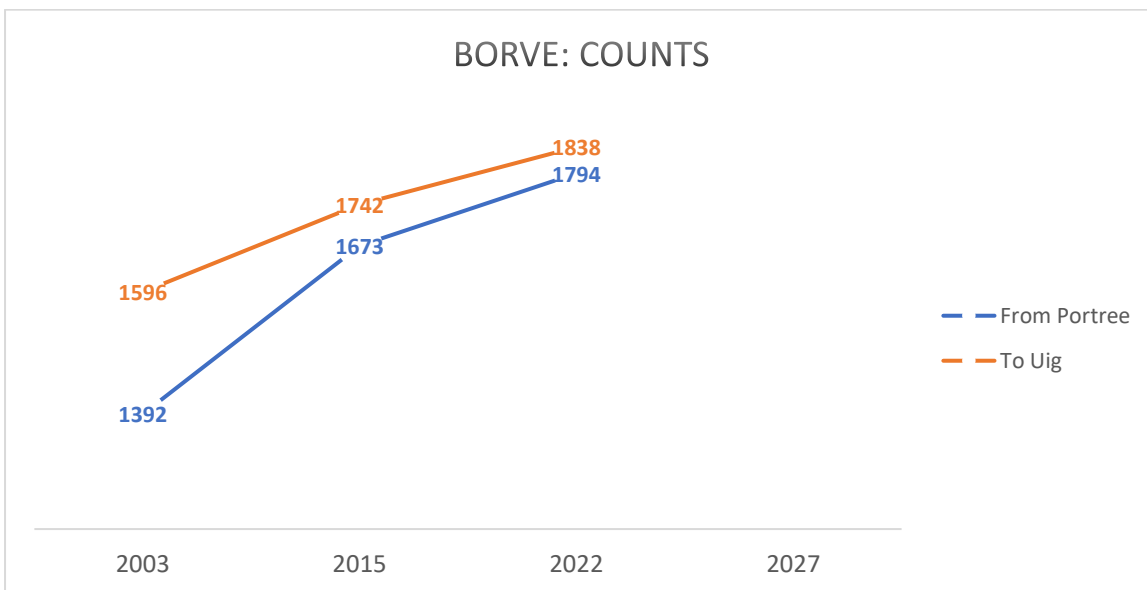


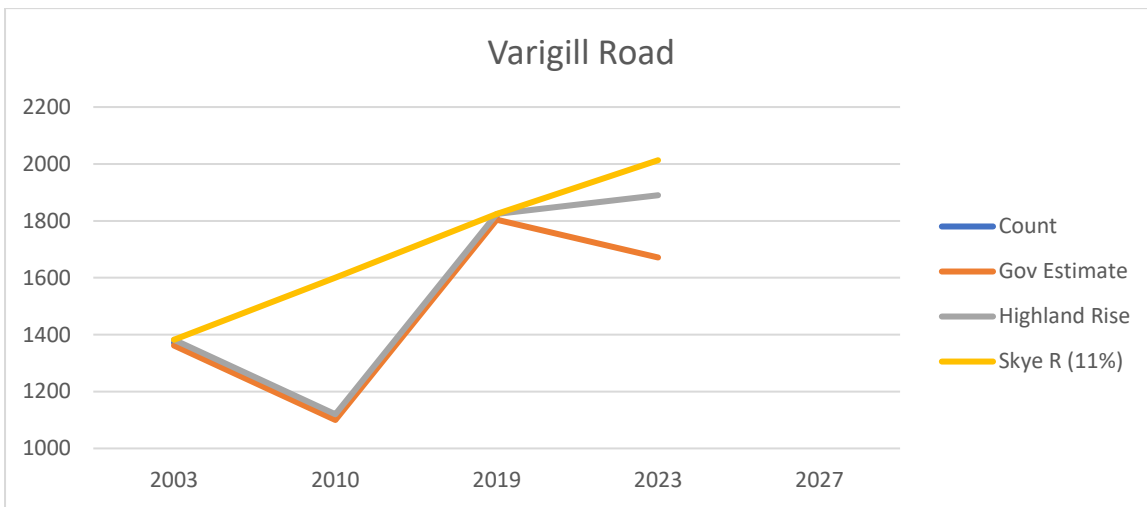
Traffic is one of the issues ‘everybody knows’ is a problem locally, yet it is unclear what can be done. To begin thinking about this, we have made a deep dive into the Department for Transport figures for Highland.

In the past thirty years, traffic (vehicle-miles) in Scotland has risen 37%. In Highland, however, it has risen 51%. The current upward trend began around 2012, since when traffic has increased by 11.2% in Scotland, but by 21.4% in Highland. Highland also has a higher and more rapidly rising percentage of non-car vehicles, from a baseline of 20% in 1993 (vs. 18% Scotland) to 30% currently (vs. 21% Scotland, a much more substantial rise). Highland has 4% of Scotland’s population, but 6% of all vehicle-miles. Partly, this is because of the high proportion of remote communities, partly the escalating number of visitors we attract.

