

The Rt Hon Margaret Hodge MP
Chair, Public Accounts Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

12 November 2014

Dear Ms Hodge

I am writing to express concern that the Government's "Roads Investment Strategy", due to be announced at the Autumn Statement next month, is likely to involve significant waste of public money and to ask you to request the National Audit Office to review the process for preparing this Strategy.

As a group concerned with sustainable transport, we support the principle of a longer term strategy for roads and at least some of the elements proposed by the Government for inclusion in this strategy. However, the main spending plans in the strategy are coming out of two processes with which we have serious concerns. These are the 18 'Route Strategies' carried out by the Highways Agency and the six 'Feasibility Studies' carried out by the Department for Transport itself. It is these studies and strategies that we believe could involve significant waste of public money.

Since early this year, Campaign for Better Transport has helped local environmental and community groups take part in these studies. In many cases, the options considered for improving conditions on the major roads in the studies have been focused only on large road building projects that have previously been proposed and dropped. There have been good reasons – principally cost, value for money and environmental impacts – for halting these projects in the past, and the groups we have been helping have been keen to see the new studies evaluate a wider range of alternatives. In some cases, formal alternatives have been tabled for consideration in the study reference groups. For example, as part of the A27 Feasibility Study, local campaigners have proposed a range of demand management measures such as workplace travel plans, rather than expensive bypasses around the urban areas, where the worst congestion occurs.

In the Transpennine Feasibility Study, the Department for Transport has admitted the traffic model they used was not robust and only allowed them to take the most superficial look at some of the options before narrowing the field. It is believed that the idea of an area-wide lorry ban which was tabled by one of the UK's top transport consultants on behalf of Friends of the Peak District was not modelled.

The reason I believe your Committee has an interest is that the alternatives being discussed would be far cheaper than new bypasses and dual carriageways, yet will still address the transport issues in the areas covered by the studies.

For example, Department for Transport figures showed that Local Sustainable Transport schemes deliver more than £5 of benefit for every £1 spent, with the Government's own webpage stating "*This demonstrates that investment in local sustainable transport projects represents very high value for money.*"

Unfortunately the Feasibility Studies have ended up ruling out all alternatives to major road building and the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister have both already announced that the studies will result in major road building along these corridors. This will be extremely expensive and we believe that more sustainable, better value options should be fully appraised.

We would be happy to discuss this further with you or officials and look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely



Stephen Joseph
Chief Executive
Campaign for Better Transport