

## **A303 Amesbury to Berwick Down** Devon County Council Written Representation

### Introduction

Devon County Council strongly supports the A303 Amesbury to Berwick Down scheme, along with other schemes currently being progressed at Sparkford to Ilchester and Ilminster to M5 at Taunton, as a vital first step towards achieving a whole A303/A358/A30 route improvement.

### Need for the Scheme

The A303/A30 is one of the two main road routes from London to South West England; it is the trunk road corridor between London and Penzance and provides the most direct road link between the South West Peninsula and London and the South East. Despite its strategic importance to the South West region, the route is of poor quality, experiencing considerable congestion and road safety problems, and is seen as an extremely unreliable access point to the South West. As a result, an improvement to the A303/A358/A30 has long been considered a priority by a strong coalition of local authorities.

The applicant's document '7.1 The Case for the Scheme, October 2018' clearly identifies the issues and constraints with the existing corridor, including its critical importance to the economy of the South West Peninsula. It highlights that despite being dual carriageway for most of its length, it is interrupted by sections of single carriageway and at-grade junctions which cause traffic bottlenecks. As a result, the congestion, delay and poor journey time reliability on the A303 is a major impediment to economic growth in the South West region, which performs poorly compared to the rest of the UK.

These issues have been apparent to Devon County Council for many years, and as such the Council have been an active member of the 'A303/A358/A30 Steering Group'. In April 2013, in order to raise the profile of the poor quality of the existing route, the steering group submitted 'The A303 Corridor Improvement Programme Outline Economic Case and Proposed Next Steps' to government. The report identified the need for a dual carriageway improvement to the A303/A358, plus further single carriageway improvements to the section of the A303/A30 between Southfields and Honiton.

An 'A303/A358/A30 Economic Impact Study' was also produced in 2013, with a refresh of this report commissioned in 2018. As part of the refresh, levels of delay as a result of incidents occurring on both the M5 and A303 corridor have been monitored. The average level of delay on the A303 and M5 routes are similar, with similar numbers of incidents observed. There is also no reliable trend of when delay occurs, preventing drivers from being able to make an informed choice before travelling. Drivers to and from the South West therefore do not have a reliable alternative route to the rest of the country. Regular disruption to the rail network further exacerbates these issues, with no reliable alternative mode of travel to the rest of the country.

### Economic Benefits

The 'A303/A358/A30 Economic Impact Study' and 2018 refresh demonstrate that the South West have a unique opportunity to contribute more to the national economy by releasing the untapped potential in the economy through investment in this vital piece of infrastructure. The improvements to the A303 Amesbury to Berwick Down section will form an important element of the final whole route upgrade. These reports

include evidence gathered from a survey of over 650 businesses. This provided compelling evidence as to the need for the scheme and severe impact the operation of the corridor has on businesses, with 89% feeling that the current unreliability of the A303 was harming their business. This evidence is also referenced by the applicant in '7.1 The Case for the Scheme, October 2018'. Benefits to the South West of a whole route corridor upgrade were calculated to be:

- 21,400 jobs
- £7.2 billion employment related economic impacts
- £8.6 billion per year increased visitor expenditure
- Transport benefits of £1.9 billion
- Improved transport resilience

The 2018 'A303/A358/A30 Economic Impact Study' refresh provides a more up to date evidence base for the GVA benefits of a whole route improvement. This considered the existing economic climate of the South West region alongside business survey data in order to monetise the predicted GVA outcomes of implementing an improvement over a 60-year horizon. This demonstrated that an improvement to the whole corridor would result in GVA benefits to the region of almost £40 billion, with Devon benefitting from £9.8 billion alone.

It should be noted that the results given in these studies can only be fully realised with improvements to the whole A303/A358/A30 corridor. The delivery of one scheme alone will not achieve the full potential benefits. However, the scheme at Stonehenge should be viewed as a vital first step and catalyst to improvements along the remaining sections of the corridor. Once the schemes have been delivered in full, the region will reap significant economic benefits.

