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Kathryn Powell,
The Planning Inspectorate,
National Infrastructure Directorate,
Temple Quay House,
Temple Quay,
Bristol. BS1 6NP

11 April 2012

Dear Ms Powell,

A556 proposals 2012

I wrote to Mr George Osborne, my MP, in February 2006 because of concerns I had at the time regarding plans for widening of the M6 from Junction 11A to Junction 19, or that a toll road may be built continuing from the current M6 Toll road but finishing at M6 Junction 19. There also appeared to be a concurrent plan to widen the A556 from M6 Junction 19 to its junction with the M56 at Bowdon, and this may have gone as far as upgrading the A556 to an A556(M). However, I was not convinced that the Highways Agency had looked at these two schemes in a holistic way. I considered that a more appropriate solution could be found for dealing with the specific problems related to congestion at M6 Junction 19 and on the A556, especially with the latter currently being identified by signs on the M6 northbound as the preferred route from the M6 to the M56 at Bowdon. I considered that any proposal to end widening, or a toll road, at M6 Junction 19, was ill-conceived and did not take into account the local environment, including the wishes of the local population, or the longer term needs for adequate roads in this part of north-west England. For many years it has been recognised that the omission of a proper link from the M6 at Junction 20 to the M56 Eastbound has been a serious fault with this part of the motorway system. By correcting that omission at that time, rather than avoiding the obvious solution, planners would be providing a long term solution to unnecessary traffic build up at M6 Junction 19 and the serious accidents that occur both around Junction 19 and on the A556.

Mr Osborne took an active and positive role in Opposition in highlighting the M6 J20 solution as key to the Manchester-Birmingham link and to the relieving of congestion on the A556, in particular in saying in July 2004 that "The Secretary of State (*for Transport, Alistair Darling*) said that the M6 linked Birmingham to Manchester, but in fact, as he knows, it bypasses Manchester and pushes Manchester-bound traffic on to the wholly unsuitable A556 at junction 19."

I have not changed my views that the A556 should not be upgraded and that M6 Junction 20 should be provided with a proper M6 northbound to M56 eastbound slip road.

As far as the current A556 plan is concerned, I do not believe that the consultation has been fairly carried out, in that those adversely affected by the A556 "new route" had not been approached at a sufficiently early time to voice their concerns. The 45 or so residences along the current A556 between Bucklow Hill and the A556/A50 junction obviously gain from the new route, however I do not believe that those whose businesses and properties would be adversely affected by the new route, including the people of Tabley, Millington and so on, have been considered sufficiently. What the proposal currently presents to those adversely affected is only a choice of the least worst situation. Additionally, there is the environmental case against the new route, including the risk to productive farmland that would never be returned to green field if the proposal goes forward. As Mr Darling said in reply to Mr Osborne in July 2004 "The hon. Gentleman is right: major environmental sensitivities are involved along the A556".

I strongly consider that the current A556 "new route" proposals will not cure the problems of the M6 to M56 link and that the only long-term solution is making Junction 20 of the M6 multi-directional, as Mr Osborne suggested to the Secretary of State for Transport in October 2002. I would argue that the A556 "replacement" work does not increase capacity at all; at best it will allow drivers to reach the M56 at Bowdon more quickly from M6 J19, but once at the M56 congestion will be increased as a direct result of speeding the flow of traffic along the A556 "new route". If the current A556 route does anything at all for traffic flow, it regulates the amount of traffic reaching and joining the M56 at any one time, in a similar way to the use of slip road traffic lights at, for example, M6 J10 at Walsall.

I understand that there is an alternative junction 20 plan shortly to be presented to the Highways Agency and the Planning Inspectorate (formerly IPC) which will include the de-trunking of the existing A556. I would urge you to give due consideration to this alternative plan and not to compound the mistakes that have been made by the Highways Agency and the IPC in favouring an A556 solution to the M6/M56 problems.

Yours sincerely

Philip Poulton