

A3 Hindhead Public Inquiry

September 2004

Sustrans Proof of Evidence

My name is Ray Blackwell and I am a Chartered Engineer. I am a Fellow of the Institution of Civil Engineers and a member of the Institution of Highways and Transportation. I work for Sustrans and currently have two roles. I have been the Regional Manager for the South East for the past 3 years and still undertake that role in Surrey, both East and West Sussex and Kent. I am also the traffic Engineer for Sustrans. I am a keen cyclist and have been for over 40 years.

Sustrans, it stands for Sustainable Transport, works on practical projects to encourage people to walk, cycle and use public transport in order to reduce motor traffic and its adverse effects. We are a charity motivated by a desire to find solutions to the problems caused by the huge and relentless growth of traffic. Deaths, injuries, noise, pollution and the destruction of the environment and the creation of a lost generation of unfit children who will never have known the freedom offered by the bicycle, are all problems inherent in the traffic growth over the past 25 years. At the heart of the issue is the status and safety of cyclists and pedestrians in relation to the car. Sustrans is trying to address the balance through the construction of the National Cycle Network.

The NCN is designed to encourage the public to start cycling again. Sustrans believes that to persuade non-cyclists to take up cycling it is essential to provide them with safe, traffic-free routes so they can gain confidence. These special paths can then connect (ideally) to traffic calmed urban routes. In cities the main thrust is to increase the profile and status of the cyclist by re-allocating road space to favour the cyclist over the car. We believe the NCN is a visionary scheme designed to pass through all the major urban centres of the UK and linking these cities via more than 10,000 miles of traffic free routes, quiet lanes and traffic calmed city streets to form a comprehensive cycling network right across the country. By the end of next year the Network is forecast to pass within two miles of over 30 million people.

In the early 1990's John Grimshaw Sustrans founder and chief executive undertook a survey of possible cycle routes to make up the National Cycle Network (NCN). He travelled extensively throughout the country and one of the routes he surveyed was from Guildford to Petersfield via Godalming and Hindhead. This route offers the opportunity to link London with the south coast route at Portsmouth via many of the towns and villages between. His initial survey showed that whilst a route was possible it was not ideal as it would have to follow the A3 between

Thursley and Hindhead as there were no suitable minor roads or bridleways across Hindhead Common. In the short term an alternative route via Farnham was developed and is close to being implemented.

However when the Tunnel was proposed JG asked me to investigate whether it would be possible to use the old A3 as a cycle route. I was pleased to see that in the HA's earlier proposals the old A3 was being retained for just that purpose. The later amendments came as a big disappointment as we still wish to develop a national route along the A3 corridor to link the various communities. We are currently talking with Surrey CC about the Guildford to Godalming section of the route.

It is true to say that in general Sustrans are opposed to building new roads as they invariably add more traffic to the network and do nothing to solve the problem of congestion in the long term. In this case however there are real advantages to the residents and visitors to the area as the proposal will remove the vast amount of through traffic that does nothing for the residents other than create a fear of using the road network unless they too are cocooned in their cars and vans. The road tunnel will offer the opportunity for local people to walk and cycle again in relative safety. The proposals for cycle lanes through Hindhead are to be applauded but we would like to talk about the detail to ensure they are attractive to the majority of cyclists and hence are used to the full.

At this point I would like to quote from a draft document published by the Department for Transport in April this year. The document is entitled Policy, Planning and Design for Walking and Cycling, Local Transport Note 1/04.

- The Governments policy for integrated transport has produced a substantial change in the approach to transport schemes.
- (There is) an overarching principle that any new measures proposed for pedestrians and cyclists represent a real improvement over the existing situation, particularly in terms of accessibility, and , where practical and appropriate, offer users a positive advantage over motor traffic.

