

Response to Examining Authority's First Questions and first Written Representations on the A556 Knutsford to Bowdon Improvement

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1. Air pollution

In our previous submission we raised the important issue of air pollution, which was not the subject of any of the ExA's previous questions or requests for background information.¹

We pointed out that a road scheme which – according to its own Environmental Assessment – increases air pollution across a wide area, and which will cause locations currently within EU legal limits for Nitrogen Dioxide (NO₂) pollution to exceed those limits, may be in breach of the law. We also pointed out that these concerns were particularly relevant in the light of the recent Supreme Court ruling that the UK Government is failing in its legal duty to protect people from the harmful effects of such pollution.²

We are therefore very pleased to see that, in his second set of questions,³ the ExA has taken up this important concern and asked a number of questions of the Highways Agency and local authorities relating to air pollution and the Environmental Assessment, and we look forward to seeing responses to these questions.

However, since then, there has been another important development.

On 11 November 2013, the Highways Agency wrote to stakeholders and published a consultation document on plans for the M60 and M62 motorways around Manchester.⁴

¹ <http://infrastructure.planningportal.gov.uk/wp-content/ipc/uploads/projects/TR010002/2.%20Post-Submission/Representations/Written%20Representations/131007%20TR010002%20Submission%20from%20Campaign%20for%20Better%20Transport%20Scheme%20%28NEW%20VERSION%29.pdf>

² Summary: http://www.supremecourt.gov.uk/decided-cases/docs/UKSC_2012_0179_PressSummary.pdf; Full judgment: http://www.supremecourt.gov.uk/decided-cases/docs/UKSC_2012_0179_Judgment.pdf

³ Questions 2.12 and 2.13: <http://infrastructure.planningportal.gov.uk/wp-content/ipc/uploads/projects/TR010002/2.%20Post-Submission/Procedural%20Decisions/131107%20TR010002%20ExA%27s%20second%20round%20of%20questions%20and%20draft%20RIES%20report.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/manchester-smart-motorway-variable-mandatory-speed-limits>

These documents stated that previous plans to widen parts of these motorways or convert them to all-lane running Managed Motorways (where the hard shoulder lanes are used as permanent lanes for traffic without widening the overall footprint of the motorway) had been abandoned in favour of a 'Smart Motorway' programme of variable speed limits for the M60, with no expansion of capacity in the urban area. The reason for this change of plan was explicitly stated to be because of concerns about breaching the EU standards for air quality after an environmental assessment.

Extracts from the Highways Agency document are given below, as well as a quote given to the publication Local Transport Today, saying that this was a new approach from the Agency.

We believe that the admission by the Agency that breaches of air pollution limits are a reason to halt plans to expand road capacity is highly relevant to the current project on the A556 and M6, where an extensive offline new dual carriageway is accompanied by all-lane running proposals between junctions 19 and 20 of the M6. The scheme's own environmental assessment has revealed that the road plans will cause widespread increases in air pollution, and specific breaches of EU limits in a number of locations. Overall the assessment of the impact on air quality is classified as 'significant adverse'.

The information setting out these problems is given on page 6 of the ES Non-technical summary and in more detail on pages 36 to 49 of the ES Volume 1 Part A – Main Text.⁵

In order to be consistent with the new approach it has adopted with the M60/M62 scheme, the Highways Agency should now similarly abandon plans to expand capacity on the A556 and consider other options for improving conditions on the road without breaching legal limits on air pollution.

