

The White Horse Alliance

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Secretary: Patrick Kinnersly. Tel. 01794 322505

Ben Bradshaw, MP
Minister for the South West

By Fax to 01392 425 630 and 0207 219 0950

28 October 2008

Dear Mr Bradshaw

Capital Spending on Transport in the SW - the Westbury Eastern Bypass

We understand that the Government is planning to bring forward capital spending on transport schemes in the regions. While we would welcome this initiative in principle as a way to stave off recession in our region we are extremely concerned over the list of schemes reportedly being considered for fast-track funding. We understand that it includes two public transport projects - in Bristol and Bath - which we approve in principle, and two shire county bypasses, which we deplore as being totally inappropriate responses to the current crisis.

We will leave others to address the relatively minor shortcomings of the bus-based rapid transport schemes in Bath and Bristol and the flawed transport and environmental case for the Kingskerswell bypass ('the A380 South Devon Relief Road'). Our purpose here is to ensure that you know the risks that the Government would run if it were to fast-track planning approval or funding for the A350 Westbury eastern bypass.

This is an extremely controversial project. Its unpopularity was one of the reasons why the District Plan Inspector recommended against safeguarding the eastern route and, we believe, why the Secretary of State ordered a full planning inquiry, and why she told the Planning Inspectorate to delay the start of the Inquiry until June 2008 to give our alliance enough time to assemble expert witnesses and legal representation.

The Inquiry finally closed on 8 October. The Inspectors hope to submit their report to the Secretaries of State by the end of the year. We would be very surprised indeed if they were to recommend planning permission being granted, or the CPO/SRO being approved. Their diligent examination of the evidence helped our experts to expose serious weaknesses in the transport case for the road. Our adviser Prof. Phil Goodwin, the UK's foremost authority on induced traffic, suggested that the cost of building the bypass (now heading towards £40m) might well exceed the benefits it would return to the Treasury. We showed that it would damage the protected landscape on the western scarp of Salisbury Plain and endanger species supposedly enjoying the strictest protection in European law.

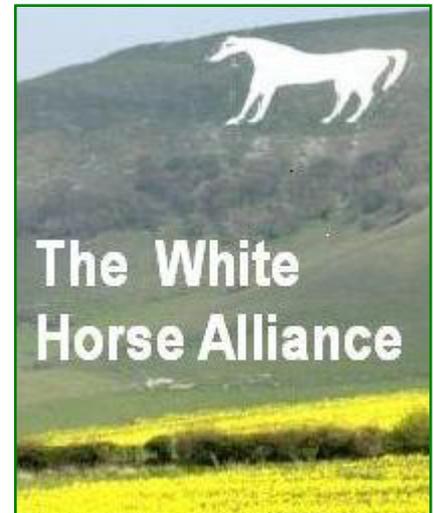
On the very day when the House is due to vote on the Climate Change Bill you should be aware that this road scheme would generate significant extra emissions of carbon dioxide. In short, it is one of the least sustainable projects you could possibly fund.

Before the Inquiry closed the Inspectors were able to examine the modifications proposed by the Secretary of State to the draft Regional Spatial Strategy. As you will be aware she has proposed deleting the A350 from the list of regionally significant transport corridors. The consultation on her proposals ended on Friday last week. It would be a curious situation if fast-tracking this project were to pre-empt her final drafting of the RSS or her response to a planning inquiry report she has not seen and is not due to decide upon until next spring.

We hope you will accept that the Westbury bypass is not a suitable candidate for priority public spending. There are several railway projects crying out for funding, such as Cranbrook station in Devon and dualling of the Kemble to Swindon line. These readily deliverable projects would bring credit - not embarrassment - to a government committed to sustainability, regeneration and social justice.

Yours sincerely

Patrick Kinnersly, Secretary, White Horse Alliance



The White Horse Alliance

Defending countryside, wildlife and local communities against a Westbury Eastern Bypass. Seeking a better plan for transport and the environment in West Wiltshire & the region



Campaign to Protect Rural England

National and regional member + CPRE branches: Wiltshire, Dorset and Somerset, and local groups: West Wiltshire and North Dorset



National member + CBT SW Network



WOODLAND TRUST

National member



National member + Friends of the Earth South West

Parish Councils
Southwick
West Ashton
Steeple Ashton

Westbury Bypass Alliance
www.westbury-wilts-bypass.info
A36/A350 Corridor Alliance
www.corridor-alliance.co.uk

