

A303/A358 South Petherton to M5 Taunton Improvement Public consultation and exhibition March 2007

Background

The London to South West and South Wales Multi-Modal Study (SWARMMS), completed in 2002, provided a long term strategy to address passenger and freight transport on the main rail and road corridors between London, the South West and South Wales. One of the recommendations of SWARMMS was to improve the A303 corridor between the M3 and the M5 to provide a high standard dual carriageway alternative to the M4/M5.

Further work was undertaken by the Highways Agency in 2004 to compare the A303/A30 between Ilminster and Honiton, which runs through the Blackdown Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), with an alternative improvement to the A358 between Ilminster and the M5 at Taunton. This further work led to a decision by the Transport Secretary at the end of 2004 to upgrade the A358 alternative, thereby avoiding the environmentally sensitive AONB.

A preliminary assessment of an A358 bypass for Henlade had been made by Somerset County Council in 2000 for inclusion in their 2001-2006 Local Transport Plan as a high priority major scheme. In addition, a scheme to widen the A303 Ilminster Bypass was previously designed by the Highways Agency in the early 1990s leading to the publication of an Environmental Statement and draft Orders in September 1996. The scheme was then put on hold along with other schemes on the A303.

In 2005 the Highways Agency commissioned consultants Parsons Brinckerhoff to develop proposals for both the dualling of the A303 Ilminster Bypass and the A358 between Ilminster and the M5 at Taunton.

Why the improvement is needed

- The only high standard route between London and the South West is currently the M4/M5, which is often congested and occasionally closed when major incidents occur
- Long queues of traffic frequently occur on the A358 during the morning and afternoon rush hours, particularly in the village of Henlade, and during the summer months on the A303 due to high volumes of holiday traffic
- Although the frequency of accidents on the A303 Ilminster Bypass has reduced following recent changes to the road layout and markings, the severity of accidents occurring is high, with a large proportion of serious and fatal accidents, often resulting in long tailbacks and sometimes road closures
- Collisions often occur on the approaches to junctions and local accesses due to the mixture of slower local traffic and higher speed long distance traffic
- The village of Henlade is divided in two by the A358 and the high volume of traffic creates problems of congestion, noise, air quality and community severance

- There are few safe overtaking opportunities along the A358
- There is little provision for pedestrians, equestrians and cyclists along the route.

Scheme objectives

- To provide part of a second strategic route between London and the South West
- To provide an alternative trunk road route to the A303/A30 through the Blackdown Hills AONB for traffic travelling between Ilminster and Exeter
- To improve safety for all road users, including pedestrians, equestrians and cyclists, and to reduce the number of accidents occurring on the route
- To reduce congestion and improve journey time reliability
- To separate local and long distance traffic and remove slow moving vehicles by eliminating direct access on to the strategic road network where possible
- To improve the environment within the village of Henlade by significantly reducing traffic-related problems of congestion, noise, air quality and community severance
- To provide a highway improvement which embraces the environmental characteristics of the area and minimises the impact on the flood plains

Rejected options

The area where the scheme is situated has several environmental constraints. A number of different options were identified along the A358 and A303 having due regard to the constraints along the route corridor. These options were subsequently assessed and several were eliminated for either design related or environmental reasons.

Options were considered for A358 routes to the north of Henlade which involved crossing part of the River Tone flood plain to the northeast of Taunton. These options also posed highway design and other environmental problems that would make them inappropriate for providing a trunk road route so were not pursued further. Variations to the route alignment were also identified between Henlade and Hatch Beauchamp and from Ashill to the Ilminster Bypass, but within the overall route corridor, for further investigation.

