

The A27 Arundel Bypass must be cancelled

“Those who promote schemes like the A27 Arundel bypass are promoting a failed intervention that will not achieve its objectives, a costly and highly wasteful use of public money and an option that will make the climate emergency worse. The A27 Arundel Bypass must be cancelled immediately, and the funding retained in that geographical area for world-best walking, cycling, public transport, car-free streets and towns, shared vehicles and sustainable freight transport.”

Professor John Whitelegg

UK road building is a remarkably persistent example of deeply flawed justification, poor value for money and repeated failures to deliver on stated objectives. The case against expanding road capacity is very well documented and has been presented at the majority of public inquiries into bypasses over the last 20 years (Note 1). Sadly we now live in a public policy and public spending environment where evidence is not checked, scrutiny does not exist and projects are justified on spurious, fag packet calculations about future traffic levels, reducing journey time unreliability, local economic benefits and the monetary value of time savings. This is very poor quality, evidence-free, decision-making at the best of times but even worse at a time when many of us are working very hard to decarbonise transport and central government has chosen to spend £27 billion to increase carbon emissions through its national road building plans (Note 2). In addition to this over 100 councils have promoted local roads costing a total of £6.5 billion and many of these councils are the same organisations that have declared a climate emergency.

All new road building should be abandoned as we struggle to meet transport decarbonisation targets in line with the Paris agreement.

It should not be necessary to repeat the case against road building but it is necessary to state the main dimensions of the case against and they are:

- Road building is contrary to official guidance (WebTag). WebTag requires that when objectives are clearly specified there should be a wide ranging scoping exercise to include road building and non-road building options followed by an open, transparent selection of the “best” option that is likely to achieve the objectives. I have been involved in a large number of road public inquiries and WebTag guidance was not followed.
- New roads and bypasses generate new traffic and do not solve congestion.
- New roads and bypasses do not generate local economic benefits.
- New roads and bypasses add significant amounts of additional carbon through the whole life cycle of material extraction, construction and in use. The spending of

billions on projects that add carbon is incompatible with net zero carbon by 2030 (2050 is far too late).

It is entirely appropriate that a legal action against the £27 billion national road building programme on climate change grounds is now making progress but it is time that all citizens heeded the clear words of Sir David Attenborough:

‘Sir David's new programme laid out the science behind climate change, the impact it is having right now and the steps that can be taken to fight it. "In the 20 years since I first started talking about the impact of climate change on our world, conditions have changed far faster than I ever imagined," Sir David stated in the film. "It may sound frightening, but the scientific evidence is that if we have not taken dramatic action within the next decade, we could face irreversible damage to the natural world and the collapse of our societies."'
<https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-47976184>

Taking “dramatic action” means no more new road building or bypasses and serious attention to the rich menu of non-road-building alternatives that are zero carbon, lower cost than roads and do not damage nature, countryside or biodiversity.

Those who promote schemes like the A27 Arundel bypass are promoting a failed intervention that will not achieve its objectives, a costly and highly wasteful use of public money and an option that will make the climate emergency worse. The A27 Arundel Bypass must be cancelled immediately and the funding retained in that geographical area for world-best walking, cycling, public transport, car-free streets and towns, shared vehicles and sustainable freight transport.

Notes

- 1 I presented a detailed case against the M4 relief road in South Wales. If anyone would like a copy of the evidence please e-mail me johnwhitelegg@phonecoop.coop. The road has now been scrapped.
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-48512697>
- 2 <https://www.leighday.co.uk/News/Press-releases-2020/August-2020/TAN-granted-permission-for-judicial-review-of-RIS2>

Author Note

John Whitelegg is Visiting Professor, School of the Built Environment, Liverpool John Moores University and an Associate of the German transport research organisation **Zentrum fuer Mobilitätskultur in Kassel in Germany**. He has authored 11 books on sustainable transport and related issues and his latest book *Mobility: A New Urban Design and Transport Planning Philosophy for a Sustainable Future* was published in September 2015. He has worked on sustainable transport projects in India, China, Australia, Germany, Sweden and Slovenia and on the same subjects with the European Parliament and European Commission.

He is the founding editor of the journal *World Transport Policy and Practice* which is now in its 26th year of publication.

In September 2020 John was appointed to the position of Fellow in Transport and Climate Change by the (UK) Foundation for Integrated Transport