A303 Stonehenge Improvement

Scheme Review - Public Consultation
January 2006

Public Exhibition

You are invited to attend an exhibition

at the White Hart Hotel in Salisbury on
Thursday 9th February 2006 from 10 AM to 8 PM
Friday 10th February 2006 from 10 AM to 8 PM
Saturday 11th February 2006 from 10 AM to 4 PM

or in London at the The Society of Antiquaries, Burlington House, Piccadilly on
Friday 17th February 2006 from 10 AM to 8 PM
Saturday 18th February 2006 from 10 AM to 4 PM

Representatives of the Highways Agency and their consultants will be on hand to answer your questions.
Where are we now?

Following a Public Inquiry in 2004 into our proposals for improving the A303 past Stonehenge, the Inspector recommended a new dual carriageway should be built, along with a 2.1km long bored tunnel to remove the effects of the road and traffic from Britain’s most famous prehistoric site. However, the cost of the new road has risen significantly since then and so Government Ministers have asked us to undertake a review and identify lower cost options.

Over the coming weeks we will be holding exhibitions to illustrate our identified options and are looking for your feedback, using the enclosed questionnaire, on the best way forward. More details are explained in this leaflet, including why the various options have been chosen.

How did we get here?

Studies and consultations on options to improve the A303 have been underway since 1991, with over 50 routes considered along the way. A Public Consultation in 1993 and further work on options in 1994/5 preceded a 1995 Planning Conference, which considered tunnel options and routes to the north and south.

A 4km tunnel from King Barrow Ridge to Airman’s Corner was chosen by the Planning Conference, but was considered unaffordable and dropped in 1996. English Heritage and the National Trust subsequently proposed a 2km cut & cover tunnel, seen by the Department for Transport (DfT) and Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) as the first example of an “exceptional environmental scheme” for which joint funding was agreed. Further work in recent years resulted in the tunnel being lengthened to 2.1km and the construction method being changed to a bored tunnel, this being the scheme heard at Public Inquiry.

The need for change

Stonehenge is the most famous prehistoric site in Britain; an instantly recognisable icon. It is a major tourist destination, and, together with other surrounding monuments, is designated a World Heritage Site.

Less than 200 metres away is the busy A303 linking London with the South West, a major route for both business and holiday traffic.

Much of the road has already been improved to dual carriageway, although the section past Stonehenge is the first single carriageway on the route after London. The case for change between Amesbury and Berwick Down is compelling, with a number of accident blackspots, heavy traffic flows, especially during summer weekends (and particularly affecting Winterbourne Stoke), and the A344 virtually touching the monument.

The presentation of Stonehenge has been described as a national disgrace.

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More than just a road

It’s not just a new road that’s needed to bring about change at Stonehenge. The wider Stonehenge Project comprises English Heritage’s proposals for a new Visitor Centre at Amesbury and a National Trust plan to return farmland around the monument to pasture.

The aims of the Project are:

To restore the dignity and isolation of Britain’s greatest prehistoric monument, and enable people to enjoy and appreciate it fully by:

- Removing the visual impact and noise of roads and traffic from the vicinity of the Stones
- Reuniting Stonehenge and its surrounding monuments in their natural chalk downland setting
- Creating the conditions for improved biodiversity with flowers, butterflies, birds and insects flourishing
- Providing improved access, enabling people to roam freely and at no cost throughout the World Heritage Site
- Building a new world-class visitor centre outside the World Heritage Site at Countess East
Selection of options for further review

Five options are now proposed, broadly meeting the objectives of the scheme which are to:

- Remove roads and traffic from the heart of the World Heritage Site around Stonehenge
- Provide a bypass for Winterbourne Stoke
- Reduce accidents and congestion

Each of the options includes a northern bypass for Winterbourne Stoke, a new flyover to carry through traffic over Countess Roundabout which would allow the existing Visitor Centre to be relocated, and the closure of the A344/A303 junction. The options are otherwise outlined below.

Published Scheme heard at Public Inquiry

The Published Scheme has a grade-separated junction with the A360 at Longbarrow Crossroads and a 2.1km bored tunnel running south of the existing A303, with the portals beyond the horizon from Stonehenge. The methods of boring the 2.1km tunnel will be reviewed in the light of the discovered ground conditions to determine whether cost savings can be achieved.

