

**Wiltshire Council**

**Full Council**

**15 February 2022**

**Item 12 – Climate Strategy and Council’s response to the Climate Emergency**

**From Laurence Cable**

**To Cllr Nick Botterill Cabinet Member for Development Management, Strategic Planning and Climate Change and Cllr Dr Mark McClelland Cabinet Member for Transport, Waste, Street Scene and Flooding**

### **Statement**

In February 2019, Wiltshire Council commendably declared a climate emergency, acknowledging the existential threat that humanity faces if it does not massively reduce the amount of greenhouse gases being released into the atmosphere. Wiltshire Council’s own climate change strategy, published January 2022, further acknowledges that “transport produces the largest proportion of emissions in the county”. The majority of these will be from road transport.

And yet, Wiltshire Council is proposing more road-building, this time the further dualling of the A350 around Chippenham. Evidence from all around the world shows that when you build more roads, people make more car journeys – this is known as ‘induced demand’, and I would urge councillors to familiarise themselves with this concept, as it’s one that I myself wasn’t initially aware of, but it completely changed my view on road-building once I understood it. While a widened road will often initially ease congestion and improve journey times, this makes driving more attractive, meaning that more people decide to do it. This uptick in driving continues, until eventually the widened road itself becomes as congested as its single-carriageway predecessor was. Only now you have a congested dual-carriageway, rather than a congested single carriageway, meaning twice the number of cars pumping out poisonous fumes.

The scenario I’m describing here has happened up and down the country – it’s why you see towns first building a bypass, and later building a bypass of the bypass. The M6 Toll is the perfect example: a route to bypass the original M6 Birmingham northern bypass, once it became full. Building or widening roads is not a sustainable solution to congestion, neither is it sustainable from an environmental perspective.

Given the above, please can Wiltshire Council:

## Question (P22-02)

- a) Explain why it is pursuing major road-building projects such as the A350 widening, when these will ultimately induce more traffic that worsens the climate emergency Wiltshire Council has declared.

### Response

Department for Transport's Decarbonisation plan (July 2021) begins with a foreword from the Secretary of State confirming:

*Our ambitious roads programme reflects – and will continue to reflect – that in any imaginable circumstances the clear majority of longer journeys, passenger, and freight, will be made by road; and that rural, remote areas will always depend more heavily on roads.*

The Plan later reaffirms:

*Continued high investment in our roads is therefore, and will remain, as necessary as ever to ensure the functioning of the nation and to reduce the congestion which is a major source of carbon*

The Department for Transport's predictions indicate an increase in traffic on our roads in future years. This will especially be the case in west Wiltshire where an increasing population and economic growth will result in significant traffic growth within the A350 corridor. For example, there are already long traffic delays for vehicles leaving Bumpers Farm Industrial Estate at peak times and these will get worse if no action is taken.

The change to electric and alternative forms of power for vehicles in the future will reduce the carbon footprint of transport, but it is anticipated that the need to travel will still exist and it is important to have the infrastructure to support this at key locations on the network, especially in predominantly rural areas where other forms of transport are unlikely to be viable.

Consideration has been given to induced traffic, which can occur when there is a suppressed travel demand, especially because of severe congestion on a network. This is not usually a major factor in Wiltshire because in most places the level of congestion is not as severe as in many other areas. The traffic modelling carried out in connection with the business case for the scheme considered this, including taking into account other proposed improvements on the network.

It was concluded that on the A350 the main factor influencing traffic growth on the network is expected to be from population growth, particularly in connection with housing and employment expansion in the corridor.

- b) Commit to critically and publicly investigating alternatives to all major road-building projects currently being planned or designed, including the A350 widening, in light the climate emergency.

## **Response**

The business case for each major highway improvement scheme has to consider the alternatives, including the option of doing nothing. The current proposals for dualling the remaining sections of the Chippenham Bypass are the completion of a scheme which started in the 1990s. At that time sufficient land was acquired to accommodate future dualling when justified by traffic volumes, and the structures were built accordingly. The increase in traffic volumes has now meant that the completion of the improvements would be justified and there is a good economic case for the scheme, which has been accepted by the Department for Transport.

Other potential large major schemes in the A350 corridor such as the A350 Melksham Bypass would be the subject of planning applications, statutory orders, and a Public Inquiry where an independent inspector would consider the case for a proposal before making a recommendation to the Secretary of State whether or not to confirm the statutory orders to enable the construction of the scheme. The public would be expected to be able to put forward objections and alternatives for consideration at that Inquiry.