



**TONBRIDGE & MALLING
BOROUGH COUNCIL**

Mark S WORRALL OBE

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Leader of The Council

Mike Penning MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Roads and Motoring)
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

25 November 2011

Dear Minister

A21 Tonbridge to Pembury Dualling Scheme

Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council has been robustly advocating the case for the A21 Tonbridge to Pembury dualling scheme for many years. In the past few weeks there have been three substantial events that provide fresh and powerful vindication of the case that this Council has been consistently advocating.

The first of these relates to the work that Kent County Council (KCC) has been doing this year to value engineer the project in conjunction with the Highways Agency. We realise from correspondence that you are well aware of this work and the recent results which have abated the costs from the estimated £117M to a figure just under £70M. Furthermore, the County Council is offering to contribute to the cost of developing the scheme further. This is in parallel with further funding commitments from the South East Local Enterprise Partnership which is offering to underwrite the cost of the stalled public inquiry.

We would like to confirm the Borough Council's wholehearted support for the County Council initiative and we would urge that you give it serious consideration as part of the imminent review of future schemes in the pre-budgetary processes.

We will avoid restating the points already well made by Paul Carter, KCC Leader, and the A21 Reference Group except to say that we should also emphasize the urgent need for this scheme to support the new regional hospital that has just opened at Pembury and to resolve the dire safety record on this stretch of single lane highway. A graphic demonstration of this could be heard only yesterday morning on Radio Kent when there was a live report from the A21 describing standing traffic in both directions on Castle Hill and the difficulties that an ambulance was having in making any progress towards the hospital despite sirens sounding and lights flashing. The situation there is indeed life-threatening for significant parts of each day.

The second event relates to the Confederation of British Industry's (CBI) 'Time is Right for Plan A Plus' announcement on 9 November. This covered a wide range of proposals to 'kick-start' growth within the economy and included the positive impact that road schemes could have both during directly during the construction phase and thereafter when the wider economic benefits would be realised. It is urging the government to re-instate 14 major road

projects delayed in the 2010 spending review to fill the gap created in the pipeline from 2013 and suggesting analysis of whether or not private sector investment could be used. The 14 schemes include the Tonbridge to Pembury Dualling project.

The CBI's plea to bring forward road schemes to promote growth in the wider economy is given further impetus by the third event, the publication by the RAC Foundation of its report 'Keeping the Nation Moving'. It is a wide ranging critique of transport investment policy in this country with numerous proposals suggested to deal with current challenges. The A21 Tonbridge to Pembury dualling scheme is identified as number 1 in the top ten unfunded projects based on published benefits. These are all projects that have potential to deliver strong economic benefits but the A21 scheme is quoted as having a benefit/cost ratio of 11. Here is the critical thing. This is based on the HA cost for the scheme of £117M. Given that the County Council and the LEP are guaranteeing delivery at a level of £70m, the cost/benefit ration for this scheme sores to nearer 20 mark and makes the case for building the scheme now inescapable. Set this against the cost/benefit ratio of HS2 between London and Birmingham that the Department for Transport estimates at 1.6.

The ultimate frustration will be that this scheme fails to secure a priority in the coming review of the road building programme only because it is not 'ready to go' and therefore would not be able to contribute immediately to growth in the national economy. It is not 'ready to go' simply because it is trapped in limbo by Crichell Downs principles that mean it cannot proceed through a compulsory purchase process without there being a clear timetable and guarantee of funding. This 'chicken and egg' situation seems completely ridiculous for a scheme with the highest cost/benefit ratio in the forward programme. Whatever else results from the coming review of the roads programme, it is absolutely essential that the Public Inquiry takes place to remove this fundamental constraint to making progress on this urgently needed project. We count on your support in helping to achieve this.

Yours sincerely,

Mark Worrall
Leader of the Council

Nicolas Heslop
Cabinet Member for Planning and Transportation

cc: The Rt Hon Sir John Stanley MP
Michael Fallon MP
The Rt Hon Greg Clark MP
Co Cllr Paul Carter