

Response on behalf of the Cycling Opportunities Group for Salisbury (COGS) to the Public Consultation on the A303 Stonehenge, Amesbury to Berwick Down, February-April 2018

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to comment on the most recent proposals for the A303 Amesbury to Berwick Down.

For Non Motorised Users (NMUs) the most important negative impact of the A303 to be mitigated is the severance created for roads and Public Rights of Way (PRoW) that cross it. We are pleased to see that these issues have been addressed in the February 2018 Public Consultation document. We have several points to raise and will divide these into the central and western section, previously commented on, and the eastern section (Countess roundabout and eastwards) that was not part of the scheme originally published in 2017.

WHS and western sections

The tunnel will mitigate severance across the World Heritage Site (WHS) and improve safety for NMUs, however the critical matter of the surface of the byway between the western end of Stonehenge Road and Longbarrow has not been specified. We cannot emphasise strongly enough that this will be the only direct east-west route for NMUs, since the new A303 will be inaccessible, and it is imperative that an all-weather bound surface is provided that is easily maintained, durable and usable in all seasons. The present provision for NMUs on the alignment of the former A344 constructed by English Heritage has proved to be entirely unsuitable for most road cycles or vehicles for disabled persons and not resilient enough to withstand even pedestrian use after winter rainfall. This is also important in respect of access during the construction phase as lengthy detours for cyclists and pedestrians will be detrimental.

The byway is shown as having permanent fences on either side, but it is not clear whether there will be access across it anywhere including at the junctions with PRoW (Byway 12 and the track by New King Barrows). Our understanding is that severance due to the existing A303 would be completely removed giving public access to both sides of the WHS without barriers of any kind.

At Longbarrow, the byway is shown as joining the existing A360, crossing a Green bridge (no.4) and running alongside both the link to Winterbourne Stoke and the existing A303. The surface of the Green bridges is not specified, but no.4 specifically needs to retain tarmac as at present so that NMUs have a direct north-south route avoiding the roundabout. At the southern Longbarrow roundabout, the new byway is shown as taking a somewhat circuitous route, we would ask for a more cycle and pedestrian-friendly solution at this point, rather than having to cross both southern arms.

It is encouraging to see the sympathetic treatment given to PRoW in the western section where severance is limited by providing Green bridges 1, 2 and 3. Also welcome is the provision of a byway on either side of the dual carriageway to the west of Winterbourne Stoke. Again the surfaces are key to encouraging their use by NMUs.

Eastern section

These proposals were not included in the original Public Consultation documents, but form a logical part of the scheme in terms of connecting communities across the A303 and reducing severance. The piecemeal nature of facilities for NMUs illustrates graphically what happens when these are added as an afterthought rather than being included in the design phase of a scheme. The contrast with the western section is indeed stark where the small community of Winterbourne Stoke is given some safe, direct and convenient facilities for NMUs, whereas connections for Amesbury, both north-south and east-west, are for the most part indirect and sub-standard. Some of the routes shown as "existing byways" on fig.5.45 are tarmac surfaces, whereas others are completely unsurfaced giving a misleading impression of the degree of connectivity between Amesbury, Bulford and Durrington. These are growing communities and deserve a coherent, convenient and safe network of walking, cycle and equestrian routes to serve their populations.

Countess roundabout

The proposed flyover will improve access for NMUs between Amesbury and Countess Road, but there is nothing on the plan to suggest improvements on Countess Road itself. We would propose that, as a minimum, grade-separated facilities be provided to the byway from both Durrington and Amesbury to assist NMUs to access the WHS, Woodhenge and the network of bridleways and tracks north of the A303, also for commuting, leisure and utility. We appreciate that the A345 is the responsibility of Wiltshire Council, but the A303 scheme needs to take the wider area into consideration as well as the road itself if an aim is to reduce severance in accordance with Highways England's Accessibility and NMU strategies. The crossings of the roundabout arms need careful design where drivers are looking to the right for oncoming traffic, unaware of the presence of vulnerable road users on their left hand side.

Countess to Solstice Park

The footbridge at Ratfyn is a useful facility for NMUs and gives direct access to Bulford Hill and the recently constructed traffic-free path on the eastern side of the minor, though heavily-trafficked, road (part of National Cycle Network Route 45, not shown on Fig 5.45, joining Solstice Park and Bulford Village). We would like to see improvements to the surfaces of the Ratfyn crossing approaches which are substandard, and if possible, to reduce the gradient using a ramp system as at the northern end of the Bulford Hill section of NCN45.

Solstice Park to A3028 junction

We appreciate the decision to close Amesbury 2, Allington Track and Amesbury Road accesses to the A303 has been made primarily on safety grounds. No accident figures for these junctions have been presented as the only documentation to discuss this was made available before the eastern section was included in the Scheme. We welcome the addition of the new link to Solstice Park from Allington Track as this is a commuting route from Amesbury and Durrington to the Research establishments at Porton Down. Surfacing is not specified, but we expect the links to be tarmac if open to all traffic.

We would be interested to compare the costs of providing the new link from Allington Track with bridging the A303 at this point to preserve the direct connection between the Bourne Valley (including Porton Down), Amesbury and Boscombe Down with Bulford Camp and Tidworth that has effectively been severed, leading to an extra 3-5km on the journey if commuting by cycle. This could be mitigated to some extent by providing a cycle track on the north side of the A303 between Amesbury Road and the Amesbury to Bulford road to access the new Allington Track link at Solstice Park. Additionally, consideration should be given to provision of cycle, pedestrian and equestrian facilities on the south side of the A303 to enable NMU access to Allington Track and the WHS from the Youth Hostel at Cholderton. At present there is a 2km gap only served by the A303 carriageway that is a deterrent to anyone using the YHA without motorised transport.

We are happy to enter into any discussions regarding the detail of facilities for NMUs in the Scheme area either within or outside the WHS.

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