

Further Comments by D J Green

The following comments are made regarding HE's Jan 8 deadline response to my paper for the Reading hearing. Whilst I have no wish to prolong this debate I find the HE position counterintuitive on several matters and would wish to bring an alternative perspective before the Inquiry. A lack of comment on my part on other matters does not indicate my acceptance but just my desire to focus on key differences.

I made the point that DfT's Road Transport Forecasts 2015 document suggests traffic demand rises across the UK of 29-60% by 2040 on the Strategic Road network (SRN) with up to 53% on remaining roads. I made the argument that high levels of economic activity, affluence and car use across the SE in general, combined with high levels of committed and ongoing development locally across Berkshire would suggest that the higher end of the range would be a plausible outcome locally. Consequently, I surmised that the HE design figure increase for the M4 from 2013 to 2037 of around 43% may well prove an underestimate of the likely demand for traffic movement. Whether that higher scale of demand can access or leave the M4 on any feeder roads or junctions is a separate matter that I shall return to later.

In response HE stated that these assertions were based on supposition rather than evidence. However, in reality my argument was essential a summary of extensive local knowledge of Berkshire's consistently buoyant economy and demographics, common sense and logic and is based on the following representative although incomplete but still startling data set:-

General

- >Berks Household growth to 2026 of 53,002 or 15.27%
- >Berks Population growth to 2026 of 79,159 or 9.4%
- >Berks is 13th nationally in total workforce size
- >Berks is UK's 6th biggest wealth producing sub region
- >Berks generates 15% of the SE Region's economic output
- >Berks generates 12% of the SE Region's jobs
- >Central Berkshire has some of the highest UK car ownership rates
- >Berks traditionally has high levels of car commuting via the M4

Housing

- > Core Berks commitments to 2026 for 59,104 new homes (ongoing)

Employment

- >Winnersh Triangle 200,000 sq m B1 (approx 10,000 jobs) ongoing
- > Reading Science Park 75,000 sq m B1 (approx 4,000 jobs) start imminent
- >Reading Station Hill (approx 5,000 jobs) ongoing
- >Forbury Place, Reading (approx 200,000 sq m B1) ongoing
- >Reading Southside (approx 100,000 sq m B1) subject to planning

Retail

- >Ikea Store adj J12 (ongoing)
- >Bracknell Town centre redevelopment (ongoing)
- >Wokingham Town Centre (firm WBC commitments)

Given the above I consider my previous suggestion of traffic forecasts locally trending towards the higher end of the DfT's forecast range both for the SRN and the local road network to be perfectly reasonable. If not in Berkshire under these vibrant conditions then where in the UK are the 2015 DfT forecasts of future traffic demand appropriate? I am disappointed that this particular point has not been given more serious consideration especially as the scheme runs mainly through Berkshire which suggests that future traffic growth in Berkshire is the prime mover for the scheme in the first place. It is clear that the current growth commitments for Berkshire to circa 2026 are likely to give rise to continued further pressure for growth in future years.

In paragraph 1.3.2 it is stated "HE considers that the growth estimate is accurate for the specific area and the scheme will function effectively throughout its projected design life". I would comment that the design life referred to here is only the standard 15 years to 2037 from a projected start in 2022. The traffic figures that I have seen indicate that the M4 scheme would be running at effective full capacity for much of the working day by 2037 and (as stated in HE's paragraph 1.2.2) peak hour conditions would be felt across three hour peak periods. This does represent the standard DfT approach to highway planning but in this instance it would appear not to provide much in the way of future flexibility, reliability and resilience following a scheme valued at £0.8Bn especially in the event of future traffic demand being greater than HE forecast.

In my previous submission I questioned the rather counterintuitive HE view that the scheme would have a neutral effect on the local road network, motorway junctions, the A404T and the M25. I found the HE comments on this aspect less than helpful and incomplete. Paragraph 1.6.3 suggests marginal percentage increases on the A404T and M25 but doesn't stipulate whether these are peak or full day related. The reason for a limited increase on the M25 is given as capacity constraint but surely this will also apply to all alternative routes to/from the eastern end of the scheme. So where will the increased flow at the eastern end of the M4 actually come from and go to if not the M25? Doesn't the comment about capacity constraint apply equally across all feeder routes throughout the length of the scheme to some extent?

Paragraph 1.6.3 also contains a remark "some of that increase joins the M4 west of Junction 12" but without any quantification. So it is difficult to draw any conclusions from this other than it cannot be sufficient growth to warrant extending the scheme to Junction 13 or beyond. Similarly there is no discussion of increases on the local road network or indeed on all the M4 junctions despite this being the focus of my original point. Given that DfT Road Transport Forecasts 2015 suggest up to a 53% increase on local roads this warrants much further discussion whilst the discussion of driver stress on local roads in paragraph 1.6.2 does nothing to explain the basic point.

Paragraph 1.7.1 asserts HE's position that their analysis to date shows little impact requiring junction improvements and so any necessary future improvements would fall to local highway authorities presumably although nothing is currently planned or funded.

In summary as the scheme's traffic figures stand it is being suggested by HE that a 43% increase in mainline traffic can be developed and accommodated on an improved M4 but without any significant increases of any feeder roads or access junctions many of which are already congested at extended peak times. This apparent conjuring trick against a backdrop

of much higher DfT forecast traffic growth on all roads and massive development locally. Consequently, I make no apology for standing behind my original comment that these conclusions are totally unrealistic.

The impact of the scheme as it stands may well be to develop increased capacity on the main line and to “guarantee” free flow by holding back or effectively gating residual traffic demand at unimproved junctions and local roads. Egress from the motorway at these unimproved junctions however could be difficult but in this case traffic would stack up back along the slip roads onto the improved M4. Is this a scheme objective or a side consequence?

At best HE’s conclusions are counterintuitive and I would recommend a thorough review of the Saturn model to identify just where the apparent anomaly arises. A Select Link analysis at peak times of the main line links between J10 and J12 would show how traffic assignments to the improved M4 were derived and the impact on all local feeder roads. I would also ask whether there is any frustrated demand shown (to access or leave the M4) at peak hours at 2037 within the Saturn model. Lastly Saturn is essentially a strategic tool and so is not appropriate to model the detailed operation of complex and congested junctions. Has any detailed operational analysis work been done on the many significant junctions within the modelled area and particularly the motorway roundabout junctions at J5, J6, J11 and J12 and what are the results?

Lastly I have read the Enhanced Noise Mitigation Study published at the January 8 deadline and welcome the move to provide much more in the way of noise mitigation for local residents. I ask for clarification on a number of key points as follows:-

- Is this a commitment from HE to fund these mitigation works?
- Will HE commit to erect these barriers when work starts for early impact?
- Will the Low Noise surfacing still be provided as well?
- Will HE commit to maintain Low Noise surfacing acoustic effectiveness?
- Why a 2.5m barrier across Lower Earley when 3.5 m used elsewhere?
- Why were noise bunds not considered as an alternative?

Thank you for listening.

Dave Green

January 2016