

Mr Chris Shuker
Project Leader
A120 consultation
Highways Agency
Heron House
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Bedford.
MK40 3LL

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Thursday June 16th 2005

Dear Mr Shuker

A120 Braintree to Marks Tey Consultation

Representation from Braintree District Councillors James Abbott and Philip Hughes, representing Bradwell, Rivenhall and Silver End ward

We object in the strongest terms to the Highways Agency proposed route.

Introduction

As local District and Parish Councillors for an area directly affected by the route proposals, we have been involved in discussions and meetings with local residents, parish councils and local groups for many years in advance of the publication of the Highways Agency proposed route in February 2005.

Subsequent to the publication of the single proposed route, we have attended numerous parish, district and public meetings on this issue as well as holding our own public meeting in Silver End. We have also attended the Highways Agency public exhibitions, Braintree District Council seminar and have visited many local landowners by invitation to view first hand the land over which the road could go. We have received (and sent in reply) a large number of letters and e-mails from concerned local residents, both within the District ward we represent and from the wider area.

Despite giving the impression that the consultation would be a genuine choice of routes, the Highways Agency has proposed **only one route**. This is not a genuine consultation and in addition, many people have commented to us that the questionnaire is leading and in particular question 4 appears to give support for the Highways Agency route however it is answered. We are also concerned about the large areas within villages such as Silver End where residents say they have not received the consultation papers, despite assurances from the Agency that they would.

We accept that the status quo is not an option. Communities on the A120 suffer severe environmental stress and danger from the increasing traffic using the road which is a consequence of policies aimed at rapid development of major private interests such as Stansted Airport and the East Coast Ports, with little regard for local people. The solution has to be one which achieves the maximum community and safety benefits for the minimum environmental damage – which the Highways Agency scheme demonstrably fails to do. The Agency has taken on board the strategic interests of the Government and the European Union (Trans European Highway), but has ignored the concerns of the very communities that would be most harmed and affected by the route.

The Proposed Route

The single proposal is an entirely new major road through open countryside, maximising the damage to the rural environment of this area and causing the loss of a substantial area of quality farmland. In a number of places it is elevated, causing enormous visual intrusion and noise pollution to local people. The Agency consultation paper is dismissive of the countryside in the

area and arrogantly claims that it is of “low ecological value” despite confirmation from their own ecologist present at the Kelvedon exhibition meeting that “a full ecological study has not been undertaken”. It is well known locally that the open area in and around Rivenhall Airfield and the Blackwater valley is of very high ecological value, containing many species that are becoming less common due to development and chemical agriculture.

The single proposed route will create two noise, pollution and development corridors where currently there is one – the existing A120. Far more people will be subjected to noise as significant numbers of residents in the large villages of Cressing, Tye Green and Silver End (which is a Conservation Status Village covered by an Article 4 Direction), as well as the smaller communities of Coggeshall Hamlet and north Feering, will be close enough to the proposed road to experience noise problems. And yet traffic levels on the “old A120” will remain substantial and will rise back towards current levels in the decades after completion of the new road (confirmed by Hyder and Highways Agency representatives under questioning at several meetings). Spending a quarter of a billion pounds of public money to not permanently solve the problems of the existing road seems very poor value for money.

The proposed road is a strategic highway that almost completely ignores the local transport priorities and difficulties that must be addressed in any new scheme. On the admission of the Agency and Hyder, the proposed road is designed to link to Stansted and the East Coast ports and the economic benefits for the scheme are measured in terms of how large the volume of traffic will use the road and how fast they will use it. This is completely at variance with the Government’s stated aims of developing sustainable communities, developing sustainable transport and reducing CO2 emissions. It is also perverse that the Agency decision to propose this single route and not other options is levered by that one “economic” consideration – the actual cost of other options in monetary terms being similar, the agricultural land take of some other options being LESS and the benefits from reduced traffic to communities along the existing road being GREATER under some other options !

With the growing international concern about the impact of climate change, largely caused by rapidly increasing CO2 concentrations in the atmosphere, it is incredible that the Highways Agency have not even mentioned this factor in their consultation papers.

According to the Highways Agency figures, the new road will accelerate traffic growth along the route corridor (new road + old road). This will also add to local traffic problems when traffic leaves the new road, as it has done to a significant extent following the opening of the Braintree – Stansted section of the A120.

The proposed road has only two junctions – at Tye Green and with the A12. Between these points, the road will be a race track through what is currently unspoilt open countryside. There will be minimal benefit to local communities but maximum harm. At the junctions, bright lighting, even if of modern shielded design, will completely alter the night time environment of these currently rural areas.