Figure 1: Map of modified scheme and Highways Agency statement about the importance of air pollution standards in their consultation documents for the M60 J8 to M62 J20 Smart Motorway

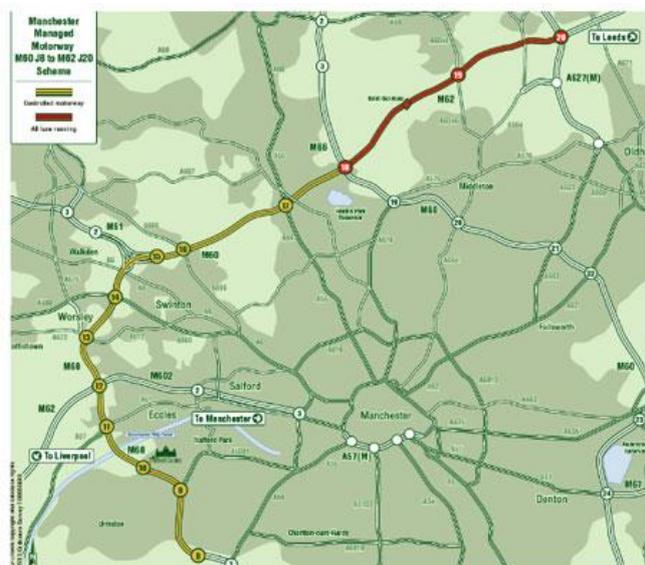


Figure 3A: M60 J8 to M62 J20 smart motorway scheme variable mandatory speed limits map

A controlled motorway uses variable mandatory speed limits to help the Highways Agency manage traffic flows at peak congestion times or following an incident. It is a component of smart motorways, which uses a range of innovative technology combined with new operating procedures to actively control traffic flow.

What is all-lane running?

All-lane running allows us to create additional capacity by allowing the hard-shoulder to be converted to a permanent running lane. We are implementing 2 aspects of smart motorway around Manchester, controlled motorways on the M60 between junctions 8 & 18 and all lane running on the M62 between junctions 18 & 20.

Why is all-lane running not available for the full length of the scheme?

We looked extensively at the option to provide all-lane running on the M60 section between junctions 8 and 18. However, our environmental assessment concluded that creating this improvement would result in an increase in traffic using the motorway which would then have a detrimental affect on air quality. Poor air quality is a concern for the UK and across much of Europe, despite air being cleaner now than at any time since the industrial revolution.

There are UK and European standards designed to protect human health and sensitive ecological habitats which we cannot ignore, as a result we are unable to take this proposal of making the hard shoulder available to traffic on this section at this time. We are committed to delivering solutions to minimise the air quality impacts resulting from traffic using our network and are working to develop further solutions that will help improve this section of our network that comply with statutory air quality limits.

⁵ <http://infrastructure.planningportal.gov.uk/projects/north-west/a556-knutsford-to-bowdon-scheme/?ipcsection=docs&stage=app&filter=Environmental+Statement>

Extract from Highways Agency statements on the M60/M62 Smart Motorway proposals:

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Consultation document on M60 J8 to M62 Smart Motorway proposal⁶

The HA said opening up the hard shoulder between junction 8 and 18 round the west and north of Manchester would have moved traffic nearer to properties and attracted more vehicles to the road. "This would have resulted in new exceedances of air quality levels, particularly in relation to NO2," a spokeswoman told LTT.

"This is the first time we have taken this approach on a major project scheme in relation to air quality," she said.

Extract from article and comments made by the Highways Agency, from Local Transport Today⁷

⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/manchester-smart-motorway-variable-mandatory-speed-limits>

⁷ https://www.transportxtra.com/ajax-login_facebook.cfm?type=login&fb=/search/?q=M60

