

A303 Sparkford to Ilchester Consultation – response from Campaign for Better Transport

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1. Campaign for Better Transport's Response

1.1 Introduction

Increasing road capacity will undermine key policy goals on environmental protection, modal shift, carbon reduction, air pollution and public health. A recent major report, reviewing over 80 Post Opening Project Evaluation reports on new roads, found that road building is failing to provide the congestion relief and economic boost promised, while devastating the environment¹. Building new roads should therefore be considered as a last resort.

Given this evidence, we are concerned that new road building is being considered in this location before all other options have been fully appraised, contrary to the principles of sustainable development. The primary purpose of this scheme is not to improve the local environment, but as the consultation documents indicate, to contribute to a long distance cross-country route, at great financial and environmental cost. While any benefits would be only temporary, the adverse impacts would be permanent.

A truly sustainable approach would have considered other, less damaging alternatives first. Our preference for the A303/A30/A358 corridor would be for significant investment in rail infrastructure and services to the south west, combined with bus improvements (both local and longer distance) and local walking and cycling enhancements. Road alterations should be constrained to small-scale online improvements to address local environment, safety or severance issues, combined with a strategic approach to freight movements.

1.2 Opposition to offline proposals

We object to the offline proposals for the significant harm they would cause the local environment. While a seemingly attractive solution, as it would allow construction to take place while the A303 remained open, the cost of its impact on the surroundings, including loss of agricultural land, would be too high.

1.3 Concern about the online proposals

If this road is taken forward to construction, our preference would be for the online option as this corridor already is impacted upon by the road, so the footprint of this development would be smaller. However, it would not be without its issues. Aside from construction being more complex, a higher speed road would increase noise pollution for local residents, rising as it would to 70mph from the current 50mph limit. Air pollution is also likely to increase at these higher speeds.

There would also need to be greater thought given to severance issues as a dual carriageway would not be an attractive prospect for pedestrians and cyclists to either use, or to try and cross. Yet this issue appears to have received very little attention. It is mentioned that there would be a new bridge under the dual carriageway at Traits Lane, but no mention is made of new crossing points (bridges or underpasses) at:

- Downhead Lane / Plowgate Lane
- Steart Hill / Howell Hill
- Gason Lane

other than the existing junctions probably wouldn't be suitable for a new high speed dual carriageway.

1.4 Cumulative impacts not addressed

We are concerned that this scheme is being progressed at the same time as, but otherwise in isolation to, other schemes being proposed along the A303/A30/A358 corridor. This means that the full impact of these schemes is likely to be severely underreported. If all these sections are expanded to dual carriageways, alongside junction capacity increases, this is likely to result in a big increase in traffic along this corridor, both

¹ "The end of the road? Challenging the road-building consensus", CPRE 2017

induced and reassigned from other routes, over and above what is estimated for each scheme in isolation. This will bring even greater noise and pollution than is currently being suggested.

Linked to the likely large increase in traffic along this corridor, it is most probable that carbon emissions will increase significantly. This will further undermine the ability of the Department for Transport to reduce carbon emissions from transport. Given that transport emissions have been flagged as being of concern by the Committee on Climate Change in its Progress Report to Parliament in June 2016, Highways England cannot keep ignoring the fact that its road building programme is driving up emissions.

1.5 Vulnerable road users

We are very concerned that little information has been provided on what pedestrian and cycle facilities would be provided either to move along the A303 corridor or across it. Indeed, as noted above in 1.3, we are concerned that some important linkages across the A303 could be severed as there is no mention of them having new bridges or underpasses.

It is important that these links are kept open. While Highways England has said that it has monitored pedestrians and cycle movements, these may not be representative of what the potential, as the current A303 already forms a barrier to these modes.

New cycle facilities will need to be designed to the latest standards as laid out in Interim Advice Note: 195/16 and sealed surfaces of adequate width should be provided to ensure all cyclists can use them.

1.6 Conclusion

Overall, we are not happy with the expansion of the A303/A30/A358 road corridor which, if all of the various single carriageway sections are converted into dual carriageways, will significantly increase traffic over and above what might be expected from expanding just one section in isolation. This will lead to a worsening of congestion overall and if it encourages more people to drive to the south west, it could overload many of the rural roads that are an attractive feature of the area.

It would be far better to encourage tourism and improve access by investing in public transport, walking and cycling to cut both longer distance and local motorised traffic.

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Campaign for Better Transport's vision is a country where communities have affordable transport that improves quality of life and protects the environment. Achieving our vision requires substantial changes to UK transport policy which we aim to achieve by providing well-researched, practical solutions that gain support from both decision-makers and the public.

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