

OXFORD CAMBRIDGE EXPRESSWAY – SUBMISSION FROM BECKLEY AND STOWOOD TO HIGHWAYS ENGLAND

IN SUPPORT OF ROUTE S1

BACKGROUND

While many feel the case is far from being made for the Oxford- Milton Keynes – Cambridge Arc and the large-scale development that comes with a 6-lane Expressway and 1,000,000 extra houses, this document concentrates on the advantages of Route S1 . There is another submission from Beckley on the disadvantages of Route S2, should this scheme go ahead.

Highways England have presented three potential corridors for the Expressway between Milton Keynes and Didcot. A route to the west of Oxford and then following corridor B to Milton Keynes has significant advantages over any route to the south and east of Oxford. It involves less new road and hence will be cheaper and cause less environmental damage. It links with the A40 and A420 allowing West Oxfordshire and Swindon to enjoy direct links into the development arc. It follows the East-West Rail line and frequent interchanges would take full advantage of this.

Routes to the south and east of Oxford pass through a series of historical and environmentally sensitive areas, notably Shotover, Otmoor and Bernwood Forest close to Oxford or the River Thames to the east.

Any route which goes between Wheatley and Oxford would need to pass through or very close to the Shotover Country Park which is a Conservation Target Area, a Nature Reserve and a SSSI. To its east is the Grade 1 listed house and park of Shotover House. To its west is Brasenose Woods which is also a SSSI. There is no room for a route which avoids affecting these sensitive areas. To the south is the village of Horspath, which is densely populated and blocks any other way through. The height of Shotover Hill would mean that any road would be a major engineering undertaking and involve cuttings much wider than the road itself.

After crossing the A40 to the north any route would pass close below the conservation area of Forest Hill village itself with the Grade II* listed church of St Nicholas. If it then went to the west of Stanton St John it would go close to the grade 1 listed properties, Woodperry House and Beckley Park and then onto Otmoor, an Environmentally Sensitive Area and SSSI with a nationally important RSPB reserve. If it went to the east of Stanton St John then it would go through a series of woods, each a SSSI, which are the remnants of the medieval Bernwood Forest.

A route to the east of Wheatley would be likely to go along the River Thames, a picturesque waterway with otters. It floods regularly over a wide area and would represent significant engineering challenges.

In summary therefore, Corridor B to the west of Oxford is strongly recommended and Route S1.



CPRE Map of Expressway Routes

Current main routes from Oxford to Cambridge are –

1. M40, M25, M11, - 102 miles, which is rarely mentioned in any report on the subject
2. A422, A43, A45, A14 – 99 miles– via Bicester, Northampton and Huntingdon
3. A421 – 84 miles - via Bicester, Buckingham, Milton Keynes, Bedford, St Neots

Estimated journey times at 8 a.m. on a Wednesday morning are very similar for all routes – 2 hr 24 mins- 3hrs 5 mins.¹

¹ Bing Maps

THE ADVANTAGES OF ROUTE S1

This Route uses the existing main routes past Oxford of A34, linking to the M40 at the existing junction 9 and the A41 to Bicester and Aylesbury and A4421 and A421 to Milton Keynes.

There are junctions with M40 and A41 to the north; A44 and A40 to the north of Oxford and the A420 to Swindon to the west of Oxford. The A34 forms part of the Oxford ring road with A4142 to the south of Oxford and further south the M4, A303 and M3 to the south coast.

There have been recent suggestions that the Oxford - Milton Keynes – Cambridge Arc should be extended to Swindon -

“Oxfordshire: local authorities across the county work together over this area through the Oxfordshire Growth Board. The county is also coterminous with the Oxfordshire LEP. The sub-region could be redefined at some future point to include Swindon, but this should be subject to the agreement of all local partners;”²

Traffic and Economics

Widening the A34 and improving the junctions with major roads would be the most cost-effective route to choose, with the least construction; least harm to the environment; least harm to the Oxford Green Belt; least disruption to residents, the ecology and natural habitats, including the many SSSIs and the least increase in pollution. Reduction of congestion on A34 would also lead to an improvement in pollution and the environment. It would also lead to the least congestion to surrounding roads as routes to the A34 are already established and will improve with improvements to the A34 itself.

- **Congestion Reduction**

Currently the A34 is beyond capacity at peak times, particularly near the junctions with M40 and A420 to Swindon. However, this could be alleviated by upgrading intersections and junctions and widening of the road.

A number of upgrades to the A34 have already been announced or are underway - In 2014 an upgrade was announced by the Government –

“the A34, the main route from the Midlands to Southampton, will see investment of £30 million to ensure a crucial freight link and enhanced junctions will improve journeys around Oxford and Winchester”³

And more recently in July 2017 –

“Major improvements to the A34 in Abingdon got the green light today (26 July 2017) ... Two new south-facing slip roads at the Lodge Hill Interchange will help end years of congestion and pave the way for up to 1,700 new homes in Abingdon.”

