

M3 Junction 9 Improvement Project

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SUMMARY

This opening statement introduces the Winchester Friends of the Earth position on the current scheme and FoE's history of campaigning against the previous Twyford Down scheme. We reject the notion that there can be any common ground between us and the applicant and express our astonishment that anyone who accepts the imperatives of action on global heating, can accept the Principle of the Scheme. Nor do we see that there is any coherent logical ground in government policy that justifies this scheme. Government policy on climate action draws its advice from the Climate Change Committee and that Committee explicitly states that traffic growth needs not just to be limited but to be reversed. This scheme is predicated on traffic growth. Indeed, there is no coherence within the DfT itself, for its Transport Decarbonisation Pathway assume traffic levels way below the National Road Traffic Projections that inform the supposed need for this scheme.

We believe that the applicant has failed in its duty to consider alternatives. The National Policy Statement requires that applications for developments in National Parks should include an assessment of: *"the cost of, and scope for, developing elsewhere, outside the designated area, or meeting the need for it in some other way"*. Since NH does not accept that there is any alternative siting of a road scheme to meet the supposed need, it must logically look for and assess *some other ways*.

Of the five scheme objectives, we argue that there is no evidence that building this scheme will achieve the first four objectives and plenty of evidence that it will not. The 5th objective of somehow facilitating active travel is rather ironic since National Highways is merely proposing to restore a safe connectivity that it has only recently taken away.

Preface:

I am afraid I came to the Open Floor Hearing, misunderstanding its purpose. I had assumed that it was, more or less, for the purpose of explaining our Preliminary Meeting submission of matters we hoped would be covered by the Issues hearings. When it became apparent that what was expected were opening statements, I had to rapidly ad lib a statement of case for objection. I would like to remedy the incoherence of that attempt with a written opening statement.

Introduction:

My name is Christopher Gillham. I have a PhD in Physics from Imperial College. I have been a resident of Winchester for 51 years, arriving here just after the first public inquiry into the M3 scheme, though not being aware of it until the 1973 decision to build the scheme. I was involved in the successful campaign to get the 1976 Side Roads Inquiry turned into a second inquiry into need and took part in that 2-year long inquiry, which ended in the scrapping of the Itchen Valley scheme west of St Catherine's Hill. I also opposed the Easton Lane Link Road, which was defeated at public inquiry – that corridor is now the public part of the Winnall Moor Nature Reserve. I was involved throughout the campaign against the Twyford Down scheme and am a part author of a book on the later Direct Action phase of that campaign.¹

¹ Twyford Rising – Land and Resistance; Helen Beynon with Chris Gillham, Sarsen Press; 2020

While Twyford Down was a major campaign of the national Friends of the Earth, the local Winchester FoE group was formed just after that campaign. I have been its transport spokesperson since then and its convenor for the last two years.

Winchester FoE has consistently responded to consultations on the scheme before you, with very clear objection in principle, seeing it as entirely misconceived; incoherent; highly damaging environmentally, economically and socially; in contradiction of treaty obligations; and dishonest in its justification and in its representation of future consequences. It belongs to a different age, when there may have been an explanation (but not an excuse) of ignorance. It is no longer possible to deny the realities that make this sort of project irrational.

Common Ground:

It is fashionable to talk about achieving 'balance' in policies and strategies, but there are distinct dangers in the notion. There may be fuzzy areas of compromise in our lives, but there isn't a balance to be had between good and evil or between facts and falsehood. And some of the apparent and generally accepted realities of the human and planetary predicament are so palpable and existential that they brook no compromised point of view. One such is anthropogenic global warming. Science is never infallible, and it is possible for scientists not to accept this reality, as instanced by Piers Corbyn, a younger but near contemporary of mine in the Physics Department at Imperial College. But science always tries to be consensual, and the size of the consensus on global warming is enormous. Even if that consensus is right, the planet may still have corrective, negative² feedback mechanisms (Gaia, if you like) that nobody has yet thought of, but it is not like Pascal's Wager where the taker has nothing to lose and can be pleasantly surprised – we cannot gamble on the consensus being wrong because, if it is right and we act as if it might be wrong, the consequences are catastrophic.

