

SUBMISSION TO INSPECTOR August 2022

8. Promoting healthy and safe communities

15. Conserving and enhancing the natural environment

16. Conserving and enhancing the historic environment

The HGV Group

THE ISSUES WITH THE BLACK ROUTE

Rokeby Junction:

4. Implications for our local road network: The Black Route design will have a severe and permanent effect on our local road system, which will cause significant harm to lives in Teesdale far beyond the corridor of the A66 route. These negative and harmful effects will be on **traffic levels** on local roads, the **safety** of residents and visitors, our **historic** and **natural** environment and the **local economy**. In more detail:

- i. **Traffic levels:** HE's projections is for a significant increase in traffic turning to Barnard Castle, via Startforth along The Sills and across County Bridge and up The Bank. These roads simply cannot take this extra traffic. The B6277 is too narrow for 2-way traffic at many points, and has bends, blind corners and adverse cambers, there are several awkward blind junctions and flooding issues. The A67 across County Bridge and up The Bank has already become a bottleneck at various key times.
- ii. **Safety of pedestrians and other not motorised road users:** The Sills and County Bridge have narrow footpaths (less than 12 inches at one point). The kerbs are old and at some points on the Sills the road the road edge and kerb are not clearly demarkated. This is a key route for pedestrians, both for necessary and for leisure walks (e.g. children walking to school, tourists on a day visit). Cyclists and horse-riders also use the Sills, and along with the walkers they connect with the many smaller lanes and paths that join the road. The Sills provide important access to the river for canoeists and and for fishing. As with the issues concerning vehicles, the issue of safety of other users has not been looked at by HE.
- iii. **Historic environment:** This aspect has been totally neglected by Heritage England, and I do not understand why they seem to have no interest in the very many Grade2, Grade2* and Grade 1 listed buildings, as well as historic monuments along this route into Barnard Castle. I believe that there is a real danger that these structures will be harmed by the proposed Black Route.
- iv. **Natural environment:** The ancient walks along our river banks will be under threat. This is our environmental heritage, it benefits our health and well-being, and is also an important part of our tourism offer, so linked to our local economy. The sound-pollution modelling mentioned above shows a significant increase in noise levels down the A6277. I am not aware of any other environmental surveying of this area to measure the effects, for instance on wildlife with the increase in traffic.
- v. **Local economy:** The County Bridge is the main river crossing for local traffic, and delays here will detrimentally affect our local economy. Residents will be delayed in getting to work, to appointments and other ordinary and special happenings. As mentioned above, we already have a traffic issue on the A67. For instance I know a self-employed hairdresser that visits her clients in their homes, and she loses valuable work time in traffic, or in

detouring miles to an alternative bridge (Abbey Bridge or Eggleston Bridge). I know several shop keepers who despair as they see the current hold-ups in Town that prevent regular customers from visiting them. This chaos also affects our important tourism offer and with a further increase in traffic we are likely to be regarded as the Town with the traffic jam rather than the pretty Market Town that we are.

Overall **the harm of the Black Route junction at Rokeby** to the fabric of our lives in Teesdale would be immense and irreversible.

Highways England have designed the **Blue Route**, which addresses all the issues above. It has the common-sense approach of leaving the Rokeby junction roughly where it has been for generations and would leave the balance of traffic entering Barnard Castle at roughly the same. Highways England have told members of the Liaison Group that further mitigation for the issue of Rokeby Park is possible with the Blue Route, however this has not been pursued - we understand this is because of the single objection from Heritage England.

The only reason I have been given that the Blue Route should not be pursued is that it would affect a narrow band of woodland at Church Plantation, which is part of a designated parkland. This has resulted in Heritage England objecting to the Blue Route. Whilst I understand the importance of preserving our historic buildings and landscapes, Heritage England have taken a very narrow and partial view of the historic impact. They have taken no account of the many important historic buildings which would be affected with the increased traffic across County Bridge; there are many listed buildings and historic monuments, which Historic England should be protecting here. Historic England have taken no account of the wider significance of how the parkland was designed to sit in the Teesdale landscape, and the historic significance of the ancient road and path networks. Their myopic, partial and discriminatory view should be challenged – they have not engaged with the public at all about this and they should be required to justify their position in the context of all of the considerations of the route. It is iniquitous that they hide behind their statutory role with no accountability.