

# **HINDHEAD ROAD SCHEME HIGHWAYS AGENCY PROPOSALS**

## ***PROOF OF EVIDENCE FROM FRIENDS OF THE EARTH GODALMING AND GUILDFORD GROUP FOR PUBLIC INQUIRY - SEPTEMBER 2004***

### **INTRODUCTION**

1.1 My name is Christopher Meeks and I am the Honorary Transport Co-ordinator for Friends of the Earth Godalming and Guildford Group. I represent our organisation on the Waverley Cycling Forum and am also a Trustee of Project Oasis North Downs – a charity started by FoE that plans to open a Camping Barn at Puttenham in Surrey for walkers, cyclists and horse-riders.

1.2 Also representing Friends of the Earth at the Inquiry, again in an honorary capacity, is Kathy Smyth who is our local officer for Milford and Witley as well as being honorary solicitor for Project Oasis North Downs.

### **OVERVIEW**

2.1 We start from a position of recognising the major importance of the countryside in the Hindhead area. Places such as Hindhead Common and the Devils Punchbowl are renowned locally, nationally and internationally and rightly enjoy designations designed to provide protection.

2.2 It is in this light that we have considered carefully the proposed Hindhead scheme, yet also with a realisation of how vital it is to encourage and provide for environmentally friendly modes of travel at the same time as protecting natural habitats.

2.3 We conclude that there is currently no ideal solution at Hindhead. We are faced with the unfortunate consequences of decades of Government policy and actions which have led to the dramatic increase in the number and use of motor-vehicles; this, in turn, has led to the demands for the wider A3.

2.4 If no London-Portsmouth road existed today and there was a proposal to build it along the alignment of the existing A3 road around the side of the Devils Punchbowl there would be outrage. Yet we are also very aware of the fine countryside which the new route would ravage. I am very familiar with the area and have studied the proposals “on the ground”, including walking the whole of the proposed new route.

2.5 Our clear view is that if the new length of A3 is approved then it is *essential* that the

existing stretch of A3 around the Devils Punchbowl be closed to motor-vehicles. Assuming that this is done, then we have decided not to object to the alignment of the proposed new road, providing that a suitable alternative way is available for the non-motorised who would be debarred from using the tunnel.

### **THE A3 – A NEW OPPORTUNITY**

3.1 The history of the development of the A3 for a number of recent decades shows how the motor-vehicle has taken precedence over all other forms of travel; the non-motorised have, to a large extent, been driven off the road with the noise, excessive speed and pollution. We are appalled that the design of this trunk road over this time has been almost as if it was a motorway and, in consequence, it is common amongst many members of outdoor organisations to hear the A3 described as “motorway by stealth”.

3.2 We are sad that what is legally a road for all travellers is now a hostile place for those who choose the most benign and environmentally-friendly ways of travelling. Similarly, if *crossing* the A3, there are some incredibly long distances between safe crossing places when measured by, say, the speed of a horse.

3.3 We see the Hindhead scheme as a positive opportunity to redress the balance, at least to some extent, and with regard to the crossing of the A3 we are supported by official policy of Waverley Borough Council.

3.4 The current Waverley Borough Plan (after Policy LT11) contains the words:  
*“The Council recognises the major problem for walkers, cyclists and horse-riders in crossing busy roads in the Borough and in particular the A3. The Council understands the importance of maintaining the continuity of rights of way and, in consultation with the Highway Authorities together with countryside and outdoor activity organisations, will explore ways of improving the situation should the opportunity arise.”*

### **GREENSAND WAY**

4.1 In our original submission we welcomed the addition to the plans of a long overdue crossing of the A3 just south of Thursley to serve the Greensand Way and agricultural needs. Since then, of course, there is the new arrangement proposed in relation to Boundless Lane – see our comments below.

4.2 We are pleased to have received assurance that existing hedges – between the lay-by and the link roads in the area of the Greensand Way – are retained in the current scheme.

### **JUNCTION WITH BOUNDLESS LANE**

5.1 We earlier objected to the then current plan on the grounds that the layout would be likely to lead to a substantial increase in traffic cascading onto country lanes.

5.2 We support strongly the major changes that have since been made to the plans, even though we have not studied the fine detail.

## **PUBLIC FOOTPATH No.94**

6.1 We object to the proposed closure of a section of this path from Boundless Road to west of the proposed new A3.

6.2 The usage of this path has, we suggest, suffered immeasurably as motor-traffic has increased on the existing A3; this traffic has acted as a barrier to people crossing over from the Hindhead Common area and exploring further afield. Conversely, we expect that with the removal of motor-traffic from what is now the A3 more walkers will wish to use Footpath 94.

6.3 However, the path is of particular importance in relation to the nearby Devils Punchbowl Youth Hostel – the Hostel is less than a mile from the western end of Footpath 94. This path is valuable for circular walks as well as being part of a walking route to the nearest other Youth Hostel, at Holmbury St Mary in Surrey.

6.4 The suggested alternative crossing of the new A3 further south is too far south in the context of walking between these two Youth Hostels, whereas the route involving the new Blackhanger underpass (to the north) would be somewhat convoluting.