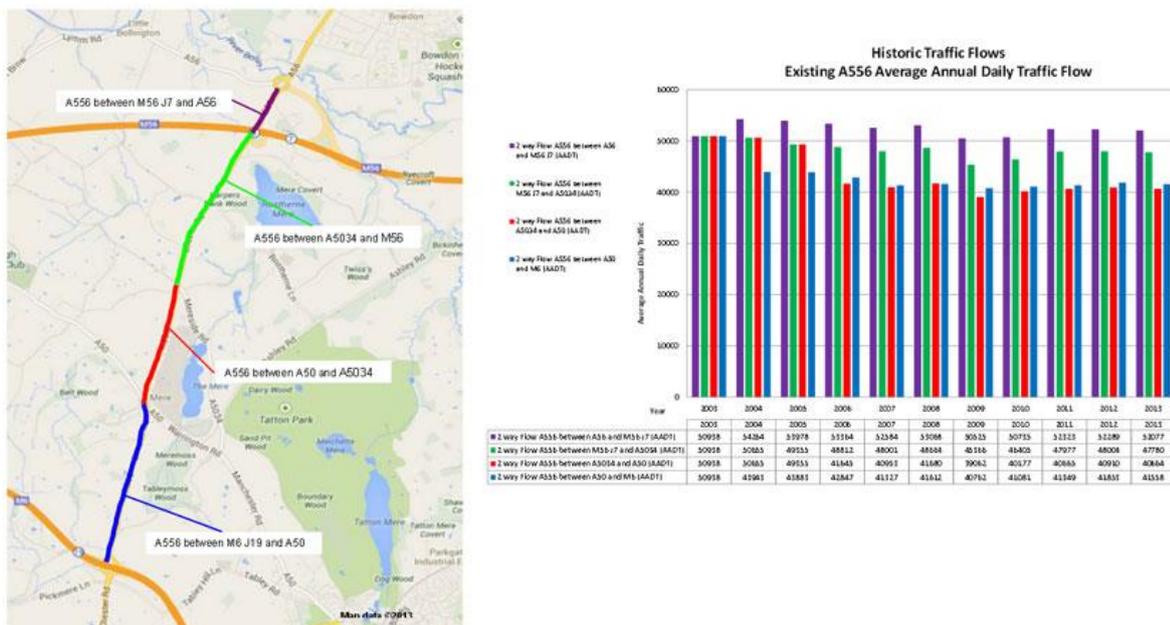
2. Questions of traffic growth

In item 9 of his requests for additional background information, the ExA asked for "a sequence of traffic flow counts along the relevant section(s) of the A556 covering the period at least from 2000 onwards to the present time and also a similar sequence for other relevant links in the highway network in the vicinity of the DCO scheme."

The Highways Agency's response to this request (chart reproduced in figure 2, using data from their Traffic Flow Data System [TRADS]) firmly corroborates the evidence we presented in our previous submission, using data from the Department for Transport's traffic counts website. It shows clearly that over the past decade traffic levels on this stretch of road have flattened out or fallen and are now distinctly below peak levels.

Figure 2: Highways Agency chart showing recent falling traffic levels on the A556⁸

Table 1 Annual Average Daily Traffic Flows for A556 2003-2013



For data against the years 2003 and 2004 the AADT statistics have been compiled for longer sections of the A556 (T) than those for later years.

We reiterate our previous concerns about the case for the road not being made in terms of an urgent need to provide new capacity aimed at relieving either current or future congestion. We call again for alternative proposals to improve the efficiency of nearby junctions to be considered again, along with measures across a wider area to reduce traffic demand and provide alternatives to car and lorry travel.

It is far better to make use of the 'breathing space' provided to consolidate and build upon these positive trends, than to pursue road-building and widening measures that are guaranteed to induce new traffic and unnecessarily worsen problems, including air pollution.

Induced traffic is a well known side-effect of road-building and widening and is defined as a phenomenon whereby, when a new transport facility or service becomes available the users of the transport system alter their behaviour in a number of ways:

⁸ <http://infrastructure.planningportal.gov.uk/wp-content/ipc/uploads/projects/TR010002/2.%20Post-Submission/Representations/Additional%20Representations/A556%20Rule%2017%20Annex%20E%20-%20209.pdf>

- Changing their route
- Changing their mode
- Changing their destination to one made easily reachable using the new system (this tends to change the length of trips, but not their utility)
- Changing their trip making frequency
- Changing their time of travel (they may previously have been deterred from making trips at busy times).

