

2 October 2017

Re: M4 Junction 18A consultation

Dear South Gloucestershire Council,

I am writing this letter because the online questionnaire provided for the “M4 junction 18A and link road” consultation does not begin to encompass the issues I have with the proposal for a new junction.

The feasibility study conducted by CH2M assessed options that would meet a set of objectives set out by SGC and Highways England. The main objectives relate to reducing congestion, improving safety, increasing network resilience, and unlocking economic potential in the “north-east Bristol fringe”. A couple of other objectives relate to minimising the impact such a project would have on the environment and on non-car modes of transport.

The major objection I have regarding this consultation is that the *only* options considered involve a new junction and new or improved roads. Surely an improved public transport network might meet all of these objectives as well. I find it incomprehensible that this was not one of the alternatives examined in your feasibility study.

The year is 2017, not 1967. The proposal for a new junction is a 20th-century solution for a 21st-century conundrum. How do you get a growing population from their homes to their jobs, schools, appointments, and leisure activities in a sustainable fashion? Will everyone need a car? The answer to that will be “yes” if the infrastructure provided consists of roads and more roads. Is that really the most efficient and sustainable method of transport in a large city going forward?

The money that would be spent on a new junction and its link roads – currently estimated at £350-450 million – could pay for a lot of buses. They could be in place next year, instead of by 2025. Routes could be changed easily if the needs changed, unlike a junction and a link road. New buses could use the Metrobus lanes and stops, which run right through the “fringe” area in question. Even if the buses were both numerous and free to the public they wouldn’t cost anything close to what a junction would cost. Would people use them? If they got them to work or school on time and were cost-effective, of course they would. And would an extensive bus network for the area meet the main objectives for the project? Of course it would – by getting people out of their cars – and you wouldn’t need those two mitigating objectives either.

The problem with building more roads and more junctions is that it encourages more cars and more development along the new roads. I have no doubt that a link road such as the J18a eastern option would ultimately open up what is now an important area of green belt to development. It would be irresistible to SGC, given the pressure for more housing. Clearly, there are local landowners who believe that too. Some have thrown a lot of money into quite detailed plans for developing the land between Pucklechurch and Lyde Green. They’ve also spent money lobbying local politicians and planners – perhaps even you who are reading this objection letter. The property owners and developers even suggested that their project’s S106 money could pay for the motorway junction, which tells you just how much profit is at stake if this green belt land were opened for development. What a kind offer: to use the money they

would have to pay towards community projects to build a junction that would pave the way for their own development plans. Nice one!

Because new roads encourage more cars, the reduction in congestion along the A4174 ring road as a result of the new junction and associated works would be temporary. As a commuter from Pucklechurch into the Stoke Gifford area, I saw many, many changes to the ring road over the last 20+ years. After each improvement, there was a honeymoon period when traffic did seem better. Result! But after a while, things got bad again. Every time. Why would this expensive junction project be different? The amazing 2% decrease in journey times anticipated as a result of this project (a 72-second saving on an hour's journey – wow!) would be short-lived.

That's why I believe that a public transport alternative should be considered as a viable means of meeting these objectives. Buses now, maybe a Bristol underground system later. The Smart Motorway improvements and roundabout improvements on the ring road could also be put in place without the need for a new junction.

So that's my first objection covered.

My second objection concerns my community and the impact that the eastern option would have on it. I live in Pucklechurch and have participated in both the Community Plan project completed in 2010 and the Neighbourhood Plan currently in progress. Both projects gathered local residents' opinions about Pucklechurch Parish and what they value about where they live. The public consultations on this were 10 years apart, but the results were strikingly consistent.

Residents of our parish value our sense of community very highly. Either of the routes proposed for the eastern option link road would devastate our cohesiveness as a community. It would cut the parish into three parts, isolating Parkfield completely and placing Shortwood into what has now come to be known as the "triangle of doom" (a small village surrounded on three sides by busy roads). No matter what the "mitigation" is for connecting the three parts, it's not a pretty picture when a busy dual carriageway has to be crossed to take your kids to school, pop down to the post office, or walk home from the pub after the quiz.

Our residents also place a high value on being surrounded by open countryside. We love our green belt! People moved here to raise their families in a clean, safe, rural environment, and that is now threatened by the eastern option link road. We are scared of losing what we value most about where we live. This road would bring its noise and air pollution to our doorsteps. This road would destroy the rural outlook that so many people here enjoy. This road would mean that the green fields criss-crossed with footpaths that we use to get to school, walk our dogs, run, and observe nature will be buried under a tidal wave of tarmac.

Just the prospect of this link road – a line drawn on a map in your feasibility study – has blighted our community. We are anxious. We worry about the future of our villages. We worry about our property values. We worry about being swallowed up into Bristol's suburbs as the green belt is eroded away.

Which brings me to my next objection: The green belt is precious. It's there for a reason. It has value not only to us who have the pleasure of living within its bounds, but for the people of Bristol and Bath, who have easy access to countryside and whose air is cleaner because the green belt acts as the region's "green lungs". The green belt is meant to stop urban sprawl and

prevent the coalescence of towns and villages. The green belt area between Pucklechurch and Lyde Green is classed as of highest importance in meeting these green belt objectives, as is the land north of the M4 near the Science Park. Yet these are precisely the areas being considered for a new junction.

The Bristol and Bath green belt also provides valuable habitat for dozens of the UK's most endangered species of plants and wildlife. The loss of 23 hectares of green belt land at best (western option) and 35 hectares at worst (eastern option a) is not trivial. Yet, according to CH2M's Charlotte (no surname on her name badge) at the Pucklechurch consultation session, the £500,000 feasibility study did not include an environmental assessment. The consultation documents show no evidence of even the most rudimentary desktop survey of potential environmental constraints. Mind you, the constraints map shows that CH2M also failed to identify the Siston conservation area and the correct boundaries for the Pucklechurch conservation area. Stellar work.

I am not claiming that the area around the M4 is pristine countryside. The land is not high quality habitat *because* it's near a major road. Now you propose to put in another major road or move the motorway over and push the area of compromised habitat out farther into the countryside. Green fields next to major roads are not the best place for wildlife, just like houses next to major roads are not the best place for people.

The eastern option link road would mean more squashed hedgehogs, more discombobulated bats, less grassland for feeding all kinds of endangered birds, mammals, amphibians, and reptiles (not to mention cows and sheep). It may not look like much, but the open land in Pucklechurch and Siston parishes is teeming with life. I'm sure that the land north of Emerson's Green is too. There's a long list of flora and fauna in rapid decline in the UK. Many of the red and amber listed species live here on the land now at risk from this project. If we keep chipping away at the edges of the green belt and cut these habitats into little disconnected pieces, they are doomed.

In summary, I am sorely disappointed in South Gloucestershire Council for:

- Not including a public transport alternative in the feasibility study
- Proposing the eastern option routes which would devastate an active, thriving community
- Its willingness to sacrifice large tracts of green belt land

A new junction in either of the proposed places is essentially a short-term solution for traffic congestion. Its devastating effects on our communities and the environment, however, will be permanent.

Yours sincerely,

Jacqueline Berry

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Pucklechurch  
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