The proposed route effectively bypasses the Galleys Corner junction on the existing A120 when it is obvious that the opportunity should be taken to deal with the acute congestion that occurs there by separating through and local traffic. In addition, the act of bypassing Galleys Corner then results in the proposed new junction in open countryside immediately to the north of Tye Green, completely altering the setting and environment of the village. The new road will lock in substantial areas of land between the new and old A120 and the access road north towards Galleys Corner. This would inevitably attract speculative development, adding to local traffic generation.

The proposed route passes through the open landscape of Rivenhall Airfield and would give direct access to the Major Waste Site facility proposed on the Airfield. This site which has had various proposed guises as a landfill proposal, then an incinerator, has been consistently opposed by local parish councils, communities and groups since the mid 1990s as it breaches the proximity principle and is in a rural area. The Highways Agency has claimed that their route and the site being so

close is co-incidence and that they would not be happy with access on to the new road. Yet it is known that the Agency and Essex County Council (who prepared the Essex Waste Plan identifying the Airfield site) have been in discussions about the A120 for some time before publication of the proposed route. It is entirely unsurprising that in their submission to this consultation, Essex County Council have stated that it would be “eminently sensible” to provide a junction on the new A120 to access the Major Waste Site.

The proposed route crosses the valley of the River Blackwater through the designated Special Landscape Area (contrary to the Agency claim that the route affects no such areas) where a huge bridge would scar the currently peaceful river valley. The route is then proposed to pass south of Coggeshall Hamlet, which contains many ancient buildings and then close to north Feering before crossing the London-Norwich main railway line and joining the A12 at a major interchange. At Feering and at several other locations, the route would carve through what are currently quiet rural lanes, destroying their character forever.

The proposal also includes a realignment and widening of the A12. We oppose this element which would add huge cost and take in even more countryside into the scheme. The priority should be to tackle the A120 problems.

We reject the proposal (also supported by Essex County Council), that the new road should be designed at 4 lane standard but with 6 lanes in mind at a future date. This would effectively be a motorway through this rural area.

Community Consultation

The proposed road has caused deep upset and controversy in and between many communities that are directly and indirectly affected. Properties have been blighted. People have been selling their houses. The Agency made no attempt as far as we are aware to test local views before publishing their single route proposal.

There is huge local opposition to the proposal. A number of parish councils are opposed outright and Braintree District Council has submitted detailed concerns. A very large number of individual responses have been submitted in opposition to the proposal.

There is no single alternative that has clear public support but there is a widespread view that the Agency should reconsider the whole proposal, talk to local communities and respond with more sensible options. After lengthy discussions with many parish councils, local groups and individuals, we wish to suggest that the Agency look in more detail at a variation of the Coggeshall bypass route which has already been largely modelled.

We also wish to record our objection in the strongest terms to the suggestion put forward by Essex County Council that an even more southerly route should be explored. This route has already been rejected by the Highways Agency, and rightly so, as having the least benefit in taking traffic off the “old” road, the worst outcome in terms of adding to pressure on the A12 (and leading to widening the A12 for a much longer distance) as well as failing to provide an east-west road. It has been claimed that an even more southerly route would have less environmental impact and avoid the Blackwater valley. This is nonsense – such a route would devastate the countryside along the Rivenhall Brook and would join the A12 on top of the River Blackwater at Kelvedon.

We are not supportive of the far northern options, either the published Agency proposal or the suggested “Copford” route. These would have a devastating impact on the countryside, as do all the other off-line routes.

Using the Existing Route Corridor

The road should be designed to cause the least damage to the environment whilst benefiting local communities and dealing with the safer and more efficient passage of east-west traffic. The price

