



an independent force for a **better Bristol**

2 August 2021

Dear Sir,

## **A4174 Junction Improvement Scheme: Consultation Response**

I am submitting a response to your consultation on behalf of the Bristol Civic Society.

### **1 Summary**

Whilst we agree the need for an effective ring road system to cater for essential through traffic, we do not believe that the proposed scheme will be effective in reducing congestion and therefore pollution, and we are not convinced that these proposals are the best use of £30m of taxpayers' money. The wider issue is how to move people around whilst reducing emissions. It is about spending priorities in a climate emergency, whilst drawing from a pot of money that is limited. It is disappointing that there seems to have been no attempt made to look at alternatives to increased road capacity when we are in an air pollution and climate emergency. As the Government's recently published Decarbonising Transport strategy says "We cannot pile ever more cars, delivery vans and taxis on to the same congested urban roads. That would be difficult for the roads, let alone the planet, to tolerate. As we build back better from the pandemic, it will be essential to avoid a car-led recovery." The overall steer from central government is that money should be spent on local transport infrastructure that helps cut emissions ("We will also support local areas to decarbonise by linking local infrastructure funding to solutions that cut emissions").

### **2 Alternatives to Increased Road Capacity**

The issue raised by the proposal is tackling congestion caused by peak hour traffic flows ie commuter car trips. A higher aim would be to replace some of those car trips with trips by public transport or active travel, aligning with the imperative of reducing carbon emissions. There is no evidence that any alternatives to cater for commuters other than increased junction capacity have been seriously considered and it has not been demonstrated these changes are the best use of £30m of taxpayers' money. It would be informative to know what alternative provision could be bought with £30m, and what the benefits and the carbon emission and air pollution impacts of the alternatives would be. For example, schemes to free up the passage of rapid transit routes that would displace some car trips and use the available road-space more efficiently.

### **3 Comments on the proposed junction changes**

#### **3.1 Achieving the stated aims**

We agree that it is vitally important to keep through-traffic out of the centre of Bristol, especially on health and environmental grounds, through having an effective ring road system. The aim should be to keep through traffic on the ring road and not diverting through the city centre or onto adjacent local roads.



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However, we are concerned that the proposals in this consultation may not achieve the aims of the scheme set out by the South Gloucestershire Council. The stated aim is to assist “necessary strategic car trips” but it is not clear how these proposals will provide for “necessary strategic car trips” as opposed to unnecessary or local car trips. The proposal may just mean that congestion and its associated problems of air pollution and accidents is shunted down the road to the next pinch point. The consultation material describes potential improvement schemes north and south of this proposal, but there is no guarantee that these will go ahead, and anyway there is always another pinch-point beyond them. In addition, the phenomenon of induced traffic rapidly diminishing the value of any increased road capacity is well accepted. Indeed, latest Department for Transport research concludes “Induced demand is likely to be higher for capacity improvements in urban areas or on highly congested routes.” Exactly the situation being addressed here.

In summary, once these things are taken into account, we do not believe that the proposals will be effective in reducing congestion, nor therefore pollution.

### 3.2 Cycling, walking and public transport

The stated aim is to improve connections for active travel and public transport but it is not clear how this will be achieved and what the real-life benefits will be. There are no bus lanes proposed. Cyclists and pedestrians appear to gain no real benefits but have some existing provisions removed.

### 3.3 Environmental Impact

A number of mature trees will be removed for the throughabouts. It is not clear where the replacement trees will be planted (“elsewhere”) to what timescales and how this will benefit local people affected by the trees’ removal. Widening through additional lanes on “undeveloped space” will remove green areas, with health and visual impacts which are unacknowledged. The net effect will be a less green road environment. Signal-controlled roundabouts of all kinds mean an increase in visual clutter from the increased number of signals, additional road markings and signage.

## **4 The option of a reduced road scheme**

Whilst we do not believe the 3-lane through-abouts are justified, as they will be ineffective in reducing congestion once induced demand is taken into account, it may be that there are significant road safety issues at one or more of these roundabouts that could be included in a smaller scheme.

Yours Faithfully,

Sue Ellis