

My concerns about the A57 Link Road proposal stem from both personal and professional experience!

I moved my family to Charlesworth, a village 2km to the west of Glossop, in 1981 from New Addington, on the borders of Kent, Surrey, and Greater London. The firm I was with had asked me to relocate from their London office to their Manchester office to lead a newly formed applied research group concerned with energy and the built environment. We moved from a location on the edge of London's Green Belt to a location on the edge of the Peak District. There was one distinct difference – the mode of the daily commute. My 30km journey into and out of Central London had been by bus and train and would take a little over an hour, whereas my 25km journey into and out of Central Manchester was in a company provided car and to an allocated parking spot adjacent to the office. The route was originally along the A57 and took approximately 45 minutes, then, with the completion of the M67, approximately 35 minutes. Over subsequent years, the journey took progressively longer as traffic increased.

In around 1990 I was drafting the firm's environmental policy and learned of a proposal for the relocation of its Preston office, then in the centre of Preston, to a new business park close to the M55. It was so close to the motorway that there was talk of the building needing to be sealed against the noise. This would have made it necessary for the building to be air-conditioned. As this would run counter to the principles being set out in the policy, I set up a brief study of the issues associated with office location. To put this into context, our work up to this point had been exclusively concerned with assisting designers, architects and engineers, to design energy efficient buildings. In fact, the Manchester office, with our assistance, had recently won the British Council of Offices' Office of the Year Award for a highly energy efficient new HQ Building for an insurance company that had outgrown its central Manchester building and had relocated to Manchester's southern suburbs. As would have happened with the proposed relocation of the firm's Preston office, this move from central Manchester fundamentally altered the commuting patterns of the insurance company's employees from being primarily by public transport, using a major city's radial public transport routes, to being largely car dependant. The study I initiated included the question – What would be the commuting distance between home and office be for the fuel use and associated emissions of a mid-range saloon car with a single occupant to equate to that of the energy used in the heating, ventilation and lighting of that employee's typical 12m<sup>2</sup> office workspace? The answer was approximately 11km.

I'm not claiming this was a detailed assessment of commuting options, and, as we move progressively towards battery-electric vehicles and more energy efficient workplaces that distance will change, but the general conclusion holds. i.e., that we should be as concerned about the relative location of home and workplace as we are for the energy efficiency and associated emissions of both buildings and vehicles. A poor locational relationship between home and workplace, i.e., one that predisposes employees to become car dependant can negate all best endeavours to achieve an environmentally conscious outcome. The relative trends in CO<sub>2</sub> emission from buildings and from private cars since 1990 clearly illustrates our failure to recognise and act upon this.

My own reaction to what had been learned was that it would be hypocritical not to respond. Commuting in my company car henceforth, until the end of its lease, was only the 3km distance between home and Broadbottom Railway Station. I also persuaded the firm to amend its company car scheme such that employees could opt to take the salary equivalent of a company car.

So, how does the above relate to my concerns about the proposed Link Road?

Glossop and its surrounding villages have tended to become 'dormitories' for a large proportion of its working population that every weekday makes its way to and from workplaces in Greater Manchester. And I was part of that population. The town has effectively become part of Manchester's urban sprawl. The proposed Link Road will, for a time, increase its appeal to prospective commuters as they see the prospect of competitively priced housing within an acceptable travel time to and from their place of work. That is, of course, until the inevitable increase in that travel time as the increased capacity is taken up.

We need, instead, to be moving towards the planning concept of '15-minute neighbourhoods' where residents can meet most, if not all, of their everyday needs, including employment, with much lower levels of car dependency. The proposed Link Road offers the diametric opposite of this.

I make this point not only with regard to the A57 Link Road proposal but, by extension, to other like proposals. A single scheme might be regarded as 'a drop in the ocean' in terms of its individual environmental impact. But, viewed collectively, their cumulative effect, particularly in this next critical decade in which we must seek every opportunity to contain emissions and to rapidly decarbonise our energy economy, the proposed Link Road, in both its construction and in its future impact, is counter-productive.

Emeritus Professor Michael Corcoran

Charlesworth, Derbyshire

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