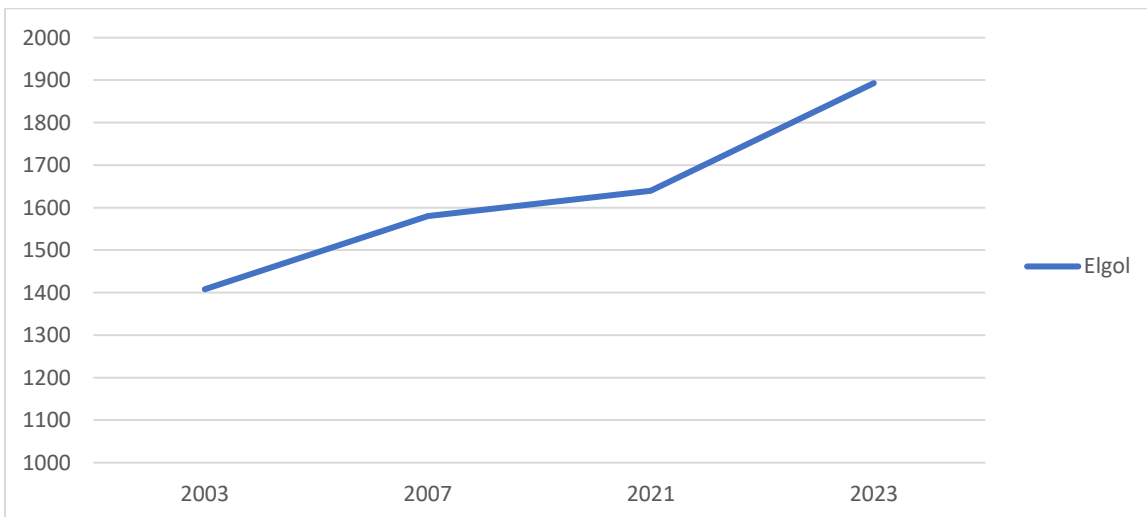
It is not possible to fully localise these figures, but it is clear that Skye has experienced even higher increases in traffic over the past decade. This trend looks set to continue to 2035 despite its environmental impact. For example, there happen to be actual counts for the Borge Junction from 2003 to 2022. These show a 29% rise in traffic reaching the Junction from Portree, and a 15% rise in traffic from the Junction to Uig. (They do not show how much traffic came/went on the A850 to Dunvegan.)



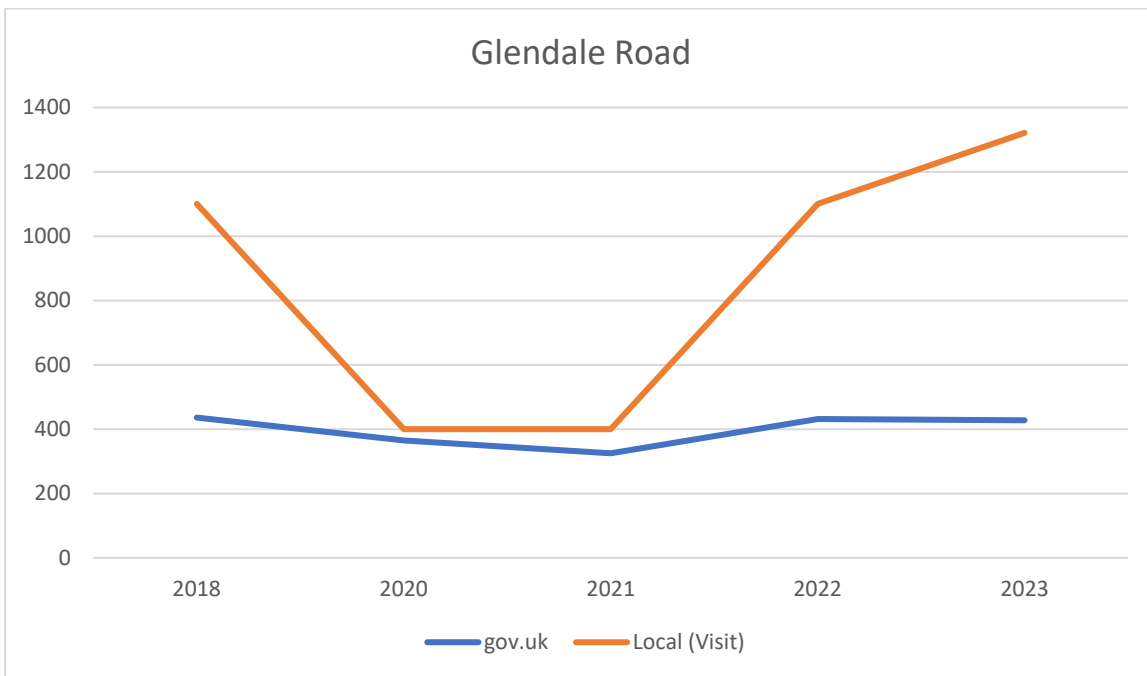
The main challenges of assessing Skye traffic are twofold and interlinked. One, even with roads that are regularly counted (Varigill, below, shows direct counts for 2003, 2010, 2019) automatic estimates for 2023 are lowered by the pandemic. For comparison, the chart below also shows figures estimated on the proven Highland-wide rise of 4% on 2019, and the equally-proven Skye rise of 11% on 2022 (assuming 2022 traffic only equalled 2019 at Varigill). The latter shows a similar trajectory to that actually seen at Borve.



