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1

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Dear Sir

Response to the A14 Huntingdon to Cambridge consultation

The current proposals are broadly similar to those contained in the "CHUMMS" consultation of 2001. Since that time, hundreds of drivers and passengers have experienced accidents or injury on this road, people are delayed from getting to work and regional business is being stymied. Moreover, the constant closure of the A14, due to accidents, is causing ongoing distress to my constituents who live in surrounding villages and suffer resulting rat-running.

The consultation booklets and the exhibitions have been appreciated locally as was the decision to extend the exhibition to St. Neots. I found the exhibition at the Huntingdon racetrack to be well set out and Highways Agency staff were helpful. I shall be interested to hear the responses to the consultation, which may go further than those issues which have been brought to my attention so far.

With traffic projected to grow by 2031, in the busiest sections, by 58 percent and with 26 percent of traffic comprising HGV's (against a 10 per cent national average), the significant majority of my constituents urgently wish to see a new A14 road. Moreover, this has remained their position since the CHUMMS consultation over a decade ago, meaning that patience has worn thin amongst many local people who have not been able to understand the ongoing delays. The decision of government to bring forward work to 2016 is therefore generally appreciated and whatever decisions are taken on the route, or funding or anything else; the time to build this new road cannot come soon enough.

Having said that, it is clear that various points are of concern to my constituents and deserve to be considered as part of the consultation.

Tolling: This is clearly a contentious issue and obviously no one locally would prefer to pay the toll on the new road rather than not to have to pay. People will therefore wish to see a proper economic case made, with figures, made for the practicability of tolling. If it is to go ahead, not only will fair pricing be important but a number of constituents feel that it would be fair to have a local or regional discount scheme apply. Furthermore, the Highways Agency ("HA") should identify at what point the new road building works are to be paid off, so that tolling should stop from that date. This is not a congestion charge.

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Other points include ensuring that foreign drivers have paid the toll – how will this be enforced? It is a key issue given that the A14 has amongst the highest HGV use on any road in Europe.

My own “red-line” issue on pricing was that there had to be a non-paying alternative for local people to tolling and I am pleased that the existing A14 will be retained as a de-trunked local non-paying road (“the old road”).

The old road: Certain residents have voiced concerns at the proposed approach to the old road. It will be important to ascertain that the Brampton Road junction will be manageable in terms of traffic movements. There has also been some concern raised at the encroachment onto the Huntingdon Common and building here should be done as sensitively as possible to retain the local environment. It is generally appreciated however that the viaduct is an eyesore that is inhibiting future development in Huntingdon. To the extent that it has to come down anyway, given its poor condition, the cost of a new one could be better spent on a new road; if timing allows.

However, there is some confusion as to whether removal of the viaduct will make it more difficult for local traffic to access the old road; especially in the event of an accident on the new A14. Related to this is the Brampton Parish suspicion that the new road will result in a confusing “labyrinth” of roads around the A1.

There are also concerns from some in Brampton and Buckden villages that the new road layout could make rat-running worse and box in their communities. In the longer term, this might be addressed by moving the A1 to the West, but in the shorter term full consideration should be given to environmental protection work to minimise sound and sight impacts. This is also relevant to a number of villages along the route, such as Offord, Hilton and Fenstanton. I know that individual villages are providing their issues and I hope that they will be addressed carefully.

Displacement: The main concerns here are that the new tolled roads will cause more rat-running through villages and also vehicles switching to the A428 and the A1123, adding congestion to St. Neots and St. Ives. Clearly the way weight restrictions will be used on minor roads will be important, to stop HGV’s going through villages, if not the A428 and the A1123.

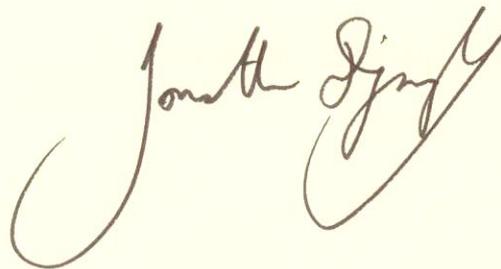
When I have queried this point in the past with the HA, I have been told that given there is currently a large displacement from the A14 to the A428, this traffic should return to the A14 once the new road is operational. Additionally, I have been told that the rat-running through villages now is so bad, that it can only get better with a fit for purpose working new road that reduces accidents.

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However, given how important these issues are, I think the Highways Agency should publish the data to back up their claims. Furthermore, others have pointed out that the A428 is going to get much higher use because of the thousands of homes being build in the Cambridge to St. Neots corridor. A requirement for an improved A428 is becoming a key issue and the A14 proposals should be actioned with this in mind.

The A14 proposals are important not only for the safety and success of my local constituency, but they are also key to the growth prospects for the East of England. We must move ahead and complete these plans as quickly as possible.

Yours Faithfully

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Jonathan Dymally". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial 'J' and a long, horizontal flourish at the end.