In any case, the UK government has signed up, in international treaty agreements, to believing the consensus and to taking the action that the consensus dictates is necessary to avoid the catastrophe. The problem we are facing here is that the UK government suffers from cognitive dissonance, it believes opposite things can be true at the same time. The Department for Transport, in particular, appears to be taking the view that the only action that needs to be taken is to develop technologies that will stop the emissions or even suck the greenhouse gases out of the atmosphere. Our view is that this is a New Climate Change Denial – that technology (some of it frankly fantastical) will solve the problem and not only is behaviour change unnecessary, but that we can carry on with even more of the same behaviours that have created the problem. At the very best it ignores Jevons' Paradox³.

This, of itself, is not necessarily strictly irrational, but it is certainly the gambling behaviour of an irrational addict. For one thing, it is not taking the advice of the consensus that it signs up to. We do not know what advice the DfT believes it has, to counter the definitive advice given it by the government-appointed Climate Change Committee, that traffic growth needs not just to be limited but to be reversed. They state that *"Overall, we expect that 6% of baseline car demand can be avoided or switched to other modes by 2030, rising to 17% by 2050."* [Climate Change Committee 'The Sixth Carbon Budget, Surface Transport' available from [REDACTED], p. 34]. DfT does not apparently accept this advice, because the draft NPSNN assumes that traffic growth is inevitable: *"However, all scenarios have projected a growth of traffic between 2025 and 2060 for England and Wales, with forecasts ranging from 12% to 54%."* [NNNPS 3.28].

But then again the DfT's strange Decarbonising Transport strategy says *"We will use our cars differently and less often"* [DfT 'Decarbonising Transport', July 2021, p.36] <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/transport->

² In fact only distinctly worrying positive feedback mechanisms are coming to the fore, like tundra methane release and reduced albedo.

³ [REDACTED]

[decarbonisation-plan](#). Is this incoherence the DfT speaking with a forked tongue or is it that there are different voices in the DfT that are not speaking to each other? What is the balance here; what is the Common Ground?

If our response to an invitation to seek common ground with NH, sounded flippant or prissy, I can only apologise. I do not mean to be impolite, but I have to stress that we regard this scheme as actually insane, for the reasons I give above and for another I talk about below. It is not about weighing merits against demerits and finding a balanced position – there is no balance to be had between the sanity of preventing human and planetary catastrophe and the insanity of chasing after that catastrophe. We are simply dumbfounded to find that there are otherwise rational parties to an SOCG at this Examination that can accept the “*Principle of the Development*”.

Outline of Objection:

I hope to make submissions directly to some of the specific issues (Rule 6 letter: Annex C) for which hearings are programmed, including especially Air Pollution, Alternatives, Climate Change, Policy and Need, and Traffic and Transport (which I assume will include the economic appraisal). I may also make submission on Biodiversity, Human Health, Landscape and Noise and I may make written submissions on the answers provided by NH to ExA questions.

In outlining our objection, I will confine comments here to some general remarks under just some of these Issue headings and to a summary critique of what the NH calls its scheme objectives.

Policy and Need: As discussed above, there is a clear disconnect between the government’s treaty obligation to achieve net zero carbon emission and a national policy statement that anticipates a continuing growth in traffic, if we are to assume that the Government accepts the advice given to it by the Climate Change Committee, that it set up to give independent advice on how to meet its climate obligations. There is nothing in the NPS to suggest that it has other climate advice or that it rejects the advice of the CCC. The incoherence, however, is at the heart of the DfT itself, in its Decarbonisation Strategy stating a need for car use to decline.

Since national policy is cited as the basis for providing the capacity to increase traffic and national policy is fundamentally contradictory, the basic policy premise for road building schemes of this sort is rationally untenable. Since policy is incoherent, we must assume that need for this scheme has to be argued on its own merit and we tackle that under the Five Strategic Objectives below. There remains the problem of what is essentially a ukase. We are told that this is a *Nationally Important Infrastructure Project* (which is why it gets a fast-track examination without benefit of an adversarial cross-examination role for those who object to it) with the implication that its need has already been established. But by whom and by what mandate and with what evidence? We examine the role of the Infrastructure Commission in this in the next section.