Northern Route

The best northern option has a grade-separated junction with the A360 to the west of Airman’s Corner. It runs south of Larkhill and has a 270m cut & cover tunnel to reduce the adverse effects close to houses. It rejoins the A303 near Countess Roundabout.

Southern Route

The best southern option has a grade-separated junction with the A360 south of Longbarrow Crossroads. It follows a series of dry valleys to the south of Stonehenge, before rejoining the A303 east of King Barrow Ridge.

Cut & Cover Tunnel

This option follows broadly the same line as the Published Scheme, but would be constructed in open excavation closer to the surface than a bored tunnel. It would therefore be above ground in Stonehenge Bottom, covered by an embankment up to 9m high.

Partial Solution

This option would retain the existing single carriageway A303 between Longbarrow Crossroads and King Barrow Ridge, but still close the A344 at its junction with the A303. It offers various options for the end of the Winterbourne Stoke Bypass at Longbarrow Crossroads, shown overleaf with a brief description of each.

Options reviewed

The plan to the right shows the main constraints which affect the choice of routes.

To the north, Salisbury Plain is a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Area (SPA), both environmental designations of international importance. It is the largest area of unimproved chalk grassland in Europe, home to many rare plants and birds. Additionally, the communities of Larkhill, Durrington and Bulford, historic Scheduled Monuments such as Woodhenge and Durrington Walls, the Conservation Area in Bulford and the River Avon SAC all limit northern options.

To the south, the Woodford Valley offers few possible crossing places. The valley contains the River Avon (a SAC and Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) along its entire length), village Conservation Areas, a marshland SSSI, Listed Buildings and Registered Parks and Gardens. Amesbury and Boscombe Down are also major constraints.

Routes that take a wide detour from the existing A303 do not provide good value for money as they involve longer journey times and cause traffic to divert onto unsuitable local roads. Non-tunnel options on the line of the existing road or routes visible from Stonehenge have been rejected because they are completely contrary to the aims of the wider Stonehenge Project. Longer tunnels were fully considered at the Public Inquiry and are deemed unaffordable. Eleven objectors’ alternatives were examined; none were recommended by the Inspector.

Increased costs

There are a number of reasons why the estimated cost of the scheme heard at Public Inquiry has increased:

- Ground investigation has revealed extensive quantities of phosphatic (soft, weak) chalk, unique in this country. This affects the extent of support needed to guard against collapse of the tunnel and would slow construction by up to a year. Insurance costs also rise correspondingly
- Mechanical and electrical equipment costs have risen, and include an allowance for a fire suppression system if needed
- Additional costs for meeting greatly reduced limits (published by the Health & Safety Executive) on the exposure of workers to air pollutants in confined spaces
- Groundwater levels have been found to fluctuate more widely than previously anticipated, and have risen to the surface in Stonehenge Bottom at times of heavy rainfall. The water level would need to be lowered during construction, and the tunnel strengthened to withstand the water pressure
- Higher estimates from utility companies
### Cultural Heritage

**Existing A303**
- Major beneficial effects on setting of Stonehenge and immediately associated monuments within the World Heritage Site.
- Negative effects on the setting of two barrow groups in wider parts of the World Heritage Site.

**New effects within the World Heritage Site**
- Direct impact upon a Scheduled round barrow.
- Negative effects on the setting of at least six distinct barrow groups and outlying monuments.
- Beneficial effects for Stonehenge and its immediately associated monuments, but divides Stonehenge from Woodhenge, Robin Hood's Ball, and other monuments.

**Similar to Published Scheme, except for loss of any as yet undiscovered archaeological remains along line of tunnel. (Previous surveys have not detected remains of any importance along this route.) Would result in a permanent alteration to the landform at Stonehenge Bottom.**

**Minor beneficial effects for Stonehenge from closure of A344/A303 junction, however continued adverse effects from the proximity of the A303.**

### Biodiversity

**Overall net benefits anticipated through reconnection of previously fragmented habitats in the World Heritage Site.**
- Negative impacts on Stonehenge, Tunnel approach cuttings intrusive in high quality landscape at Longbarrow Crossroads and King Barrow Ridge.
- Adverse visual effects on about 100 properties at Larkhill. Traffic visible from Stonehenge.
- Allows improvement at Longbarrow Crossroads and King Barrow Ridge. Affects proposed access arrangements from new Visitor Centre.
- Removes road and virtually all traffic from sight at Stonehenge.