6.5 With the long-term future of Holmbury St Mary Hostel recently secured and a new Camping Barn for walkers and cyclists at Puttenham due to open in Spring 2005, we anticipate an increased number of people walking between these places.

## **PUBLIC FOOTPATHS 89 AND 90**

7.1 We support the call for an underpass of the A3 to link these two footpaths. Considering how walkers are thwarted by the A3 as it is today, the paths are already well walked and appreciated; we are in no doubt that they would be walked to a much greater extent if the means was there to cross the road.

7.2 Although a number of walkers do now brave the at-grade crossing, it is impossible for many, including disabled people, and risky for all. The danger – to adopt a slogan used by the Ramblers Association nationally – is that you are either quick or dead!

7.3 We draw to the attention of the Inspector the fine views which are part of the experience of this walking route.

## **THE TUNNEL – ALTERNATIVE ROUTES**

8.1 With the non-motorised prevented from using the tunnel, it is obviously essential that suitable alternative provision be made for walkers, cyclists and horse-riders.

8.2 It appears to us that the current proposals of the Highways Agency fail to take into account the intention of Sustrans to include a route over Hindhead Common as part of the National Cycle Network; we are also very aware that with the closure of the existing A3 to motor-vehicles the Hindhead Common area will attract many more walkers, cyclists and horse-riders than today.

8.3 At a Highways Agency public exhibition in 2003 there was an imaginative plan showing the retention of a limited width of the existing A3 around the Devils Punchbowl for cyclists, but this is no longer part of the plans. We feel that such a route, if it was gated and with a prohibition on motor-vehicles (perhaps exemptions only for emergency or National Trust vehicles), would soon begin to assume the “feel” of a very quiet country lane. Consideration could be given to applying a top surface more in keeping with the area, in consultation with the National Trust, cycling and other organisations.

8.4 We understand the feelings of those who would rather the existing A3 around the Punchbowl be covered over completely, but believe that view is too narrow a focus. The broader picture is that by creating attractive cycle routes we can encourage more people to cycle, which from an environmental perspective is very important.

8.5 Aside from this, there is an environmental resource issue in that current plans envisage surfacing a width of the relevant section of BOAT 500 to enable use by cyclists whilst the existing A3 could be used with all the foundations of a trunk road.

8.6 We support the proposal to exclude motor-vehicles from part of BOAT 500, although hope that a way can be found so that the few horse-drawn carriages are still able to use the route – perhaps by a “permissive” agreement with the National Trust and the County Council. Photo `A` enclosed, taken north-west of Gibbet Hill on the part of BOAT 500 proposed for bridleway status, is dated *August* 2004 and shows the state of the surface at this location and water across much of its width at the height of the Summer. Photo `B`, taken at the western end of the BOAT illustrates a motor-vehicle using the route with little space for horse-riders, walkers and cyclists to pass by.

### **HINDHEAD CROSS-ROADS**

9.1 The double mini-roundabout proposed will, we feel, create a situation that is likely to be confusing on the ground with vehicles coming in different directions. What is the accident experience of such a layout in a similar location involving an `A` classified road?

9.2 The layout seems to assume that all cyclists will be proceeding along what is currently the A3, when in reality there are lots of different possible directions in which cyclists will be moving.

9.3 We are concerned that the cycle path in this area is intended to give way to side roads. If the road that it follows has precedence over the side roads then we submit that the cycle path, too, should enjoy that precedence.

### **HAZEL GROVE JUNCTION**

10.1 We reluctantly accept that a roundabout on the north-western side may be necessary, although the precise design of this is very important.

10.2 However, we again question the need for a roundabout on the south-eastern side, with its consequent land-take and the known danger to cyclists associated with roundabouts. We suspect that a layout could be devised that would work whilst avoiding the need for a roundabout. After all, one of the roads from this roundabout, Hazel Grove itself, is now to be closed to most through motor-traffic. We recognise the generation of traffic from local schools, though this is at limited times and presumably almost non-existent during school holidays.

10.3 We wonder what other options were considered for the Hazel Grove Junction or whether the Highways Agency has imposed a standard formula for a situation such as this without too much thought...

10.4 Certainly, this scheme gives the impression of being designed with little consideration for non-motorised users, despite the statement that the junction is part of the alternative route for cyclists to bypass the tunnel (reference: letter from Highways Agency to FoE). We understand that a shared pedestrian/cyclist path is now part of the plans, to traverse the junction and its roundabouts, but that no safe crossing is to be provided over the slip roads. If that plan is adopted, then it is imperative that a safe way be provided over the slip roads, whether it be by toucan crossings or underpasses, even if that means some layout redesign.

10.5 If toucan crossings are provided then our suggestion is that if possible they operate on an immediate response basis and we request that any "push-button" is at a height that a wheelchair user can reach.