Alternatives: As you are well aware, Madam Inspector, the ExA recommendation not to grant a Consent Order for the Stonehenge scheme, was overruled by the Secretary of State. The subsequent High Court judgment was that the SoS was in error in so doing. Justice Holgate ruled that the applicant should have considered alternatives to the scheme. In the process of the SoS redetermining the scheme, I believe NH has only responded with posited road alternatives which it has then dismissed. There is nothing in the NPS to suggest that non-road alternative means of achieving the objectives of a scheme should be ruled out and since NH appears to rule out road alternatives to their preferred scheme, it is hard to see what reason there could be for not examining non-road alternatives.

In respect of the current scheme, the National Park designation applies and the NPS states at §5.151 that, in such cases⁴,

*Consideration of such applications should include an assessment of:
....the cost of, and scope for, developing elsewhere, outside the designated area, or **meeting the need for it in some other way** [my emphasis]*

⁴ This clause survives into the latest draft NPSNN.

What Marsden⁷ discovered from the data is that the Transport Decarbonisation Pathway assumes a low trip rate prediction, high fuel costs and low GDP, at odds with government policy. This is a trajectory that assumes traffic in 2035 will be 40 billion vehicle miles (14%) less than the National Road Traffic Projections used by the DfT to justify its road building. Marsden also shows that the technology uptake assumptions are wildly optimistic and that none of the decarbonisation scenarios will meet the 6th Carbon Budget on current government policy.

Apart from Marsden, the reliance on technology rather than behavioural or organisational/political prioritisation of alternatives (like investing in public transport), presupposes quite a lot about how much renewable energy will be available and that road transport should have priority access to what is available. Much road transport in fact is highly discretionary – we don't really need to do it, whereas most other activities that consume energy (heating houses, hospitals, schools etc; fuelling industrial processes etc.) are much less discretionary.

'When you're in a hole, the first thing to do is stop digging'. It is beyond extraordinary, that the DfT, staring the climate reality of transport in the face, should continue with a deliberate policy of increasing traffic and emitting large quantities of carbon in road construction. It is then beyond irresponsible to pretend that those emissions are small, with the preposterous policy of not summing up all the carbon emissions arising directly and indirectly from their individual schemes. The argument is that, for a given scheme, the carbon emission is small compared with the total emissions of the UK (why not, while they are about it, compare its insignificance with the total emissions across the planet?). The camel's back is broken by straws.

The DfT idea that the sum of small emissions (though no road scheme has small emissions) is small, is also completely at odds with its Wehtag appraisal methodology, where the sum of millions of insignificant (and arguably dubious) time savings is somehow deemed to be economically significant. There is hypocrisy here.

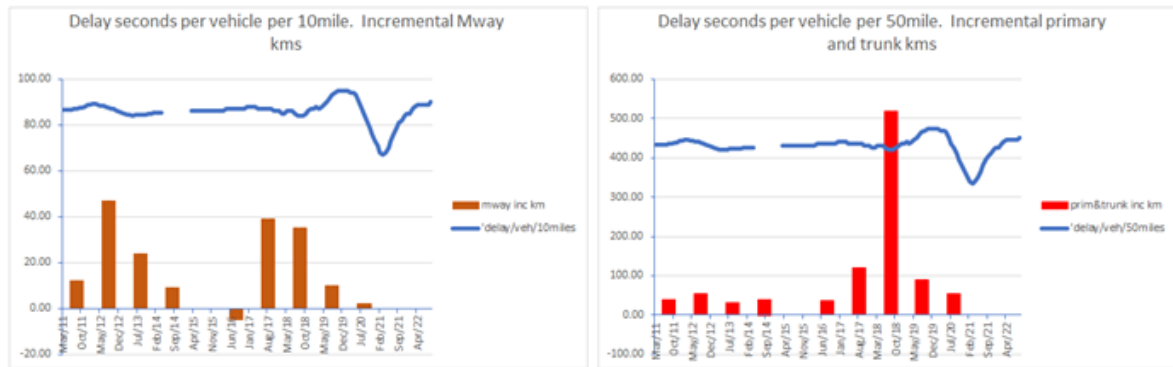
Scheme Objectives: The Scheme has five strategic objectives, supported by the National Highways Delivery Plan 2015-2020 (National Highways, 2015):

