

Annex 1

Tom Harris MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State
Department for Transport
Great Minster House
76 Marsham Street
London SW1P 4DR

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Dear

A21 Trunk Road Scheme Cost Increases

I have been made aware that the cost estimates of two Highways Agency's schemes in Kent have risen very steeply and I am concerned that this could lead to the timing of these and other Kent schemes in the South East England's Regional Transport Board's to slip significantly.

The schemes in question are:

- A21 Tonbridge Bypass – Pembury Bypass Dualling: a rise from £64m to £112m
- A21 Kippings Cross – Lamberhurst Bypass: a rise from £40m to £103m

I am very concerned over the scale of these cost increases and seek assurances that the Department for Transport will make an appropriate contribution to the cost increases. Without this contribution, or a corresponding increase in the Regional Funding Allocation the RTB gets from Government, the Regional Programme will be set back and the delivery of schemes in Kent which deliver regeneration and sustainable economic growth will be seriously delayed.

The A21 Tonbridge Bypass – Pembury Bypass Dualling proposals have been repeatedly delayed over the last two decades, most recently by switching prioritisation of the scheme to the RTB. The existing A21 between the Tonbridge and Pembury Bypasses is an appalling stretch of single carriageway road with very poor vertical and horizontal alignment. It links two sections of dual carriageway and carries some 46,500 vehicles/day - way over its design capacity. Consequently there are serious delays and a bad accident record. The Benefit to Cost Ratio for this scheme is very high, even at the higher cost - far above the accepted threshold for good value for money schemes.

There is no alternative way of improving existing traffic conditions – the road has to be dualled to cater for the volume of traffic and is on-line to reduce impacts on the surrounding area. Good accessibility to and from the north to the new hospital at Pembury, now under construction, depends on the improvement of this road. Concentration of key services at this hospital and transfer of many services from Maidstone Hospital, including the accident centre, increases the need or improved accessibility provided by this scheme.

Serious delays on this section of the A21 undermine the effects to regenerate Hastings and its surrounding area, not only because of the increase in journey times but also because of the inherent unreliability of travelling along its length.

The A21 Kippings Cross - Lamberhurst Bypass scheme would replace a very poor section of single carriageway road which also suffers a very poor accident record. It would provide a section of dual carriageway linking to the existing dual carriageways either side - Pembury and Lamberhurst Bypasses. The scheme would be off-line, as widening on line is not possible due to very poor horizontal alignment of the existing road. Traffic flows are some 24,000 vehicles/day and the Benefit to Cost Ratio is still considered as 'high'. The scheme also improves the accessibility to the Hastings area and to the new Pembury Hospital

It is also vital that these two schemes are built in a single package as this would increase the overall value for money by reducing overhead costs and providing a cut/fill balance, with excess material from the Kippings Cross - Lamberhurst scheme used on Pembury - Tonbridge which has a deficit. Without the linkage, Pembury - Tonbridge would have to import fill material from some distance away (it being in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty), incurring additional expense and unnecessary lorry miles.

It is my belief that the South East does not receive its fair share of Regional Funding Allocation for transport compared to other regions. The South East already suffers from significant congestion and the demands for development in the Growth Areas and the continuing growth in cross-Channel road freight traffic exacerbates the existing problems in Kent.

I would be grateful if you could give an assurance that the Department for Transport will make a significant contribution to the cost increases of these schemes so that the existing RTB programme can be maintained.

Yours sincerely

Paul Carter
Leader –Kent County Council