

Messrs Andrew Alcorn, Derek Parody, Chris Jones
A303 Stonehenge Public Consultation
Highways England
Bristol Office
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Our unique reference number to Highways England Questionnaire:

ANON-BABJ-X63D-M

A303 Winterbourne Stoke bypass – response

Dear Messrs Alcorn, Parody and Jones

I write this letter on behalf of an informal action group working under the name of the Campaign for the Preservation of the Southern Till Valley (CPSTV). This group was formed by concerned residents living in or around the villages of Winterbourne Stoke, Berwick St James and Stapleford, plus other interested outsiders, all of whom have expressed major concerns about the proposals of Highways England to construct a bypass to the south of Winterbourne Stoke as part of the A303 upgrade proposals.

The group was formed shortly after a public meeting held in Berwick St James to discuss the proposals. Our local MP John Glen attended that meeting and was able to hear at first hand the strength of feelings expressed by all those present. That feeling was underpinned by rapid formation of a CPSTV committee including representatives from all three villages and subsequent raising of funds given on a voluntary basis by residents in the valley, in order to examine in more detail the material concerns and worries raised by the southern route option – whether for residents, businesses or local ecology and archaeology.

Even at this early stage, CPSTV has no objection in principle to the proposed tunnel. Indeed, it takes the view that if the A303 is to be dualled past the Stonehenge WHS, then a tunnel is probably the only possible option to answer the legitimate concerns of those who wish to preserve the archaeological heritage in the area. We are conscious of that history and the benefits that it can bring to the area. Nevertheless we are concerned that perhaps too much emphasis is given to the interests of those who have lived in the area, but are long dead, at the expense of those living in the area whether now or in the future.

Four technical reports were commissioned from independent specialists to review those aspects of the southern route causing the most concern. The four reports are attached to this letter or have been delivered separately to your offices. They are as follows:

1. Overall assessment of the overall consultation and proposed bypass routes by Mabbett
2. Preliminary Ecological Appraisal by EPR consultants
3. Transport consultancy report by Vector consultants
4. An acoustics report by JSP consultants

There are a number of key concerns identified by these four professional consultancy companies:

Fundamental flaws and bias in the consultation

There are significant differences between the two bypass options routes in terms of ecology, landscape, hydrogeology, noise and air quality. None of these points were presented to the public. Overall there appeared to be a grave and prejudicial bias in favour of choosing the southern route

Ecological and hydrological impacts

The detrimental impacts for the River Till SAC, including that from run off, are so severe as to raise considerable questions as to the validity of any presentation of any southern option. The likely impact from a northern route crossing what is a drier valley comprising largely arable land is significantly less.

Pollution – noise, air quality and light

Given the prevailing wind direction, the impact from a southerly bypass from noise, exhaust fumes and light pollution will be severe especially on Winterbourne Stoke. A northern route option would protect every single house in both Winterbourne Stoke and Berwick St James from that risk. Furthermore nearly every house in both villages would find itself positioned further from a major road than at present.

Landscape and land take

Concerns regarding the visual impact of the southern route is likely to be higher, owing to the need for more high level structures. No formal analysis of these impacts was presented to the consultation process. Furthermore land take appears to be significantly underestimated on both routes, but particularly for the southern route

Finally, we must express our concerns about the lack of time and information given to this consultation. As mentioned by Mabbet, everything has been produced at very short notice which has resulted in a deficiency of information on which people may make an informed decision. Thanks to the generosity of a large number of individuals across the valley, we have ourselves sought to address some of that information gap by commissioning our own independent research. That should not have been necessary.

Two other areas of concern should also be mentioned.

Damage to rural links and businesses

The area should be recognised not just for the archaeological interest to the east. Local businesses benefit from visitors wishing to experience its flora, fauna and woodland walks some of them rare and protected if not unique. Shops, pubs, farms, a campsite and a dairy all face threat of closure from loss of those attractions. Conversely it is likely that businesses in Winterbourne Stoke may experience a new lease of life should a northern route provide the benefit of uninterrupted access to the southern valley with no dividing road.

Loss of community

A dividing southern expressway will form an impassable and fast moving barrier across the valley. Links between the villages which have been in place for over 600 years will be irreversibly destroyed.

Nevertheless, we do not just wish to proffer negative views. We have already suggested that a northern route might actually benefit small business in Winterbourne Stoke. In addition however, we believe that there are three **positive solutions** which would further enhance the northern route:

Re-siting the western portal

Risk to the untouched archaeological sites south of Normanton Gorse would be reduced by siting the western portal closer to the existing A303 in the area to the northwest of the same gorse.

Moving the junction east

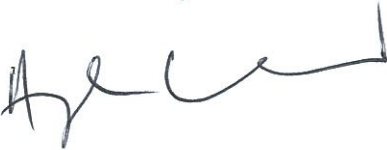
It would make far more sense to site the A303/A360 junction to the south west of the current Longbarrow junction outside the area of archaeological interest. The result would avoid need for an awkward dog leg, create a more direct route for WHS visitor traffic and remove local concerns on rat running. The junction could be sunk into existing contours of the land to answer the concerns of those worried about impact of headlights on Stonehenge. The area appears to have minimal archaeological significance relative to the other areas.

Reduction of height of viaduct

There have been no clear reasons given for the height of the viaduct crossings. Lowering the structures will create far less visual impact and be easier hidden by sensible tree planting, so minimising the profile of any solution.

We trust that Highways England will take note of our concerns, welcome our input to their consultation, find the enclosed reports useful – and proceed to recommend both a modified western tunnel portal and an improved northern Winterbourne Stoke bypass.

Yours sincerely



H.N.A Colthurst
Chairman

Cc John Glen Esq, MP