Congestion relief: *To reduce delays at M3 Junction 9 on all links M3, A33 and A34.* Road network congestion is always given as a reason for increasing capacity of the road system. But we know that increased capacity increases traffic, though the new draft NPSNN erroneously seeks to downplay the well-known SACTRA report, by essentially asserting that the evidence is cloudy. In fact, the report it cites does not, in any way, go counter to SACTRA. It does not suggest that induced traffic is not significant; rather it stresses the obvious, that induced traffic is likely to be greater where congestion (or predicted congestion) is high, precisely the conditions that are usually cited as a reason for building a road and precisely the conditions for ensuring that the economic model spews out a significant benefit.

That of itself does not mean that more new congestion arises than is relieved (obviously, in principle, one could keep increasing capacity until there is no population left to occupy it), but one might have expected that the DfT or National Highways would at some stage have researched whether an economically and politically plausible level of road building would bring about an overall reduction of congestion on the network. In fact, no such research has ever been carried out. Such evidence as exists rather demonstrates that the congestion problem never was, nor ever will be solved by capacity increase on the SRN.

Data on total network congestion is surprisingly hard to come by, considering the eye-watering sums of money that have been expended with the objective of reducing it. I can explain the following graphs in

a later submission, if necessary, but essentially plotting what limited data there is on network congestion against measures of road building shows no intimation that the latter has ever solved the former.



Neither the motorway nor the all-roads capacity increases can be seen to demonstrate any beneficial effect on overall network congestion. The motorway capacity increases around 2012 are followed by a slow general climb in congestion, and a slight decline around 2017, but the 2017/2018 expansion is followed by a very significant congestion rise, up to the start of COVID. The all-roads figure can be similarly interpreted. We don't yet know how the congestion curve for late 2022 into the current year will turn out. It is reasonable, however, to assume that COVID will have had some lasting effect on overall traffic, with changes of travel habit, particularly as a result of increased home working. What ought to be depressing is the fact that, despite the changes in work behaviour brought about by COVID and despite the new splurge of road building in 2017 and 2018, congestion is back to the level of 2018. An opportunity lost.

So the claim of network relief by road building has no basis in the observable data. Nor indeed does the draft NPSNN document see any prospect of actual relief. At §3.3 we have:

Increases in the number of seconds of time lost due to congestion on motorways also varies under the Core scenario; from 81.8% in one region to 215.5% in another.

Journey Time Reliability: *Smooth the flow of traffic by improving journey time reliability and reducing delays (time lost per vehicle per mile) at M3 Junction 9 and the exit and entry roads for the A33 and A34.* It is really hard to see how this objective is different from the first. If one did relieve congestion then the journey time would be more reliably predictable and vice versa, so this objective suffers from the same objection as the first.

There is an additional reason for suspecting that capacity increases do not bring about improved reliability or indeed journey times. It is how the Jevons Paradox manifests itself in this field⁸, as observed in the research of David Metz.⁹ The central plank of Webtag economic appraisal is a supposed value of time and roads are built to reduce that time. But the user behaviour changes to use the same time to travel further. In practice this seems not to mean gaining access to new opportunity, but that the distance to facilities, like hospitals, employment, etc. simply increases – more travel (more emission, more environmental and social damage) to the same economic purpose.

Safety: *Improve the safety for all road users and reduce the annual collision frequency and severity ratio on the M3 Junction 9.* One is tempted to recall that the M3 through Twyford Down was partly justified on exactly the same basis – the then Roads Minister, Christopher Chope, claimed that lives were being lost every day on the A33 at Winchester, when in fact there was about one death every five years. Truth is a regular casualty when the road builders get to work.