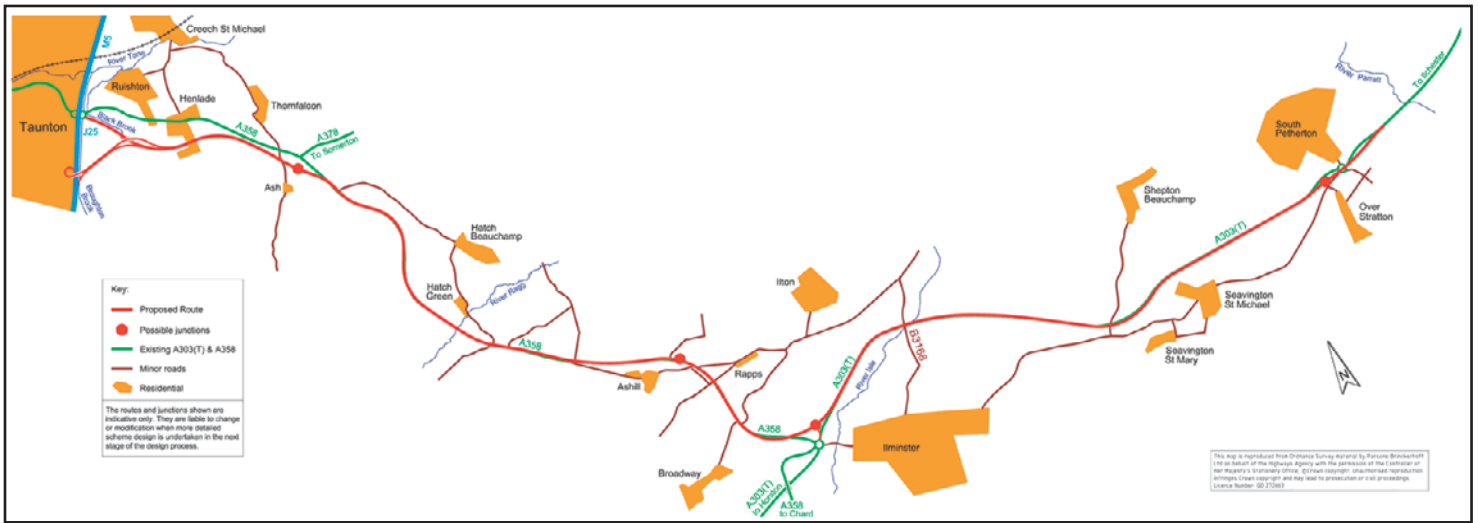
Links from the M5 to the A358 crossing land closer to the existing junction and requiring a large complex structure over the M5 were rejected in favour of the simpler design now being proposed.

Following further evaluation and consultation, the majority of the remaining options were rejected on either environmental, safety or engineering grounds. This has left only one option which minimises environmental impacts while also offering some benefits to certain aspects of the environment.

Details of the rejected options will be available to view at the public exhibitions.

Proposed route

The proposed route would create a new dual carriageway between the end of the existing A303 dual carriageway to the east of Hayes End Roundabout near South Petherton along the A303 to Southfields roundabout north of Ilminster, then along the A358 to the M5 motorway at Taunton. This is shown in red on the plan below.



Subject to the findings of the public consultation, this route will be proposed to Ministers as the single preferred option because it:

- Addresses the scheme objectives to reduce congestion and improve road safety, and provides a viable alternative to the A303/A30 route through the Blackdown Hills AONB
- Makes best use of the existing highway network and allows successful integration of the local, county and trunk road networks
- Represents a route that is sympathetic to the surrounding landscape and topography and minimises its impact on the flood plain
- Reduces traffic-related problems of congestion, noise, air quality and community severance in the village of Henlade
- Avoids demolishing residential properties
- Provides safer local traffic accesses and affords opportunities to improve access for pedestrians, equestrians and cyclists

The scheme would generally comprise on-line widening of the existing A303 Ilminster Bypass and A358. The most notable exception to this is along the length of the Henlade bypass, where the dual carriageway would pass south of Henlade before re-joining the existing road network at M5 junction 25, with separate link roads connecting directly with the M5 south of the existing junction.

Grade-separated (two level) junctions are proposed for the project, subject to further development of the scheme, as these provide the safest option for traffic joining and leaving a dual carriageway.

The purpose of the public consultation

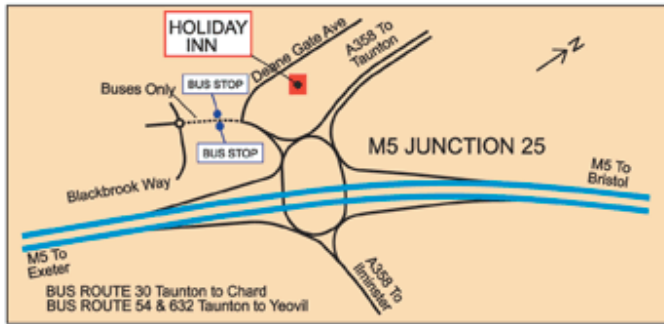
The purpose of this consultation is to present the proposals for the selected route and to seek the views of statutory bodies and other interested parties including people living, working and travelling in the area. You are encouraged to visit the public exhibition, details of which are on the rear of this brochure.

A questionnaire is included with this brochure which we would ask you to complete and return in the enclosed pre-paid envelope by **18 May 2007**.