10.6 Roundabouts, particularly large roundabouts and gyratories, were described on page 63 of `Cycle-friendly Infrastructure` (published CTC 1996) as being *"the most feared feature of the road network for cyclists. Even experienced cyclists will make detours to avoid certain roundabouts or sometimes dismount and wheel their bicycles across the junction. They have good cause to do so: cyclists are some 14-16 times more likely than car users to suffer an accident at a roundabout..."*.

10.7 The toll of death and injury for cyclists on roundabouts is unacceptable, which is why it is vital that any new design ensures, as best one can, a safe passage for the most vulnerable whether it be cyclists, pedestrians or wheelchair users. It should be noted that the Hazel Grove roundabout is near to residential areas.

10.8 We have requested a detailed design drawing for this junction but are told that this will not be available until a few days after the start of the Inquiry – and thus after the time when our Proof of Evidence needs to be submitted. In these circumstances, we hope that the Inspector will be prepared to consider a supplement to our evidence if, after receiving the plan, we feel further comments are necessary on this specific subject.

## **CYCLE PATHS**

11.1 We remain of the view that two-way cycle paths alongside the A3 should be best separated from the main road by a hedge – to filter fumes and reduce glare from approaching headlamps – and that there should be a crash barrier on the main traffic side.

11.2 There is also the issue that many front and rear cycle lamps are much brighter today than at one time, which could be confusing to motorists after dark – with the possible risk of an accident.

### **KNOCKHUNDRED LANE – ONE-WAY SECTION**

12.1 In our original submission of January 8<sup>th</sup> 2004 we objected to the proposal for a section of this lane to be one-way. Since then, the length of the one-way section has been reduced, which we welcome, but the situation remains unsatisfactory for horse-riders and cyclists, who are subject to highway law.

12.2 We understand and support the objective to prevent Knockhundred Lane becoming a cut-through for motor-vehicles from the A3 southbound to Woolmer Hill, but believe this can be achieved by a different legal mechanism without detriment to horse-riders and cyclists.

12.3 We refer the Inspector to Traffic Advisory Leaflet 6/98, entitled `Contraflow Cycling` and published in September 1998 by The Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions.

12.4 The solution we favour for Knockhundred Lane is that described at the foot of page 2 as `False one-way streets` (also known as `plugged no-entry`).  
To quote the text: *“In these circumstances the street remains in two-way operation. However, point restrictions prohibit motor-vehicles from entering at one end of the street, so that the street effectively operates as a one-way street. Cycles are exempted from this restriction and are able to bypass the no-entry signs via a segregated `cycle gap`.”*

12.5 Clearly this arrangement would prevent motor-vehicles gaining access to Knockhundred Lane from the A3, yet provide a legal exemption for pedal-cyclists. We hope that this legal exemption can be extended to also cover horse-riders.

### **`THE SPANIARD` - SAFE CROSSING OF A3**

13.1 In our original submission we objected to the stopping up of Bridleway 71 (where it meets the A3 opposite `The Spaniard`) and to any plans to close gaps in the central reservation in this area.

13.2 We have considered carefully the response sent to us from the Highways Agency (letter dated June 23<sup>rd</sup> 2004) but still believe that a safe crossing from Knockhundred Lane to the Rights of Way and common land opposite is important.

12.3 We note the wording within that letter: “It would seem inappropriate to provide two new crossings so close together at the end of the Common when the next crossing southwards is at Liphook, some 3km further south”. It is extraordinary to think that the next safe crossing to the south for non-motorists should be 3km distance, but the failure of Government in the past to

provide suitable crossings over that stretch of the A3 is no justification for inaction within the present scheme.

**CONCLUSION**

14.1 To conclude, if no London to Portsmouth road existed today and there was a proposal to build it on the alignment of the existing A3 around the Devils Punchbowl, there would be outrage. We hugely welcome the prospect of losing the motor-traffic from this location, whilst at the same time recognising the damage that the new road would do – albeit much reduced by the tunnel – to another swathe of magnificent countryside.

14.2 On balance, we have decided to accept the Highways Agency proposal for the new road and tunnel, but only if the existing A3 around the Devils Punchbowl is closed to motor-traffic.

14.3 Satisfactory alternative provision for non-motorists who are barred from the tunnel is fundamental and, in our view, this is an area where the present proposals fail and need modification.. Also, we believe that a number of additional safe crossings of the A3 are required to link important Rights of Way.

14.4 We are concerned at the double mini-roundabouts proposed for Hindhead Cross-roads and cannot see why the cycle/pedestrian path should give way at side roads. We hope that the Inspector and Assistant Inspector will look closely at the plans for the Hazel Grove Junction bearing in mind land-take as well as the needs of cyclists, wheelchair users and pedestrians – particularly in view of the high risk to cyclists associated with roundabouts.

14.5 The overall scheme should have been designed comprehensively from the beginning with the needs in mind of all who have a legal right to traverse the highway, but we see little evidence that this has happened. The Highways Agency Hindhead logo says much to us of the thinking of the Highways Agency.

14.6 Nevertheless, we are grateful to Highways Agency officials for their co-operation and willingness to discuss possible improvements in a constructive way. Indeed, we are hopeful that through the Public Inquiry process the scheme will be much improved to the benefit of all.

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