

A road bypass for Saltford? A policy discussion paper

Saltford Environment Group – Version 14 March 2018

INTRODUCTION

This policy discussion paper has been prepared for the Executive Committee of Saltford Environment Group and is updated periodically to reflect changing circumstances including any new proposals. 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 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 or near the Broadmead (Waitrose) 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 Copse Road, Grange Road, Manor Road, Montague Road, Uplands Road and The Glen and from residents in 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. It also looks at the October 2017 Atkins final report for the West of England Joint Transport Study

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 at the time whilst proving beyond doubt that a bypass would be seen by planners as a new housing boundary for Saltford and be in-filled with houses as has been the case elsewhere in England. 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 (Waitrose) 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 it does 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.
- The West of England Transport Study Final Report by Atkins in October 2017 (see next section) considered the potential of a bypass for Saltford and concluded that this would entail relatively high scheme costs.

West of England Transport Study Final Report by Atkins (October 2017)

This report said (paragraph 6.7.4):-

A bypass for Saltford was considered as a potential option for reducing traffic flows through the village and freeing road space for mass transit between Bath and Bristol. The bypass would need to take a relatively long route to the south of the village, which would result in an increase in distance travelled compared to the existing route. The increase in distance travelled would partially offset the benefits of reduced congestion, reducing user benefits. The scheme would also enable through traffic to be diverted from the village, helping to improve journey times for buses through the village. However, other lower-cost options, including bus lanes on the approaches to the village, could play a more direct role in helping to reduce bus journey times, although these would need to be investigated in more detail.

The bypass would cross difficult terrain, with steep slopes south east of the village. It would be necessary to create a significant cut in the hillside, with a relatively steep gradient and potential requirement for a climbing lane in the westbound direction. These issues would collectively result in landscape impacts, major earthworks and relatively high scheme costs. It is therefore recommended that further work should be undertaken to assess options to provide bus priority on the approaches to Saltford before a decision on a Saltford Bypass is made. As part of this further work, consideration should be given to the future potential conversion of bus priority measures to accommodate other forms of mass transit, such as light rail.

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. This is particularly the case when it is difficult to predict future traffic volumes against a background of the recognised need to move commuters away from using the car and into rail, bus services and/or cycling. There are more attractive options from an economic and environmental viewpoint than new roads; a local example might be a light rail scheme on the former Bristol-Mangotsfield-Bath line (currently Sustrans cycle path) sharing the route with cyclists as occurs currently with the Avon Valley Railway for a 2 ½ mile stretch between Oldland Common and Avon Riverside.

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”.

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, a light rail system, 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.

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