The 2018 'Economic Impact Study' also states that the South West economy is under-performing compared to the rest of the UK and, without improvement, the performance of the corridor will deteriorate, further limiting growth and prosperity. The Devon economy, along with other South West counties of Wiltshire, Somerset, Dorset and Cornwall, contribute proportionally less to the UK economy than other regions as measured by GVA per head. Productivity in the South West is slightly below the national average, with those businesses along the M4/M5 corridor performing notably better than along the A303/A358/A30. GVA per head along the M5 corridor exceeds not only other parts of the region, but also the UK average. In contrast, the areas served by the A303/A30/A358 all demonstrate GVAs lower than the national average, with productivity decreasing further west. This corroborates the evidence shown in Section 2.3 of '7.1 The Case for the Scheme, October 2018' which shows the productivity as a percentage of the UK average decreasing along the A303 route compared to the M4/M5 corridor and recognises the productivity gap between the South East and more distant regions, such as the South West.

#### Client Scheme Requirements

It should be noted that the 'Client Scheme Requirements' for Transport and Economic Growth focuses on creating a high quality and reliable route that meets the future needs of traffic and enables growth in jobs and housing by providing a free-flowing connection between the South East and South West. However, it is Devon County Council's opinion that these objectives will only be fully achieved once the whole corridor improvements are delivered. The delivery of the A303 Amesbury to Berwick Down scheme alone will not solve the connectivity issues between the South West and South East. Although it will resolve one of the key Pinchpoints and serve

as a catalyst for the remaining schemes, further Pinchpoints along the corridor must be prioritised to achieve the scheme objectives.

#### Future Demand

Populations of the corridor's adjoining authorities have continued to grow, with further growth planned in the future. The existing Local Plans for Wiltshire, North Dorset, South Somerset, Taunton Deane, East Devon and Exeter allocate approximately 100,000 additional new dwellings and 420ha of employment to be delivered in the districts by 2031. 40% of these new dwellings are within 5km of the A303/A358/A30 corridor. Their close proximity to the strategic link of the A303/A30 means the success of these developments will be expected to be influenced most by the future performance of the corridor.

Large future growth is also planned for the wider South West, with large developments planned for the Greater Exeter area, Cornwall, Plymouth and Torbay. If all planned development comes forward, there will be a large resultant demand, and a high-quality transport network will be required to ensure the region's population and economy can grow. It is vital that the A303/A30 does not act as a barrier to the planned growth in the South West.

#### Reference to the Road Investment Strategy

It should be noted that it is our understanding that the Road Investment Strategy for the 2015/16 – 2019/20 refers to the 'A303/A30/A358 corridor package of commitments' and not a 'A303/A358 corridor package of commitments', as repeatedly referenced by the applicant. Improvements to the A30 between Honiton and Southfields form part of the overall corridor package and the full benefits to the South West cannot be achieved with the exclusion of this section.

#### Conclusion

Devon County Council strongly support the Government's commitment to improving the A303/A358/A30 corridor to create a safe, efficient and resilient second strategic route between London and the South West Peninsula. Delivering that commitment is vital to our region's economic growth and resilience of our transport connectivity with the rest of the UK. It is a critical project with wider implications for the rebalancing of the UK economy and harnessing the productivity potential of the Peninsula region.

However, the full economic benefit for the UK will only be achieved with a full end-to-end improvement along the A303/A358/A30 corridor. The remaining unimproved sections, including the A30 between Honiton and Southfields, will need to receive funding allocations in future RIS periods in order to ensure the proven need for a second strategic link to the economic growth areas in the South West Peninsula are met.

#### Enclosed

*A303 Corridor Improvement Programme (including the A358 and A30): Outline economic case and proposed next steps (April 2013)*

*A303 A358 A30: Corridor Improvement Programme: Economic Impact Study (February 2013)*

*A303/A358/A30 Corridor Improvement Programme: Economic Impact Study (January 2019)*