

From: [REDACTED]
To: [A303 Stonehenge](#)
Subject: Reconsidering the A303 at Stonehenge.
Date: 04 April 2022 23:56:41

Dear Sir, Madam,

I have several points I wish to raise on this proposal, in addition to my original written objections to them some time ago.

My personal involvement in issue around the A303 goes back many years, notably:

Member of Somerset County Council (and its Environment/Transport Committee) from 1993-2005, representing Ilminster Division (which included the Ilminster bypass and the A303 up to the Devon border);
Chairman of the Blackdown Hills AONB Partnership, through which the A303 and A30 run, 1999-2005;
Chairman of SELCA, the Salisbury-Exeter Coalition of Local Authorities engaged with upgrading services on the Waterloo-Salisbury-Exeter railway line, including some doubling of the track, 1999-2002.

I am also an archaeologist who has worked on the important sites at Dinnington (2nd-4th Century Roman-British Villa), Ham Hill (Bronze Age/Iron Age/Roman Villa defended hillfort), and elsewhere in the South of England.

In addition, from 1981-1987 I was Parliamentary Liaison Officer for the Parliamentary Alternative Energy Group (now Parliamentary Renewable and Sustainable Energy group).

Briefly my points are as follows: (I have borrowed the structure of a fellow colleague's submission, but adding my own content to parts that I could not express better myself.)

1. Alternatives

i. As a local representative of CPRE I was involved in early consultation meetings at County Hall, Taunton. However at these meetings we were frequently told that alternatives other than road based were not under consideration. The emerging "solution" showed a potential 40% increase in traffic on the road - but when I queried implications for the Government's 'Road Traffic Reduction Bill' (2001?) I was told that we'd 'moved on' from that: how we do so without a formal rescinding of the bill is not clear?

ii. During these discussions there was no opportunity to discuss the travel options for people without access to a car, (through age (young or old) disability or financial limitations). Nor of the biased Cost-Benefit analysis that weights the value of a car-drivers' time, and omits that fact that you can work on a train, and will arrive in better shape.

ii. The alternative of a re-dualled railway track and faster service from London to Devon and Cornwall was ruled out of order. However a study of the live information on Google shows that the serious pressure on the A303 comes in holiday times. Post Beeching, the focus on road-based travel to the SW also results in serious knock-on effect of heavy congestion in the destination villages and towns. A quality railway service, and interconnecting local taxis/buses or even car hire would immediately reduce both congestion and pollution, as well as supporting the local economies..

2. Transport Policy.

i. There is no doubt that decisions that will enable us all to reverse the "highly damaging" (ref IPCC report) consequences of climate change must come from the top, in the form of joined-up policies that enable efficient, sociable and productive lifestyles.

Since transport is responsible for c30% of our damaging pollution, it is disappointing that we have not been enabled to make more changes to travel systems. As the Prime Minister stated at the Climate conference in Glasgow, we are down to the very last opportunity to reverse the trend and undo the damage. Electric vehicles will only tickle the surface, and can only be but a part of the whole change. In towns and cities they will simply give us a slightly cleaner gridlock.

ii. "Public Transport" implies a genuinely public service, with integration of all the elements necessary to make it efficient in meeting needs. Sadly it is a piecemeal mix of different systems, operating on short time scales, with little incentive to attract investment, and an image problem. And yet all the economic evidence is that a good public transport network is far more efficient and less polluting than reliance on private vehicles requiring ever more road space. Any investment in travel for the future must come from the starting point of efficiency, quality and availability to all travellers.

Again when this was raised as a key transport consideration in the consultation sessions around the emerging Stonehenge design, it was dismissed.

[A quality integrated public transport network will of course also benefit the economies of the destination areas of Cornwall and Devon in providing opportunities for work, such as in local transport connections and retail, thus meeting welcome "levelling up" policies.]

3. Policy on the land surrounding the World Heritage Site of Stonehenge

i. Stonehenge, like the emerging site of Brodgar in Orkney, has been a gathering point for many small neolithic communities coming from far and wide since c3000BC. Its location was chosen for its visibility and domination of the landscape around. The original citation of the Stonehenge and Avebury WHS in 1986, reinforced since then, states that it is not only the visible structures of the area that are important, but also the evidence *within the wider landscape* that is key to the status.

