

A road bypass for Saltford? A discussion paper

Saltford Environment Group Committee, 6 March 2013

INTRODUCTION

This discussion paper has been prepared for discussion within the Committee of Saltford Environment Group. It highlights the concerns that we have about the building of a by-pass and the risk to our Green Belt and local businesses.

We are regularly asked for our views on this controversial subject. This discussion paper looks at the potential adverse effects our village might face if a bypass was to be built. It is not a statement of policy as such but does conclude that the case has not been made that a bypass would be suitable solution for peak time traffic congestion in Saltford and would be likely to create more environmental, social and economic problems than it would solve.

ROUTE & DO RESIDENTS WANT A BY-PASS?

A suggested southern route starting at Broadmead (Co-Op) roundabout, would probably pass close to or through the Teviot Road playing fields, cross Manor Road and the Community Forest, skirt Saltford and the Golf Club and re-join the existing A4 before Corston. Such a plan would draw vehement opposition from Saltford residents in roads such as Manor, Montague, Uplands and The Glen. There would also be implications for residents of Corston and Keysham's Chandag Estate.

A northern route would entail going through the Cotswold AONB and affect the mainline railway (due for electrification and re-signalling) so whilst it may be a cheaper option, it is perhaps less likely to receive planning permission.

Traffic congestion at rush-hour peak periods is unwelcome for Saltford hence when residents have been asked whether they would like a bypass without distinguishing the route or setting out the pros and cons, they tend to respond that they are in favour of having a bypass. Residents like the idea of a bypass in theory but not so much in practice once the main implications are considered.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Listed below are some of the key environmental, social and economic considerations for building a southern route bypass.

Environmental considerations:

- Loss of green belt agricultural land, wildlife and local landscape character.
- A by-pass would destroy existing footpaths and bridleways.
- Strong vocal opposition from residents who value Saltford's surrounding natural and peaceful environment, as well as from organisations such as Avon Wildlife Trust and CPRE.
- Likely infill development (as housing development boundary would almost certainly move out to the by-pass route) leading to more loss of greenbelt and Saltford changing from a village to a town.*

***Note:** A southern route bypass containing an infill of 5,000+ houses was one option proposed by B&NES Planning Officers for the Core Strategy housing numbers in January 2013. This would have destroyed a large tract of green belt and turned Saltford into a town. It was rejected by B&NES Councillors and Saltford Parish Council but proves beyond doubt that a bypass would be seen by planners as a new housing boundary for Saltford and be infilled with houses as has been the case in many other parts of the country. Saltford itself is not a major centre of employment thus the infill housing it would attract would lead to more commuting by car into Bristol and Bath.

- Increased noise pollution from faster traffic.
- Studies show that new roads designed to alleviate traffic problems often generate increased traffic volume in the area.

- Release of existing capacity constraint likely to lead to more vehicles using the new bypass than use the existing A4.
- Embedded carbon from construction likely to have a very long payback period (if at all).
- Risk of net reduction in air quality due to raised air pollution levels from increased traffic volumes travelling at higher speed with possibility of Saltford becoming a rat-run for motorists wishing to avoid a faster filling bottle-neck at the Broadmead (Co-Op) roundabout.

Economic and social considerations:

- Risk of losing local businesses from reduced passing trade, e.g. Post Office business was down by 40% for 9 weeks in 2006 when A4 was closed for re-surfacing.
- Key bus services, e.g. the X39 (“Express”) bus, could bypass the village (as for Keynsham).
- House values in some areas of Saltford would fall because of the consequent increased supply of housing or housing land in the vicinity.
- Significant in-filling would create pressure on Saltford's social infrastructure e.g. schools, medical facilities.
- Traffic on the A4 peaked in 2002 and has reduced by 7% since then (2012). Future traffic volumes difficult to predict with an uncertain economic outlook.
- Greater Bristol Strategic Transport Study by Atkins in 2006 said a bypass would “not produce an effective economic performance”. Priced then at £72M (2006 prices) it said the release of the capacity constraint at Saltford would create additional traffic in Bath producing further congestion in the area and would achieve only modest time savings between Keynsham and Bath.

CONCLUSION

Unless a bypass was being used as a strategic ploy to free-up land for infill housing development (such as the rejected proposals by B&NES Planners in January 2013 for a bypass surrounding 5,000+ houses in the context of the Core Strategy), it seems highly unlikely that any public authority would otherwise invest such a high capital cost for moving a traffic bottle-neck just 2 miles along the A4 when it is difficult to predict future traffic volumes against a background of rising oil prices and motoring costs.

Any firm plans for a bypass would likely create a negative effect on our community spirit from polarised opinions within the village between “winners” and “losers”.

An origin-destination survey (i.e. origin, destination, journey purpose, vehicle occupancy) should be conducted by B&NES and be updated periodically. This would enable evidence-based non-highways solutions to peak-time traffic congestion on the A4.

Before a bypass is planned other solutions for reducing traffic levels such as car-sharing schemes, more or improved public transport including the re-opening of Saltford station, improved cycling facilities, and increased freight-carrying efficiency should be implemented through an integrated approach to transport planning by B&NES and the West of England Partnership.

SEG's Committee agreed a policy statement concerning Green Belt development on 15th January 2013 incorporating six core principles; one in particular concerned traffic congestion in Saltford:

“Traffic congestion requires sustainable solutions, not simply creating more roads that increase overall road traffic with higher carbon and other polluting emissions whilst creating traffic problems elsewhere.”

This paper shows that at the present time a bypass would not be a suitable solution for peak time traffic congestion in Saltford, creating more environmental, social and economic problems than it would solve. It would not be sustainable development.

Prepared by Phil Harding for Saltford Environment Group's Committee
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