Exhibition Venues, Dates and Times

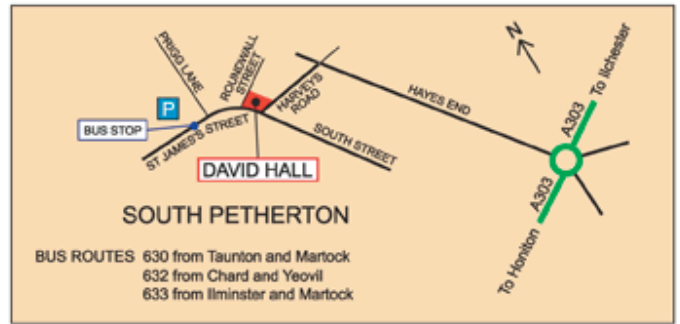
Holiday Inn, Taunton

Friday 2 March 2007 10.00am to 8.00pm
Saturday 3 March 2007 10.00am to 4.00pm



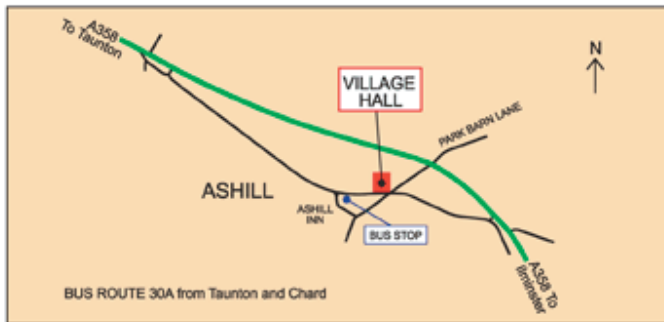
David Hall, St James's Street, South Petherton

Friday 9 March 2007 10.00am to 8.00pm
Saturday 10 March 2007 10.00am to 3.00pm



Village Hall, Ashill

Friday 23 March 2007 10.00am to 8.00pm



Village Hall, Ruishton

Saturday 24 March 2007 10.00am to 4.00pm



How you can help

Please try to visit the exhibition, where scheme details will be on display. Representatives from the Highways Agency and their consultants Parsons Brinckerhoff will be present at the exhibition to explain the proposals, to answer your questions and listen to your comments.

It is important that you let us have your views on the proposals by completing the enclosed questionnaire and either handing it in at the exhibition or returning it in the enclosed pre-paid envelope or by writing to us at the following address:

Sarah Watkin, Scheme Administrator
Zone 2/26H
Highways Agency
Temple Quay House
2 The Square,
Temple Quay
Bristol BS1 6HA

Completed questionnaires to be returned by **18 May 2007**

Further copies of this brochure and questionnaire are available from the exhibition or from Sarah Watkin at the above address or:

Telephone: 0117 372 8048
Email: A303A358Improvement@highways.gsi.gov.uk
Website: www.highways.gov.uk/roads/projects/14075.aspx

What happens next?

Responses to the public consultation will be carefully analysed. The results will be presented in a report which will be posted on the Highways Agency's website and deposited in the local area for the public to view. Details of the deposit locations will be advertised in local newspapers. The Secretary of State will then make an announcement on the preferred route to be taken forward which will protect the route against any further development. Further work on the scheme beyond this will be dependent on decisions taken on the A303 Stonehenge scheme and subsequent rounds of the regional prioritisation process. Should the scheme progress however, it will follow the stages indicated in the diagram below and there will be further opportunities to comment once the detailed proposals are published.

Alternative routes
investigated

Public consultation

Secretary of State
announces Preferred Route

Detailed proposals published
(start of statutory procedures)

Public inquiry
(if necessary)

Secretary of State
announces decision

Land acquisition

Construction starts

Contact us

For further information about the scheme contact Sarah Watkin, Scheme Administrator, at:
Zone 2/26H
Highways Agency
Temple Quay House
2 The Square
Bristol, BS1 6HA

Telephone: 0117 372 8048
Email: A303A358Improvement@highways.gsi.gov.uk

For real time traffic information:

08700 660 115

www.highways.gov.uk/trafficinfo

24 hours a day, 365 days a year

(Calls from BT landlines to 0870 numbers will cost no more than 8p per minute; mobile calls usually cost more)

For general Highways Agency information:

08457 50 40 30

email: ha_info@highways.gsi.gov.uk

24 hours a day, 365 days a year

(Calls from BT landlines to 0845 numbers will cost no more than 3p per minute; mobile calls usually cost more)

Safe driving at roadworks

Remember that tiredness can kill. Take regular breaks from driving.



During 2005, five workers were killed and 12 seriously injured in the course of their work on Highways Agency roads. This was the worst year since 1999.

For the safety of all road users and roadworkers, drivers approaching roadworks are advised to:

- Keep within the speed limit – it is there for your safety
- Get into the correct lane in good time – don't keep switching
- Concentrate on the road ahead, not the roadworks
- Be alert for works' traffic leaving or entering roadworks
- Keep a safe distance – there could be queues in front
- Observe all signs – they are there to help you