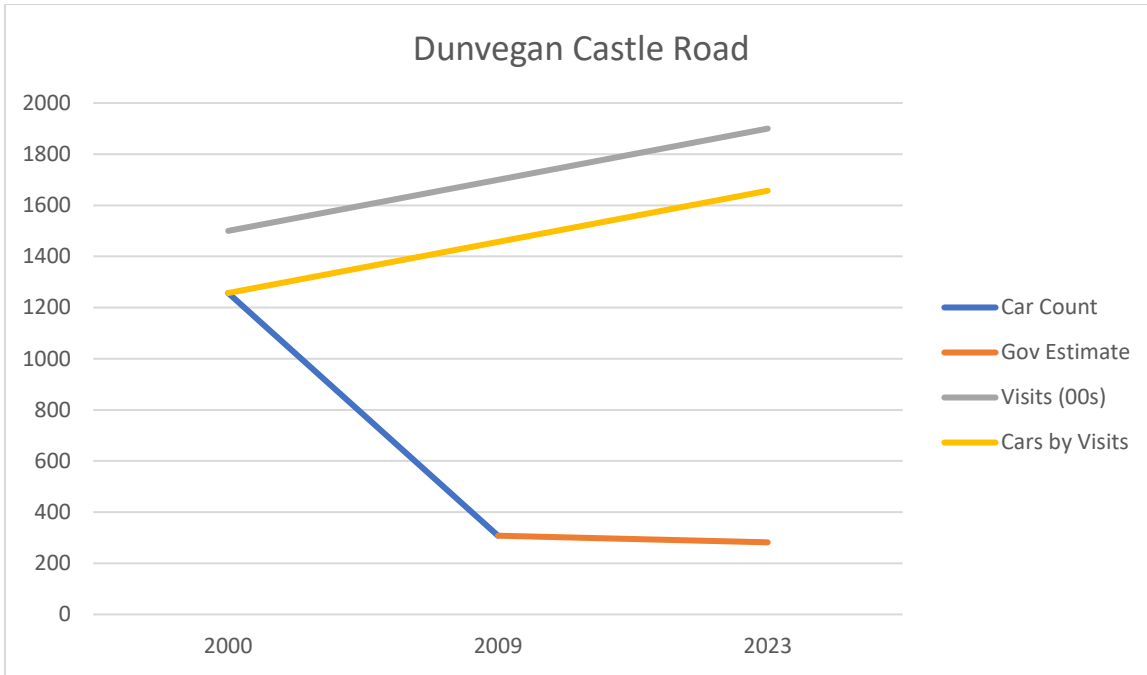
We can also compare a frequently counted single-track road, between Broadford and Elgol (only the 2023 figure is an estimate). This is an area of similar remoteness and natural appeal to northwest Skye, showing proven figures of 1650+ vehicles per day for a dead-end single-track road on Skye.



However, the second issue – seasonal variation! - is illustrated by the Glendale chart below. Again, the 2018-2022 DfT figures are actual counts (in/out averaged). But we can see from the lack of a pandemic crash that they are off-season/residents-only figures. The other line shows a local high-season count, projected recovering to pre-pandemic level in 2022 and rising by the Skye average for 2023. This suggests summer road-use is likely at least 3x the official estimate for 2023. Given the global appeal of Neist Point, and the exceptional numbers of STLs in Glendale, it is not hard to imagine the actual figure equalled Elgol’s 1800 in 2023.