Crucially, ongoing discoveries of remains in the surrounding landscape show a much bigger, more connected, landscape than we ever dreamt of, even a few years ago - we are still working out the undoubted relationship of Blick Mead, Durrington Walls, the Greater Cursus etc. The World Heritage Organisation has stated that *the site's status will be at risk* if the Government proceeds with the present plans.

The vast majority of informed archeological opinion is utterly opposed to these plans: those supporting it being mainly commercial bodies, who hope to gain contracts for the initial work on site: a sure case of selling your birthright for a mess of pottage.

ii. In the information issued about how the road will be designed there is not only no reference to the anticipated increase in traffic, but also misleading illustration of how the road will be designed. For example, they show far less traffic than is anticipated; and none of the necessarily intrusive lighting and signage which must accompany such a structure. The A303 already is the source of considerable noise pollution in some of the more sparsely inhabited areas of Somerset and Wiltshire: this anticipated volume on a faster route will have the potential to change the nature and appreciation of the area for ever.

iii. The knock-on implications this 'improvement' (I utterly dispute this wholly subjective adjective) will have massive effects, as stated above, in creating added demand further down the A303; in particular a huge broadcast of noise across the AONB by any dualling at Chicklade, and an increase in traffic volume and noise on other parts of the road, including the Blackdown Hills AONB. This is deemed 'outwith the terms of the inquiry' - but in actuality it is very much connected.

I understood from the presentations that the calculations for impact on dwellings only

applied to houses with 50 metres of the road: my own house is just under a mile from the A303, with a hill in between, and no line of sight: as I write, I can open the window and hear the continuous sound of traffic. And that is with present volumes, travelling at at 60mph max, not the 70-plus that is normal on dual carriageways, with double the volume of vehicles.

The same considerations apply to the proposed cutting at each end of the tunnel. There is no question that despite this expenditure, the noise will not be highly intrusive in and around the World Heritage Site. Given the exponential increase in noise generated by each increment of speed, it is likely to be worse than at present.

iv. There is no reference in the economic analysis supporting the original decision to dual the A303 through the WHS, to the wider benefits Stonehenge brings to the local economy. There is however much local knowledge that many visitors to the UK include it in a circuit also taking in Salisbury and Bath: changing the impact and the experience at Stonehenge has the potential for an (as yet uncalculated) impact on the other sites, as well as on those who provide the attractions and facilities within them. In addition the site is a powerful talisman to many who pass by at present; in future they will not stop for a £20 'Visitor Experience' - they will simply lose that experience.

Conclusions:

We stand at a time of unprecedented change: our economy suffering from Brexit, Covid and massive inflation, particularly in the cost of fossil fuels. Some of these effects may be temporary, but many are part of longer structural change.

Already this is leading to major shifts in patterns of work, travel and freight movement - trends which can only continue as the old (often environmentally profligate) patterns of movement are progressively examined and discarded. While we continue to plan for enlarged road capacity between large towns and cities, they are conversely becoming places where the private car is discouraged, for a better urban environment, for both residents and business. The strategic planning has not even begun to catch up with reality at the destination.

In the past, Britain has seen many ill-timed projects: the Royal William Dockyard was built for sailing ships in the 1830s, just as the age of sail gave way to steam; canals were built in the 1840s - just as railways were crossing the country; country houses were built in 1910, redundant by 1920; and steam locomotives were built for the railways in 1960 - and broken up for scrap when all steam haulage ended, just 8 years later.

Building this proposed tunnel, at *this* stage of tumultuous structural change (and fiscal contraction) would look, even before it were finished, like the foregoing examples: a product of disjointed thinking and outdated priorities, wholly at odds with the Government's more recently stated environmental objectives, and our revised sensitivities.

Above all, it would cause irreversible damage to the most significant and iconic archaeological site in Britain. You can re-purpose dockyards, country houses and canals; but from the smallest to the largest relic, archaeology is all about the 'context' of a find: and when that crucial setting is gone, you have only a piece of stone or a coin. The historical meaning has gone for ever.

I submit that nothing in the fudged calculations and glib reassurances of these proposals can justify that destruction.

David Gordon

