

Stoke Gap Written Representation to The Northampton Gateway Rail Freight Interchange (TR050006)

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Introduction

Further to registering as “Interested Parties”, we have, as a group of individuals with similar views, chosen to submit a combined representation, as we don’t feel the on-line process allowed us enough scope to explain our concerns properly.

Who are we?

We are a group of homeowners, in a little known part of this area, known as Stoke Gap. We make up a total of 7 households and we all live either just off or actually on the A508 and, as such, will be directly affected by the proposed project. We want to share our views as local residents, parents, property owners and road users.

Our Concerns

Our key concerns are what this development means for Road Safety and Traffic Congestion, The Environment and the Value of our Properties.

Road Safety & Traffic Congestion on A508

Many of us have young children and animals and this road already causes us concern. It is very difficult, even with the 50mph speed limit, for vehicles and pedestrians to cross the A508 safely, particularly at the junction of Ashton Road and Northampton Road and Rookery Lane, which is just outside our properties. We feel that this development can only add to the danger and difficulties we are already facing.

The A508 has a serious traffic problem. With its blind bends and undulations it is not designed for large vehicles or for large amounts of traffic. When the M1, A5 or A43 have issues, the A508 becomes a parking lot and traffic is at a standstill, making it extremely difficult to get to work, or get our children to school. This is a regular occurrence and obviously affects our ability to leave or enter our properties. Although Roxhill suggest that their development will improve the traffic flow, the significant increase in traffic (16,500 per day), can only add to these problems.

We have investigated accident statistics and traffic volumes supplied by the Department of Transport for the part of the A508 outside our homes. The data is not easy to decipher, however, one of the most concerning discoveries is that the traffic volumes on A508 forecast for 2026 (in 2012) were exceeded in 2015, just three years after the forecast and 11 years sooner than predicted.

With both these figures and those provided by Roxhill, we are concerned that the data, pertaining to volumes and types of vehicles using the road over the last few years, did not match what we see out of our windows every day. Data suggested some declines, particularly in HGV volumes. Upon further investigation, it was found

that, in the last 10 years of the Department of Transport statistics, only 2 years are based on actual count of vehicles (2009 and 2013) the rest of the years are estimated figures, including the last 4 years to 2017.

The figures used by Roxhill are said to come from traffic counts taken in October last year, but they are not on this section of the A508. We have to question just how reliable and true the data is; who is checking the reliability? We do not want to rely on "guesstimates" for something as important as this.

We feel that the proposals by Roxhill, to ameliorate traffic impact, whilst they suggest that they will improve our situation, will simply make life even more difficult at an area that could once again be known as an "accident hot spot". Accidents are not likely to occur during the hours when traffic is jammed, but when the traffic is flowing freely. The Roade By-Pass does not help us, as it delivers this increase in traffic, and no doubt increased speed directly before our homes. We are still squarely on the route, and it only allows for more traffic to use our part of the road, at an increased flow.

Other measures proposed will only serve to force traffic onto unsuitable roads and through villages, or severely limit opportunities for traffic to cross or merge safely with A508 traffic. The proposed ghost island design for the A508 Junction with Ashton Road and Rookery Lane, will only serve to create an even more complex and dangerous situation than we already have.

A continual traffic flow and 4 lanes serves to complicate the decision making process for east-west traffic. The stagger arrangement will take longer to complete whilst the ghost islands have the effect of increasing average speeds north-south at the junction and offering fewer opportunities for east-west traffic to cross or merge.

Although there has been an improvement in accident numbers and severity over the last 10 years, this is still a potentially dangerous section of the A508 with serious accidents and even one fatality within the last 6 years. Increased traffic volume and users, unfamiliar with this area, only threaten to increase these numbers and the possibility of further fatalities.

A recent measure to help with the safety of the A508 on our stretch of road was sandblasting of the tarmac to provide more grip. This has resulted in a significant increase in road noise to our properties, and the increase of traffic will just exacerbate this situation, making it extremely unpleasant for our families, to enjoy the sanctity of our homes.

We feel that the proposals fail to adequately address the issue of traffic and road safety and a solution has not been presented that gives us confidence that traffic issues will be dealt with in a satisfactory way, not to mention the environmental and health implications.

The Environment

The environment is another major concern and something we feel strongly about. If the project goes ahead just how much of the hedgerows and trees growing immediately outside and around our properties will be removed, affected or damaged? Apart from being attractive, they also provide essential sound, safety and visual protection from the road.

The proposal for warehousing on the western side of the M1 at Junction 15 is also objectionable on environmental grounds based on the scale of the development and the increase in traffic that will be generated around the site and in the corridors leading to it.

Living where we do, we already live with unacceptable levels of both air and noise pollution along the A508. This proposal can only exacerbate those problems. The area has already seen significant loss of countryside due to new warehouses (a lot of which stand empty) and housing developments.

This development would mean further loss of valuable agricultural land, countryside and footpaths. It will have an adverse impact upon the local wild life habitat and will degrade the existing country walks. Roxhill state that they will ensure they do all they can to mitigate the impact of the proposal but surely the permanent loss of 520 acres of arable land cannot be considered as progress.

Just how strategic is this development? It appears to be an out-of-scale invasion into a piece of countryside that deserves protection from the more-of-the-same mentality of developers.

We suspect this development is not just about the Rail Freight Interchange, but more about building warehousing that Roxhill, or its parent company can then lease out and sell. This is more a money making exercise and at what cost to our lives?

There is already a strategic rail freight terminal at DIRFT, which is just 18 miles further north on the M1. We understand that they will not reach capacity until at least 2031. Why do we need another interchange? In nearby Corby, there is another massive distribution centre, The Midlands Logistics Park, which has already been approved and building due to start imminently.

Is the infrastructure in the South Northamptonshire area able to cope with the addition of a further 7500 new jobs? The housing, schooling and roads are not adequate to deal with this influx into the area. Therefore, new employees must travel from adjacent areas that will simply add to the existing and expected traffic congestion and pollution problems.

Property Prices

We fear that the expected increase in traffic volumes, degradation of our environment and general destruction of the countryside will devalue our homes. Some of us live in listed buildings and the road dust pollution, and vibrations from increased heavy vehicle traffic, will have a detrimental impact upon these properties that are supposed to be preserved.

In the Roxhill documentation, it refers to some of our driveways ("private access") being realigned and visibility improved. What exactly does that mean for us and for the surrounding plant life? Improving our visibility would be beneficial, but if the traffic flow is so increased, we will just have a better view of a road we cannot get on to!

Our properties represent our life's savings, they are an investment in our and our families' future and they are our homes. We specifically chose to live here in the countryside and have endeavoured to make the A508 safer, resulting in the speed limit being reduced to 50mph. However, we feel there is still more that can be done to improve road safety and this development does NOT appear to be one of those improvements.

What Do We Want?

We want to be heard, we want you to listen and take on board all we have said. How has this project to this stage with all the negatives against it? We want to know what Roxhill propose to do to address our concerns, because as it is, we feel that we are just "small fry" in the bigger, money making, picture and will be treated as "collateral damage". We want reassurance that this process is not just a nod to procedure.