

Gillian Keegan MP House of Commons London SW1A 0AA

19 July 2017

Dear Mrs Keegan

Folkestone - Honiton Trunk Road A27 Chichester Bypass

I noted from your election leaflets that you are keen to press for a solution to the Chichester Bypass problems. I'm sure everyone would support you in your endeavours and I noted in the press that you intend meeting with Chris Grayling. Not knowing whether or not funding is available for a solution is totally unacceptable.

I am writing to you as a retired chartered civil engineer having specialised in highway construction mainly as a Resident Site Engineer for West Sussex County Council. Back in 1995, before the days of Highways England and the Highways Agency, the County Council had an agency agreement with the Department of Transport for the Council to maintain and improve Trunk Roads within the County. It was then that the then County Council's Surveyor's Department was tasked with the reconstruction of the existing A27 Chichester Bypass and I was appointed as Resident Engineer, along with a staff of engineers, clerk of works and inspectors, to oversee and administer the works contract.

On paper the project was a simple task - just excavate the existing carriageways and build new ones in the same location but each one being two metres wider. The contract did not even involve reconstructing the roundabouts or widening over the railway bridge. In practice this was far from being a "simple" task! Without going into details, the main problems encountered can be summarised as follows.

Traffic One narrow lane for each direction was kept open at all times. Even back in 1995, the traffic queues were horrendous. Lots of traffic decided to "bypass the bypass" by going through Chichester and gridlocking the city; not helped of course by the railway gates.

Underground Utilities As with all highway projects, details of the underground utilities (gas, water, telecommunications, electricity, sewers) were obtained from the various bodies before construction and there was expected to be minimal disruption as a result of the works. In reality, underground apparatus was found in numerous unforeseen locations throughout the site which necessitated in their diversion out of the way of the road construction resulting in disruption of the works programme and vastly increasing costs.

Water Table Between the Whyke and Bognor Road roundabouts, a very high water table was encountered due to the road's proximity to the lakes. In order to be able to construct the new carriageway, I had to instruct the importation of many tonnes of rock from the West Country to "lift" the construction out of the water and redesigned the new carriageway some 0.5 metres higher than the existing. This of course resulted in additional time taken and increased costs.

These are just three of the problems that were encountered in carrying out this project; there were numerous other problems caused by unforeseen conditions arising, all resulting in increased costs. It is a pity I didn't keep my own personal records as all details were obviously forwarded to the Department of Transport on completion of the final account.

Anyway, the reason for telling you about my experience back in 1995 are that it is my firm opinion that any attempt to undertake major improvements to the existing bypass would be fraught with disaster and be totally ill advised. The present traffic flows are far in excess of the 1995 situation - and that was horrendous then. The plans we have seen show far more complicated engineering than the task we undertook in 1995 and to keep even one lane open in each direction at all times will be impossible.

Similar unforeseen problems to what we encountered back in 1995 are likely to be repeated; the high water table is still there, underground utilities are again likely to be encountered in unexpected locations, especially as works are to take place at the roundabouts this time. The economic cost to Chichester businesses will be extremely damaging due to traffic gridlock. Prior to any highway works being carried out there will inevitably be "pre-contract" works needed in diverting known underground utilities out of the way of the new construction. I would anticipate at least a six month period in which this is done throughout the length of the bypass. This of course is added to the time taken for the highway works.

I really do wonder how Highways England's consultants have estimated the cost of each of their schemes put forward at the consultation. They couldn't possibly have known the cost of utilities diversions. This wouldn't be known until detailed designs had been completed. I would like to think that they would have allowed a large enough contingency to cover these costs but of course we as the general public have no idea. My gut feeling is that the published costs are far too low for this type of work.

All this leads me to conclude that the most obvious solution is a new bypass away from the existing one and that is inevitably to the north of the city. Constructing new roads on green field sites are far less prone to unforeseen conditions, are safer for construction workers and will result in minimal interference with existing traffic flows. Estimation of actual costs is far more predictable with contingencies kept to a minimum. Considering the geography, the geology, and importantly finance, a new bypass to the north of the city is the only sensible solution.

I hope you have been able to find time to read this letter and are able to see the advantages of a new bypass being constructed to the north.

Yours sincerely

R D Probee

cc Cllr Louise Goldsmith