



TAAG NEWSLETTER #25 - December 2022

With the end of 2022 fast approaching, we wanted to share an update on activity since our last newsletter in August.

Public Consultation

In September we advised subscribers to our e-mail updates that the public consultation had been postponed again. On the one hand this is incredibly frustrating but, on the other, it offers hope that future development will be delayed or curtailed. The difficult economic headwinds could yet lead to the bypass proposal being cancelled, as it was in 1993.

You may recall that we sent councillors a list of follow up questions following the Public Meeting on 19th July. A copy of our covering letter was posted on our website in August but we didn't receive a reply to any of the additional questions. We then submitted these to be asked at Gloucestershire County Council (GCC) meetings and these together with responses were added to our website in November. *Reports Tab taagroup.co.uk*

TAAG Concerns Document

An original report was produced in August 2020 and, while this remains largely valid, we have produced a revised and more comprehensive version. It reflects the increased probability of using the A435 and that this is central to many of the concerns we have. This new report has been adopted by the Teddington & Alstone Parish Council (TAPC) and shared with Laurence Robertson MP along with local councillors. The document was added to our website in November. *Reports Tab taagroup.co.uk*

Meeting with Laurence Robertson, MP

We had the opportunity to meet with Laurence (and also Cllr Vernon Smith) in early October to discuss the bypass proposal. He has a clear interest in the scheme as a means to alleviate congestion and promote growth but is also mindful of negative impacts and wants route proposals properly assessed. We asked him for some words to include in our next newsletter:

"Traffic along the A46 to J9 and into Tewkesbury is already at a high level, with queues forming regularly. In addition, vehicles queue along the slip roads to leave the M5. And the traffic will only increase as more businesses are rightly attracted to the area and as extra houses are built.

I have held regular meetings with the County Council, Tewkesbury Borough Council, National Highways, businesses, the Transport Secretary, other government Ministers and individuals to discuss this situation and how we might best move forward.

I do not wish to set any hares running at this stage, because nothing is decided. But to me there are two issues to consider. First, can an environmentally friendly way be found to by-pass J9 for those who do not need to access that junction; and secondly, how can the capacity of the A46 and J9 be increased?

I would welcome all considered thoughts on this situation by email to robertsonl@parliament.uk or to 22 High Street, Tewkesbury GL20 6DL. Thank you."

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While he makes no mention of using the A435 within a bypass scheme, his reference to increasing A46 capacity and being 'environmentally friendly' opens up the possibility that online solutions for the A46 (e.g. widening sections of that road, new lights, junctions etc.) should also be properly considered as well as more disruptive alternatives.

TAAG will be considering how to respond to his invitation for feedback in the New Year. We would also urge residents to submit their own feedback directly to Laurence.

Traffic Monitoring on the A435

A number of people noticed some traffic monitoring equipment briefly appearing at the entrance to Teddington Village at the end of September - and possibly also at the Teddington Hands roundabout. After investigation, we discovered this was to collect A435 entry/exit data in connection with the bypass scheme proposal. It's worrying that this work had not been done before the public consultation was meant to have started and when routes would already have been selected. We have been told results are now available and have been requested by Parish Council. We await further details.

Bypass Scheme Terms of Reference (ToR)

A question was asked at the public meeting on July 19th as to whether the design consultants had been given any direction on including or excluding a Northern route. While the answer was 'no', we have followed this up with a Freedom of Information (Fol) request to obtain a copy of the ToR as this would identify any constraints or direction given by GCC on routes. Our request was refused on the grounds of commercial sensitivity although they could have provided a copy with appropriate redaction of these elements. GCC have failed to respond to our request for the decision to be reviewed and we have just raised a complaint with the Fol Inspectorate.

GCC project funding for Bypass Scheme Business Case

The current budget for this, essentially the cost of using the external consultants, was initially set at £3m in June 2020. This was increased by £5m to £8m in March 2021 and in June 2022 by a further £6m to £14m. For context, GCC's annual budget for 2022/23 was £519.6m. We still don't have an explanation for the latest increase of £6m and we do question if this spend is value for money. We are looking at how best to raise awareness of this.

In 2018, National Highways estimated that the 'most likely' cost of a bypass incorporating a new M5 junction would be £300m. Materials etc. costs must now be considerably higher and, according to a recent email from GCC, indicative costs could be as much as £500m. If a future bypass scheme is approved by the Department of Transport, under the terms for a Large Local Major (LLM) scheme 15% of it's build cost will need to be funded by GCC i.e. a minimum of £75m. It's unclear how this money would be found.

Next Steps

With the public consultation delayed until the end of 2023 (or beyond) there is unlikely to be much for us to report on next year. However, TAAG will continue to monitor progress and respond to new information as appropriate.

Finally, we would like to wish everyone a Merry Christmas and a Happy 2023.

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