It is easy to envisage how the A556 project could induce traffic by all of these methods.

We also note that the second set of questions from the ExA does not yet refer to forecasts made in support of calculations of time savings (and thus economic benefits) for previous incarnations of this scheme.

Therefore, we also propose again that the ExA asks the Highways Agency to a) present a copy of the 'do minimum' traffic forecasts for the scheme previously proposed in the 1990s and b) to account for the discrepancy between these forecasts of growth and the minimal changes in traffic levels on the A556 in this area reported in their response to item 9 above.

Extract from our previous submission:

"A counterfactual exercise:

It is well worth asking how - if the A556(M) road had been built instead of dropped in 1997 - similar predictions of its economic benefits would have fared.

We can estimate this by comparing long-term traffic forecasts from 1997 with what has actually happened in the past 15 years:

- *The 1997 traffic forecasts predicted traffic would "grow by more than a third on all roads over the next 20 years and by more than half on trunk roads."⁹*
- *In fact, compared with 1997, traffic in 2012 was just 7.5% higher (see Figure B.2.2 below)*
- *Assuming the same average rate of annual growth continues for a further 5 years from 2012, traffic in 2017 can be estimated as approximately 10% above 1997 levels.*

This means that - at most - one third of the predicted time savings (and thus less than around a third of the predicted economic benefits for the first 20 years of the scheme) would have been achieved if the road had been built when first planned.

Before being allowed to rely on current forecasts made using similar methods, the current promoters should be challenged to account for this discrepancy between what was predicted and what happened since their predecessors originally wanted to build the road."

3. Weighing up environmental damage vs economic 'benefits'

We are also pleased to see that the examiner has asked for the reasons behind previous decisions to abandon similar bypass proposals to be provided (items 4 and 5 in the requests for additional background information).

⁹ A new deal for trunk roads in England: Understanding the new approach. Department for Transport, 1997, archived at: <http://www.solihull.gov.uk/planappdocs/msadocuments/CD251.pdf>

The responses to these show that previous schemes with extensive new offline road-building have been rejected by ministers based on the disproportionate amount of environmental damage, which was not considered to be offset by the supposed benefits of the scheme.

Extracts from past ministerial statements:

"The study also considered replacing the A556 in Cheshire by linking the M6 and M56 with a new dual carriageway. I am worried about the environmental consequences of such a new road, and I have therefore asked the Highways Agency to examine the alternative of widening the existing motorways and improving the junction between them."

Secretary of State Alistair Darling in 2002, from HA response to Item 4 in requests for additional background information: A copy of the Ministerial or Departmental instruction following the publication of the MIDMAN study in March 2002¹⁰

"However, I am not convinced that the proposal for a new motorway in open countryside between M6 junction 19 and the M56 is acceptable. I have also considered alternative improvements of M6 junction 20, but I do not believe that they represent value for money. I have therefore asked the Highways Agency to work with local stakeholders to identify smaller-scale measures for the A556 in Cheshire."

Secretary of State Alistair Darling in 2003, from HA response to Item 5 in requests for additional background information: A copy of the Secretary of State's decision of April 2003 to reject both the A556(M) and M6 Junction 20 schemes and to commission the A556 Route Management Study (RMS)¹¹

We urge the ExA to follow this and conclude that the same concerns apply now just as strongly, if not even more so (especially given the additional strength of the legal restrictions on worsening air pollution).

November 2013

Sian Berry
Campaign for Better Transport

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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¹⁰ <http://infrastructure.planningportal.gov.uk/wp-content/ipc/uploads/projects/TR010002/2.%20Post-Submission/Representations/Additional%20Representations/A556%20Rule%2017%20Annex%20E%20-%204.pdf>

¹¹ <http://infrastructure.planningportal.gov.uk/wp-content/ipc/uploads/projects/TR010002/2.%20Post-Submission/Representations/Additional%20Representations/A556%20Rule%2017%20Annex%20E%20-%205.pdf>