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### Landscape and Visual Effects

**No of residential properties within 0-100m**
- 100 - 200m: 5
- 200 - 300m: 6
- 300 - 400m: 29
- Large reduction in traffic noise at Stonehenge.

**No of residential properties within 0-100m**
- 100 - 200m: 70
- 200 - 300m: 256
- 300 - 400m: 176
- Large reduction in traffic noise at Stonehenge.

**Similar to Published Scheme.**
- No of residential properties within 0-100m: 1
- 100 - 200m: 9
- 200 - 300m: 30
- Large reduction in traffic noise at Stonehenge.

### Traffic

**Traffic noise levels decrease slightly at Stonehenge as a result of closure of the A344/A303 junction.**
- Does not remove the A303 from sight at Stonehenge. Maintains existing severance between Stonehenge and Normanton Down Group of barrows.

### Summary

**High cost scheme which allows visitors open access through most of the World Heritage Site. Removes traffic from sight at Stonehenge.**
- Mostly a surface route in World Heritage Site, cheaper than Published Scheme. Would divide Stonehenge from other major monuments and have significant adverse effects at Larkhill. Traffic visible from Stonehenge.
- Surface route in World Heritage Site, cheaper than Published Scheme, but intrusive in tranquil landscape. Traffic either entirely or almost entirely removed from sight at Stonehenge.
- Less expensive than Published Scheme but a visually intrusive embankment covering the tunnel in Stonehenge Bottom. Removes traffic from sight at Stonehenge.

**This Option deals with some of the heritage issues by accommodating closure of the A344/A303 junction. Traffic problems partially addressed, but leaves congestion in the World Heritage Site, and traffic remains visible from Stonehenge.**

### Junction options for Partial Solution

#### Option 1

The dual carriageway ends at a new roundabout where the bypass joins the existing A303. Longbarrow Crossroads remains as now. This is the minimum cost option requiring no construction within the World Heritage Site. Congestion would get worse without improvement to Longbarrow Crossroads.

#### Option 2

This is a development of Option 1. East of the new roundabout the A303 is diverted to the south of Longbarrow Crossroads, passing under the A303 without connection. The option would reduce the impact on barrows north of Longbarrow Crossroads, but would cross a linear earthwork. It would reduce the traffic problems at Longbarrow Crossroads, but could lead to rat-running and congestion in nearby villages.

#### Option 3

This builds on Option 2 by providing a new roundabout on the A303 and a new link road joining the A303 to the A303. It allows all movements between the A303 and the A303, removing the possibility of adding significant traffic to the local road network.

#### Option 4

This continues the Winterbourne Stoke Bypass along the same line to the south of Longbarrow Crossroads as Options 2 and 3, at first as dual carriageway but reducing to single-carriageway to lie in with the existing A303 east of Longbarrow Crossroads. The A303 is carried over the A303, with a junction provided between the two. This Option would do most to reduce traffic congestion, but would impact directly on one Scheduled Monument.
What happens next

Further work will be undertaken on the options described, and the results, together with views expressed during the consultation will be reported to Ministers by early summer 2006.

Ministers will then decide the way forward on the scheme.

Your views

If you wish to express your views on any of the options proposed or on the scheme itself you can leave your questionnaire at the exhibition, or send it, or a letter, to the address alongside, before the 24th April 2006.

Further information

A more detailed report on the issues covered in this brochure and at the exhibition is available on the Highways Agency website

www.highways.gov.uk/stonehenge

Copies of this leaflet and the enclosed questionnaire will be available at the exhibition.

If you require further information please write to

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2 The Square, Temple Quay
BRISTOL, BS1 6HA

or email
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Information provided in response to this consultation, including personal information, may be published or disclosed in accordance with the access to information regimes (these are primarily the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA), the Data Protection Act 1998 (DPA) and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004).

If you want the information that you provide to be treated as confidential, please be aware that, under the FOIA, there is a statutory Code of Practice with which public authorities must comply and which deals, amongst other things, with obligations of confidence. In view of this it would be helpful if you could explain to us why you regard the information you have provided as confidential. If we receive a request for disclosure of the information we will take full account of your explanation, but we cannot give an assurance that confidentiality can be maintained in all circumstances. An automatic confidentiality disclaimer generated by your IT system will not, of itself, be regarded as binding on the Agency.

The Agency will process your personal data in accordance with the DPA and in the majority of circumstances this will mean that your personal data will not be disclosed to third parties.