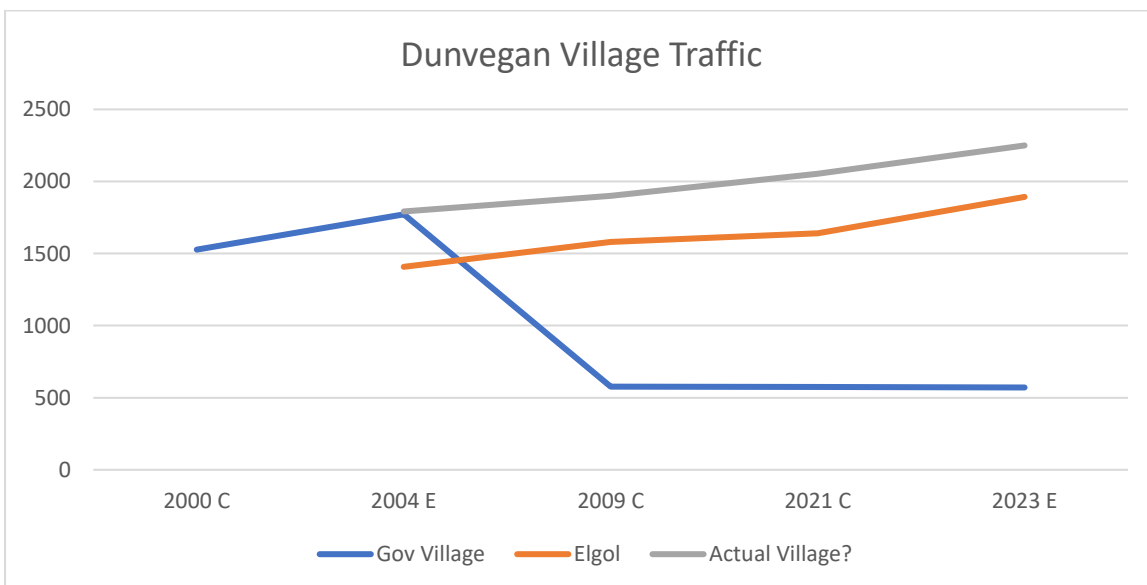


Across Skye, we see estimates based on summer actual counts in 2000 revised by off-season counts 2009-12 (as Varigill above) with recent estimates based only on the latter. So, for example, for Dunvegan Castle, the figures currently being used by government suggest a fall of three-quarters from traffic levels in 2000. This is obviously not the case! Local knowledge aside, we know that there are more visitors to the Castle, and we know that more of them now travel by car (than coach, as shown by Scotland-wide bus statistics).



The official count of 2009 simply cannot reflect known tourist traffic to the open Castle that year, whereas the 2000 count must do so. Therefore, the yellow line is the likely real *minimum* of the volume of traffic now using this road during the Castle’s opening months: 5x the current estimate.

Similarly, for traffic through the Village (Lonmore to A850) the official figures are shown by the blue line. Did overall traffic fall by two-thirds between 2000 and 2009? No!



Again, the official figures show the difference between summer and winter, not the real change over multiple years. Actual counts at Elgol (orange) happen to be close to the 2004 estimate for Dunvegan, and show a consistent rise through 2021, likely to have been at least matched in the Village.

In conclusion, we can see there are significant problems with how traffic across Skye is surveyed and estimated. The evidence shows these are particularly vivid in the DCC and IV55 8 areas, where the estimates on which road maintenance are based are wildly out-of-line with other evidence of traffic volume (and with comparable communities/landscapes in other parts of Skye). This issue is also escalating rapidly, since summer Skye Bridge traffic increased by 101,565 (11.4%, Skye Connect) between 2022 and 2023.

There is therefore an urgent need for further local car-counts, both off- and in-season, to capture the actual numbers using our roads. There is also a need to lobby THC to conduct regular automated traffic surveys at sites known to attract exceptional visitor numbers, and to do so at consistent times of year (e.g. April, July, November) so that figures are analysed like-for-like in future. This in itself would trigger much-needed improvements to our roads. It is further worth noting that every other such site on Skye (Elgol, Storr, Kilt Rock, Fairy Pools, Dunvegan Castle) now has a dedicated bus service several times daily, while Neist Point (and Coral Bay) are car-only.

(Elgol, for example, is a community of just 62 households, but is served by four return weekday bus services, summer and winter. A modern Stagecoach 20 passenger minibus nimbly handles the single-track road. Providing an essential, regularly-used lifeline (and social experience) for the elderly and disabled in the community, it is also popular with hikers and independent travellers of all ages, while serving to link Broadford and Kyle. It is not impossible to run an economic and effective bus route, particularly in areas appealing to hikers, cyclists, and exceptionally high numbers of visitors.)

Reliance on cars alone is not only ecologically unsustainable and practically dangerous and frustrating. It also makes both community members and visitors particularly vulnerable to rising fuel prices, and repetitions of the fuel crises we already experience. Further, it is expensive to the local authority in terms of road repair, traffic safety and school/NHS taxis. There is a clear business case for a local circular public transport route (as was created for Trotternish, e.g. several daily Bakery-Glendale-Orbost-Roag-Lonmore-Village-Castle-Claigan, returning Castle-Village-Lonmore-Vatten-Harlosh-Feorlig-Struan) as well as for locally-owned shuttle buses.