

By email to A303Stonehenge@planninginspectorate.gov.uk

Wendy McKay
Lead Member Panel of Examining Inspectors
National Infrastructure Planning
Temple Quay House
2 The Square
Bristol
BS1 6PN
3rd May 2019

Dear Ms McKay,

Application by Highways England for an Order Granting Development Consent for the A303 Amesbury to Berwick Down

Submission relating to the Examining Authority's Written Questions

I write on behalf of the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership, which covers the areas of Devon, Somerset, Plymouth and Torbay.

This response relates to your Written Questions G.1.3/ G.1.4 (Need for the scheme and conformity with NPSNN); Socio- Economic Impact SE.1.11 (Socio – Economic Effects); Transport Assessment Tr.1.11/ Tr.1.17 (Standard and capacity of the proposals)

Need for the Scheme

Economic productivity in the South West Peninsula lags behind the UK average, as is shown in Figure 2.5 - Productivity in "The Case for the Scheme" (DCO document 7.1). In view of this the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) joined with other LEPs and Local Authorities to commission an assessment of the economic impact of upgrading the A303 corridor from the M3 to the M5 at Taunton to dual carriageway standard.

This study (*A303/A30/A358 Corridor Improvement Programme – Economic Impact Study, Parsons Brinckerhoff, February 2013*) concluded that improving the whole A303/A30/A358 corridor would:

- create 21,400 jobs and deliver a £41.6bn boost to the economy
- deliver £21.2bn of taxation, welfare savings, disposable income and tourism benefits;
- create £1.9bn in transport benefits from reduced journey times and greater resilience;

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- save 1807 fatal or serious casualties;
- reduce carbon emissions by 9%

This work was instrumental in gaining a commitment from Government to support upgrading of the A303/A30/A358 corridor.

We therefore strongly support the need for the A303 Amesbury to Berwick Down scheme, not just for the economic benefit which would result from upgrading the corridor, but also for the improved resilience that it would offer.

In the past few years the fragility of the transport networks serving the South West Peninsula has been very evident – not just in the context of major rail closures at Dawlish and the Somerset levels, but also with disruptive closures on the M5 motorway. The availability of the A303/A30/A358 as a second strategic route to the South West will be an important factor in convincing businesses that the South West is a sound place in which to invest.

Government Commitment to the Corridor Programme

We note that Government has given a clear commitment to upgrade the whole A303/A358 corridor to dual carriageway standard, and that three key elements of this strategy have been advanced during RIS1.

This commitment is set out in the Road Investment Strategy – Investment Plan, published by DfT in December 2014. This stated:-

“We intend to upgrade all remaining sections of the A303 between the M3 and the A358 to dual carriageway standard, together with creating a dual carriageway link from M5 at Taunton to the A303, as part of a long-term commitment to creating a new Expressway to the South West. We intend to start this process with three major improvements, as part of a total A303/ A30/A358 corridor package of commitments worth £2 billion”

and

“We will also set aside funding for smaller scale improvements to the A303/A30 section between Southfields and Honiton to improve safety and journey quality for road users recognising that large scale improvements would be challenging given the protected landscape and topography surrounding the route.

Taken together, this long-term programme will transform this route into an Expressway to the South West. Full implementation of these proposals will run beyond the first Road Period, and we intend that subsequent Road Investment Strategies will fund the remaining improvements.”



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We strongly endorse the principle of upgrading the whole of the A303/ A358 between the M3 and the M5 at Taunton to dual carriageway standard, together with improvements to the A303/A30 between Ilminster and Honiton. We welcome the commitment from Government, expressed in the Roads Investment Strategy, to achieve this over a number of RIS periods.

The Amesbury to Berwick Down section of the A303 is the element of the corridor which currently suffers from the most frequent and extensive periods of congestion and delay; it is also the most easterly scheme on the A303 corridor (i.e. closest to the M3 motorway). Therefore it is, in our view, fundamental that the A303 Amesbury to Berwick Down improvement should proceed. By doing so, it will “unlock” the upgrading of the whole corridor and provide the platform for further sections of dualling to be promoted during subsequent RIS periods.

Conformity with the National Policy Statement for National Networks

We believe that Appendix A of The Case for the Scheme (DCO document 7.1) indicates that development of the proposals has been in accordance with the requirements of the NPSNN.

Socio – Economic Effects

The Combined Modelling and Appraisal Report, DCO Document 7.5, summarises the approach which has been used to quantify the wider economic impact of the scheme. It should be noted that this assessment relates only to the specific proposal, and does not attempt to quantify the benefits which would result from upgrading the whole corridor to dual carriageway standard.

To that extent, the beneficial impact of this particular scheme in “unlocking” the whole corridor strategy is not reflected fully in the quantified business case as presented; the wider impact of £41.6bn forecast in the Parsons Brinkerhoff study noted above should also be acknowledged.

Standard and Capacity of the Proposals

Question Tr.1.11 asks whether an inference could be drawn that capacity limitations on the A303 at the scheme location do not act as a brake to economic activity in the South West except at busy times – generally at weekend and holidays.

We would argue that such an inference should not be drawn, because the existence of delays and congestion is not so predictable as implied by the question, and not confined to specific dates or times. Indeed, the risk of delay and congestion may result in a number of responses, such as choice

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of another route (e.g. M4 and M5), choice of another destination (i.e. not coming to the South West), or not travelling at all.

Question Tr.1.17 asks whether the capacity provided by the scheme is required, given the forecast traffic flows for 2041. Firstly, we would note that in our understanding the forecast traffic flows represent the situation with just the three RIS 1 improvements made to the A303/A30/A358 corridor, rather than the complete corridor upgrade to dual carriageway standard, as anticipated in the Road Investment Strategy published by DfT in December 2014 (Transport Assessment – DCO Document 7.4, para 5.3.5 Core Scenario). To that extent it is likely that the 2041 forecasts are an underestimate of the flows which would be anticipated at this location after the complete corridor upgrade.

Secondly, we would note that there is already congestion on the A303 at this location with just one lane in each direction, and there is not a meaningful step change in capacity which is lower than the provision of two lanes in each direction. We would therefore disagree strongly with any suggestion that provision of two lanes in each direction is “over-provision.”

Yours sincerely,



David Ralph
Chief Executive



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