⁸ As it could well do in transport decarbonisation as currently conceived. Technology improvements of efficiency (e.g. with EVs) do not necessarily play out in the overall economy, because they often can induce profligate behaviour change.

⁹ The Myth of Travel Time Saving; May 2008; Transport Reviews: 28(3):321-336

The idea that road safety is improved by road building is a nice little invention of the Webtag appraisal process. The idea is that a high-capacity modern road has a lower accident rate than any road it replaces. In fact, it has never been demonstrated that the building of such roads improves the overall safety of the network. DfT has never researched the matter, so we just do not know whether there are effects (e.g. off-junction speed behaviour) that add accident risk to the surrounding network¹⁰. Cross-correlation of road building and accident increments suggests that negative effects might be occurring.¹¹

Road safety would, of course, be improved if the DfT invested in modal shift and pothole repair rather than big road scheme construction. And what would be the health benefit to the nation as a whole if the huge burden of air pollution brought about by DfT policy were removed?

Economic Growth: *Support economic growth and ensure the junction can accommodate additional traffic.* The sustainable economic growth that politicians universally proclaim to be their goal, is as near being oxymoronic as it is possible to be for any economic model that acknowledges a trophic reality. But we won't labour this point, fundamental though it is. It suffices to point out that neither the Department for Transport nor the Treasury have been able to point to any research that demonstrates that growth (as measured, say, by GDP) arises from building additional roads in a relatively mature network.

When pressed on this matter the DfT cites the Eddington Report, clearly not having read it properly. What it says is that GDP correlates with road building, but Eddington was at pains to point out that he did not know which way the correlation ran. This specific question is one of several questions repeatedly put to the DfT, through a previous Transport SoS and through two submissions to the Transport Select Committee. It has never been answered. The question was put in relation to some work in cross-correlation, which actually implies that incremental road building correlates negatively with changes in GDP in following years. The Department has never countered this observation.

The DfT has been known to add up all the net-present-values of its road schemes and claim that that is a demonstration of economic value of its overall road programme. This is simply a circular argument, because it starts with the assumption that road transport is an economically beneficial activity at any level of traffic and that, therefore, it must be beneficial to reduce its costs. The economic principle is that of the user's willingness to pay, an argument that only has force if it is the user that pays all the costs. If the user is subsidised by externalising costs, this is a manifestly false principle.

Eddington stated that users should pay for the externalities, but this has never been the case. The Blueprint 5¹² analysis, long before the extent of climate cost externality was appreciated, showed that motorists were subsidised to the extent of about three times the total tax and duty take on the activity. If even these externalities were recovered (e.g. through road pricing) and the mass of climate externality ignored, the elasticity of road use demand over price would signify a level of traffic on UK roads comparable to that pertaining in the 1950s.

The arguments here can be seen in detail at footnote 11. The DfT has never countered any element of these arguments.

¹⁰ For example, is the B3335 modelled in the Webtag appraisal as having the standard accident rate of a road of this type, without any modelling of the unpleasant and intimidating speed behaviour that locals witness from the vehicles that have debouched from the Hockley slip roads?

¹¹ *World Transport Policy and Practice*; 20.2/3; May 2014; p75 et seq

¹² *Blueprint 5: The True Costs of Road Transport*; Maddison D, Pearce D, Johansson O, Calthrop E, Litman T & Verhoef E; Earthscan, London 1996

Active Travel Benefit: *Improvements for walkers and cyclists including connecting the National Cycle Network Route 23 which is severed by the current junction layout.* This is a very cheeky proposition. The crossing of Junction 9 for cyclists was always unpleasant and will be unpleasant with this scheme. But it was a lot less unpleasant before NH/HCC widened the carriageway of the current roundabout a few years ago, so that a whole new lane of car and HGV traffic was installed right up against the narrow pavement that formed the crossing of Network Route 23 between the two cycleway tunnels. The public were not asked if they wanted this (a proximity to cycles that is not recommended in the Highway Code) and there was no opportunity to object. So, many thanks NH for giving us back a small part of what you took away from us.

C Gillham

6th June 2023