

[REDACTED]

From: Tim Farron [REDACTED] >
Sent: 17 August 2023 15:03
To: Enquiries, CEU - HMT
Subject: (Case Ref: TF152939)

Dear Jeremy

I write on behalf of Ms Emma Nicholson of [REDACTED], with regard to issues relating to the dualling of the A66.

Emma says: “ I am a resident at Kirkby Thore and within the new Westmorland Constituency. I live on a section of the A66 road which may be dualled. For the past 3 years, I have been raising complaints with my local MP and National Highways (NH) about its methodology under Project Speed and the implications for delivery and cost.

I have recently noticed the concerns raised by the Transport Select Committee and within various written questions raised by Mike Amesbury MP. The answers are typical of what I have experienced. If the Select Committee is not able to get a straightforward answer then alarm bells should be ringing.

Freedom of Information requests are consistently denied on grounds of Commercial Sensitivity. It is only in recent weeks that the issue of cost has gained any real traction and that is why your article has been sent to me. I know there has also been coverage in the Manchester Echo, Northern Post and various Construction Periodicals.

As someone who has attended some of the Planning Inspectorate Open meetings and sought to highlight the impact of this project, I am able to give you an insight on why the possibility of massive costs escalation on this project is an inevitability not a possibility. The fact that contractors (Costain) are already bolting like rats from a sinking ship should ring alarm bells.

To help illustrate the arrogance with which NH have proceeded, consider the approach adopted on one of the 9 sections identified for dualling. This is known as scheme 04 &05 Temple Sowerby to Appleby. It's unclear why it is described as this as the section at Temple Sowerby was dualled several year ago. It does appear a play on words to try and make this scheme which only covers 4/5 miles appear better value. This section can be quickly identified on any map of the A66 project. It is the only part of the scheme which departs significantly from the existing A66. This proposed route swings north and surrounds the village of Kirkby Thore. The table extracted from NH Combined Modelling and Appraisal report identifies that this one section accounts for just short of 1/3 of the entire project costs estimate. **NH do not suggest I am wrong when I say that to cover 4 miles and before they have put a spade in the ground they are proposing to spend 0.5 Billion on just one of the nine sections.**

Table 6-19:

Percentage Split of Most Likely Project Costs Amongst A66 Schemes A66 Scheme A66 Route Section Scheme Cost as % of Project Total (Ranked in Descending order of magnitude) This means for every pound spent only 90 pence will be recovered This is the adjusted cost appraisal. Without adjustments made for intangible benefits, the BCR falls as low as 0.4.

NH refused to give an answer on the BCR for each individual scheme. They certainly won't answer on scheme 04&05. They say a BCR does not exist. If that were true it would be criminal. It would leave them unable to assess contractors' estimates against their own. Instead, it is an attempt to evade any examination of this controversial decision.

Various explanations have been given to include improved access to a French owned gypsum mine (with a limited life span – already importing from Spain) and the new explanation, which is to avoid Roman archaeology. The more plausible explanation is that NH failed to consult properly under self-imposed

pressure by project speed and opted for a route they didn't understand having failed to consult or meet landowners.

Consequently, they did not appreciate the northern option on scheme 04 & 05 required them to cross a floodplain and required an 800m single span bridge. It is this error which contributes to this one section having a cost estimate of 0.5 billion.

This bridge is the single largest structure, but it is not yet designed. The concern expressed by the Planning Inspectorate as to why they were being asked to consider a Planning Application where there is no design to approve can be viewed in the publicly available recordings of the Open Hearing available on the Planning page devoted to the A66.

This is just one of the reasons why the lack of planning means further costs escalation is inevitable and why contractors are pulling out. They know they cannot deliver on budget and are not even willing to try.

Other factors which will cause escalation are :

- Acquisition prices for land have increased since the cost estimate.*
- NH have not identified what Land they require as they do not know due to design not being complete*
- Future blight claims are not included in the costs estimate*
- Costs are being relocated to other budgets . One example is a fund known as the Designated Fund which NH are using to fund environmental projects required to achieve NO NET LOSS are not included.*

As the Northern Policy Foundation have covered this issue I hope the above will raise sufficient concern about the risk of not properly investigating this issue before it goes further and the taxpayer funds a project which is already identified as poor value for money.

This issue needs to be brought to the attention of the Treasury and input should be sought not just from NH or the DFT.

We farm just outside Kirkby Thore and our farm will be severed by this project. No Farm Impact Assessment took place. In fact no visit took place until after route selection.

Friends of the Lake District and the National Park Organization have raised concerns but been excluded from the Consultation Process. I understand they also intend to raise this issue with you.

We would like help to raise the concerns regarding the costs implication of this project, to include Parliamentary Questions (currently being pursued by Mike Amesbury an MP from Cheshire) as to date even local papers will not print a story despite the costs concerns being covered in every national newspaper including a recent article in The Telegraph."

I should be grateful for your comments on the points Emma has raised.

Thank you for your time and assistance in this matter.

Yours sincerely

TIM FARRON

As well as being the Member of Parliament for the current seat of Westmorland and Lonsdale, Tim Farron is also the Liberal Democrat Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for the new Westmorland and Lonsdale seat which includes areas of the current Penrith and the Border seat. If Tim Farron is writing to you on behalf of someone who lives in Penrith and the Border, then it is in his role as a Liberal Democrat Prospective Parliamentary Candidate – not as a Member of Parliament.