I would argue that the scheme as published does not represent a real improvement. Sustrans believes that the existing A3 road should be maintained, albeit in a narrower form, through the Devils Punch Bowl area for the use of cyclists and walkers. The proposal as published introduces an additional length to any journey and increases the gradient considerably and is not compatible with the government aims to increase the provision for sustainable transport. By making the journey longer and more difficult you will be increasing the likelihood of people using cars rather than reducing it, as should be the case. Since a substantial majority of all journeys made in the UK are less than 5 miles cycling is a genuine alternative to the car for many journeys. The

published scheme has the potential to offer a long length of traffic free cycling, something that most existing and all potential cyclists prefer. The steeper gradient will also deter many disabled persons from using the route hence denying them the opportunity to access this attractive countryside.

With the Hindhead tunnel in place and a quieter and in most cases traffic free cycle route in place along the old A3 we would want to route the National Cycle Network Route 22 along this corridor. Route 22 will eventually link London to Portsmouth and for cyclists using the Portsmouth to Le Havre Ferry it will give easy access to European velo routes to the Loire Valley and beyond. Cycle tourism is growing rapidly both in the UK and in France and this link is likely to play an important part in the national network. I would not recommend the use of the BOAT 500 as a National Route. Its gradients would lead to high speeds downhill and with only a 3m wide surfaced section which is also likely to be heavily used by pedestrians and horses it could easily give rise to conflict.

In 2003, the NCN carried 126 million trips by cyclists, walkers and other users, of these, approximately 77 million were trips by cyclists and 49 million by pedestrians. On a like-for-like basis (i.e. not including growth resulting from extensions to the NCN), this represents a year-on-year growth of 10% in the number of cycling trips. Traffic-free routes (which account for one third of the NCN) were critical to this growth, with 13% year-on-year growth between 2002 and 2003, compared with 6% on on-road sections of the NCN. Usage of this route will be quite substantial and I estimate that it could be comparable with the Cuckoo trail in East Sussex with trips in the order of 150,000 to 200,000 per year.

We would contend that your proposals have introduced unnecessary costs. The existing byway BOAT 500 appears to be adequate for its current purpose but it is not wide enough to accommodate the various users that you envisage. A clear width of at least 6m, and preferably much more, would be required for a shared cycle track/footpath with adjoining bridleway with no overhanging vegetation lower than 4.5m on the bridleway side and 2.5m beside the cycle track. Boat 500 is heavily tree lined and to create these conditions would mean felling large numbers of trees. Your proposal to surface, and drain the byway adds unnecessary costs when the existing carriageway is available and in very good condition and likely to last much longer than the less substantive surface proposed on the byway. I would contend that drainage of the route will be very difficult to achieve if it is to be easily maintainable and still in keeping with the landscape. The relatively steep gradients will mean the track will act as a drainage channel unless it is raised above the surrounding land and I do not believe this is proposed. Any ditches will have to be reinforced to prevent washout and damage to the track.

Maintenance of Boat 500 is likely to be a very real concern to cyclists in the medium to long-term unless the cycleway is adopted as part of the highway maintainable at public expense. It is not good enough to simply assume that it will be maintained for cyclists as a public right of way as very few, if any of the highway authorities has sufficient money to maintain their public right of way network in a condition so that it all is usable at all times. As a National Route it needs to be in good condition at all times of the year. The existing A3, which is built to a relatively high standard, would not require the same high level of maintenance.

Turning now to the proposals to surface part of the verge along the existing A3 can I request that serious consideration be given to protecting the footway/cycleway by the introduction of a crash barrier along the outside of the carriageway. Not only will a barrier prevent motorists inadvertently leaving the carriageway it would also stop others who felt that the surfaced footway/cycleway was a convenient place to stop. This arrangement is recommended by the Countryside Agency/ Institution of Civil Engineers in their paper entitled Rural Routes and Networks.

In summary the old A3 offers the ideal opportunity to create a magnificent new national cycle route for all cyclists. It will offer the chance for people to cycle to work, school or for leisure purposes through a beautiful landscape. It should not be closed but modified for cyclists and walkers.

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