

A303 Stonehenge Consultation Team  
Highways England

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Dear Sir/Madam

### **A303 Stonehenge Public Consultation: response from Transport Focus**

Transport Focus is the independent consumer watchdog representing the interests of all users of England's motorways and major 'A' road, and we welcome the opportunity to respond to this consultation. We wish to highlight important considerations around the prospective user experience on the new stretch of A303, drawing on evidence we have obtained, or are in the process of obtaining, through our research.

The procedure for obtaining a Development Consent Order requires the applicant to formally consult the local community and other stakeholders. It is particularly important that the views of users of the road, whether in cars, vans and lorries, or as cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians, are taken into account. We welcome the references at several points in the consultation document to the interests of 'drivers'; this should be broadened to 'users', to recognise that decisions on how the new road is configured will affect a large number of passengers, including in buses and coaches, as well as drivers.

Highways England should clarify how much of the new road will be built to Expressway standard. The current Road Investment Strategy sets out a long-term commitment for the whole of the A303 to be progressively upgraded to this type of motorway, and this consultation refers to the 'mile a minute' aspiration for this new stretch of road. But it then presents only the middle section of the scheme, Countess to Longbarrow, being barred to slower and more vulnerable users. As well as requiring Highways England to ensure good alternative provision for those displaced users, the intention regarding Expressway brings with it the need to provide sufficiently closely-spaced Emergency Refuge Areas, and to make clear the speed limit that will normally be in place on the new road.

The presumed speed limit will be a key determinant of the journey time savings expected from the new road. Users' understanding of the benefit that will follow the prolonged period of disruption during construction would be increased by juxtaposing current and future journey times in average traffic conditions, not just in the peak tourist season. It would also help to understand how occasional two-way operation of one tunnel bore would affect journey times. And, as a final general observation, we support the proposal to open the new road in phases, to bring some benefits to users as early as possible.



Turning to the specific requests for comment:

1. on the viaduct proposals

The option of using conventional open bridge parapets would enhance the user experience by providing an improved view of the Till valley, thus increasing users' sense of place, and of being less confined. Figures 5.10 and 5.11 focus on the view of traffic on the new road from the valley, and indicate little difference in visual intrusiveness; it should be borne in mind that many more people will be experiencing the view in the other direction, of the valley from the road, if only fleetingly.

2. on proposals for the new Longbarrow junction

Users will require assurance that the planned absence of lighting columns at the junction will not adversely affect safety. We believe there would be less justification for dispensing with lighting at a junction, with conflicting and merging traffic movements, than there would be on other stretches of the road (e.g. the western tunnel entrance).

3. additionally, on overall proposals for the western section of the scheme

Highways England needs to confirm whether the western section would be categorised as Expressway, open to faster motorised traffic only. We note that the existing A303 through Winterbourne Stoke will be developed as a route for cyclists and pedestrians.

4. on the green bridge

No comment

5. on the options for construction of the western approach cutting

As the document indicates, the option of grassed slopes in the cutting would provide a more open aspect for users. It provides the potential for appropriate planting to enhance a sense of rural location for users, rather than the quasi-urban feel of being confined by vertical retaining walls.

6. on options for the western tunnel entrance

We note that the depth of the cutting means that vertical retaining walls will be necessary here. At the point where the canopy is needed, we note the potential for ventilation outlets to benefit the user, by adding visual interest and injecting an element of place-specific drama to the journey. However, targeted lighting might be needed to avoid a safety disbenefit from distraction to drivers during bright sunshine, and the choice would need to be balanced against other considerations such as cost, and safety on the surface above.

7. on overall proposals for the central section of the scheme

Transport Focus will shortly complete research into user experience and expectations of road tunnels, carried out in partnership with Highways England, which will for the first time provide guidance on the aspects of tunnel design that matter most to users. We have begun to discuss our findings with Highways England, and will be exploring from next month with the A303 project team ways in which this new evidence might affect detailed aspects of the planned design. This could include measures in the tunnel to make journeys more interesting for drivers and passengers, and to retain some sense of unique location which would otherwise no longer be evident to through traffic.



Our research has also noted users' perception of reduced safety in bidirectional tunnels: we recommend therefore that Highways England seeks to minimise the duration of two-way operation in a single tunnel bore during maintenance work on the other A303 tunnel.

The planned restrictions on permitted traffic through the tunnel imply this central section will be categorised as an Expressway, and so it is essential that sufficient provision is made for Emergency Refuge Areas and incident response, appropriate to a tunnel operating as a motorway.

We note that the shorter length of the eastern approach to the tunnel means the options presented for the western entrance are not an issue here. However, the design of the tunnel entrances on both sides should take account of what our research is establishing regarding user preferences.

8. on options for the Countess junction flyover

We support the option for a multi-span viaduct across the roundabout, as it would provide a more open aspect and provide a modest enhancement to the user experience.

9. on overall proposals for the eastern section of the scheme

No comment

Yours faithfully

**Guy Dangerfield**  
Head of Strategy