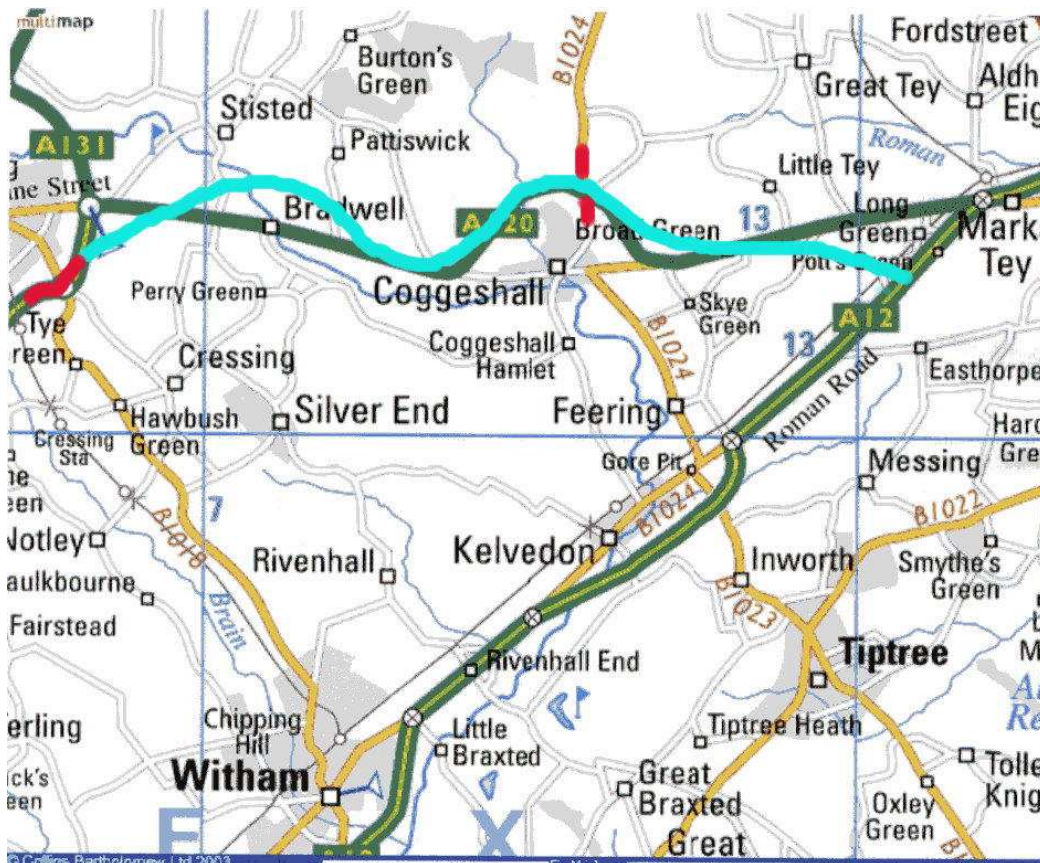
tag of a quarter of a billion pounds of public money and the once in a generation occurrence of such a scheme, taken together with the fact that we still do live in a democracy, means that the Agency cannot treat this road as only a strategic highway.

The alternative we support (attached) has already been modelled by the Highways Agency to a significant extent, but it passes further north of Bradwell than the Agency "Coggeshall bypass route". It does not show slip roads and junctions here as it is indicative only, but we would strongly support access being arranged to avoid rat running through local villages and access to the gravel working on the airfield from east of Bradwell only, largely using the existing haul road, thus removing all gravel traffic from the village:

Alternative on-line improvement of A120

Indicative route shown in blue, existing A12 and A120 in dark green;

Red sections indicate dropped cuttings for A120 beneath Galleys Corner and for Earls Colne Road beneath A120.



Advantages of alternative over Highways Agency off-line proposals:

- 1. Provides genuine relief for Bradwell and Marks Tey removing ALL through traffic from the villages (Highways Agency scheme leaves substantial through traffic flowing through Bradwell which will rise back up towards current levels). Villages can then be fully traffic calmed with pedestrian crossings and shielded modern streetlights more suited to rural areas.**

2. Keeps road development largely on existing corridor, minimising noise spread and secondary development potential (such as major waste site on Rivenhall Airfield and land locked north of Tye Green). Avoids impacting on more communities (Highways Agency scheme has significant impact on Cressing, Tye Green, Silver End and North Feering).
3. Does not include major off-line section of A12, thus reducing loss of countryside, as well as reducing cost and scale of overall scheme.
4. "Bypass" sections can be completed first, providing early relief for villages and keeping existing road traffic moving for longer.
5. Minimises land-locking countryside that would be then built on (Highways Agency scheme locks land to the south of Braintree between roads).
6. Scheme can incorporate substantial landscaping to screen road and buffer noise – a necessity north of Bradwell.
7. Proposal is a logical improvement for east-west traffic along A120 corridor (Highways Agency scheme and other southern routes create 2 traffic and development corridors instead of 1).
8. Improved route can be used to develop integrated public transport system with modern commuter coach/bus links.
9. Proposal addresses local and county priorities but still provides a much improved East-West road. (Highways Agency scheme is ONLY a strategic road to carry ever higher volumes of traffic linked to growth of east coast ports, Stansted airport and other private developments).
10. Limits improvement to what is needed. Highways Agency scheme involves major 6 lane off-line section of A12 and the intention to widen new A120 to 6 lanes at a future date.
11. Avoids disruption to Braintree-Witham railway line and passes beneath the main London-Norwich line in a tunnel.

Draw backs:

1. Northern bypass of Bradwell cuts across Blackwater valley (Highways Agency scheme also cuts Blackwater Valley and Special Landscape Area). A tunnel north of Bradwell would avoid this.
2. On-line section development would be disruptive to traffic flows, but this can be mitigated by re-routing and traffic management. The A414 has been closed for major works in 2005, a road which carries over 20,000 vehicles a day.

In conclusion, we strongly object to the Highways Agency proposed route.

We request that the Agency reconsider the project and include essential local transport priorities and the need to avoid unnecessary environmental damage.

A route that uses the existing corridor as far as possible, whilst relieving communities of through traffic would better meet local needs whilst providing a safer east-west route.

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