² Partnering for Prosperity: A new deal for the Cambridge-Milton Keynes-Oxford Arc - <https://www.nic.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Partnering-for-Prosperty.pdf>

³ Major roads investment in London and the south east – 1.12.2014 - <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/major-roads-investment-in-london-and-the-south-east>

Other Suggested Junction Improvements

M40 - Further upgrades could be made to junctions with M40, to become a fully separated junction as at the M40 M25 junction. This would alleviate congestion from M40 to A34 south and vice versa.

A40 – A junction improvement with dedicated lanes from A40 going north and south

A420 – A junction improvement with dedicated lanes onto and from A420 to A34

These junction improvements would reduce congestion considerably and reduce journey times.

Upgrading and Widening A34

Along the length of A34 from the M40 south to the A420 junction there are few if any buildings next to A34 which would complicate road widening. Widening of several bridges over the river Thames, the railway line and Oxford Canal would be necessary, but this is far less costly than other routes.

The A420 junction at Botley has been seen as a challenge for road widening as there are houses alongside the A34. However, there are industrial buildings to the east of the A34 near the A420 junction where road widening could reduce the need to demolish houses.

- **Shorter Journey Times – Integrated Transport Links**

The A34 already has connections with three Park and Ride sites for Oxford at Botley, the Pear Tree Roundabout and at Water Eaton.

There is a direct connection with Oxford Parkway station with connections to Oxford and London. While this is far from offering an integrated transport system, so more people can make use of public transport, it is a great advantage to this route over all others.

- **Improved Journey Time Reliability**

Improvements to the A34 – road widening and junction improvements will improve journey time and reliability when the improvements are made. Furthermore, if the scheme is extended to include improvements to and widening of A420 to Swindon then there will be a choice of routes for freight and commuters from the industries in Swindon either via A420 or M4, thus potentially reducing traffic volume from M4 north up the A34.

- **Support to Economic Growth Aspirations**

Extension of the scheme to Swindon and improvement of A420 could offer significant potential for economic growth and additional housing. Improving the A34, while by far the cheapest option, would not create new opportunities to increase housing above the additional 100,000 already planned for Oxfordshire⁴, although there would be the opportunity to create more industrial and business units near junctions.

⁴ Helping the Cambridge, Milton Keynes and Oxford corridor reach its potential - Section 1.8

NIC have forecast an additional 240,000⁵ houses on top of those already planned and over half a million extra people. This would double the present number of houses, which stands at 281,480⁶.

None of the Corridor or Route options could deliver sufficient land for development to more than double the current number of houses in Oxfordshire. This figure from NIC is not based in reality or evidence. Little if any consideration has been given to the acceptability of this level of increase in housing and population to current Oxfordshire residents. It is very likely that many would find this unacceptable. The cost of their opposition should not be underestimated. An Expressway would also not deliver the additional infrastructure necessary.

Environment

As Route 1 widens the A34 and improves the junctions it has the smallest impact on the Environment of all the routes where a new 6-lane expressway would be constructed near existing communities.

- **Air Quality** – although there would be an increase in traffic, getting currently congested traffic to flow freely in places where it is now often stationary may benefit pollution levels, since queuing traffic emits up to 29 times more pollutants than free-flowing traffic.⁷

It is important that Route S1 is distanced along more of its route from housing. This avoids, to a certain extent, the detrimental effects from air pollution – both from diesel and petrol and particulate matter, which would have significant impact on the houses and villages along Route S2.

- **Cultural Heritage** – this is unlikely to be affected at all
- **Landscape** – The Oxford Green Belt would not be affected significantly, not the landscape
- **Nature Conservation** – Despite the acknowledged challenges of improving the A34 over Oxford Meadows SAC, (Special Area of Conservation, the highest EU level), overall improving the A34 is the least-worst route from an ecology point of view.

Although improving the A34 is not without major ecological challenges, most notably in the section running through Oxford Meadows SAC and close to Wytham Woods SSSI, improving this section of road may potentially result in net ecological gain. As northbound traffic through the SAC currently becomes stationary for long periods, improvements that allow traffic to flow freely may mitigate or even reduce local nitrogen pollution. However, the effects of any land take on the SAC and its important

⁵ Partnering for Prosperity: A new deal for the Cambridge-Milton Keynes-Oxford Arc - 11.2017
<https://www.nic.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Partnering-for-Prosperty.pdf>

⁶ Live tables on dwelling stock - Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government 6.3.18

⁷ Kumar,P., Goel, A., Concentration dynamics of coarse and fine particulate matter at and around signalised traffic intersections, 2016

colonies of creeping marshwort may mean that an alternative S1 route is less damaging overall.

- **Noise and Vibration** – The noise will affect the same corridor as at present, but there is likely to be more vibration from lorries which needs to be addressed and monitored. However, the noise and vibration from building the Expressway on any new route will affect thousands of additional properties and current residents.
- **People and Communities** – While it is regrettable that any people and communities will be affected by Route S1, far fewer will be than any other Route or Corridor. Residents will still be able to pursue rural activities enjoying the same footpaths, and other country activities such as horse riding, cycling etc

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