

**A303/A358 SOUTH PETHERTON
TO M5 TAUNTON**

REPORT ON PUBLIC CONSULTATION

August 2007

Report No. HHT91730BA/01

Final





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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**1.1 Public Consultation**

1.1.1 A public consultation exercise was held into proposals to improve the A358 between M5 junction 25 at Taunton and the existing Horton Cross roundabout and also the A303 Ilminster bypass, in combination.

1.1.2 The twelve-week consultation period ended on 18 May 2007 and incorporated one councillors preview exhibition, seven public exhibitions, one public meeting and a number of separate meetings with parish councils. All of these were attended by Highways Agency staff along with their representatives.

1.1.3 A public consultation leaflet was prepared showing the preferred option and explaining the need for the scheme. It also contained a questionnaire used to gauge opinions on the preferred route and allowed respondents the opportunity to make suggestions and comments. It was distributed to land/home owners directly affected by the route, councillors, members of parliament and a number were left at deposit points across the route corridor where they were available to the public. More than 6,000 leaflets (including questionnaires) were distributed throughout the consultation period.

1.1.4 The Highways Agency website address for the scheme was made available to the public on the public consultation leaflet, where information on the scheme was made available. Members of the public also had the opportunity to make their responses to the public consultation, over the Highways Agency Information Line (HAIL).

1.1.5 The Stage 2 Environmental Assessment Reports (EARs) were sent to Statutory Environmental Bodies (SEBs). The SEBs were then asked to comment on the proposals and their formal responses state no major objections to the scheme.

1.1.6 There were six Scheme Assessment Report (SAR) deposit points (also used to supply the public consultation leaflets to the public).

1.2 Responses to the Public Consultation

1.2.1 1,020 questionnaires were returned following the consultation period. 79% were received by post. The majority of the responses showed favour for the scheme with 771 (76%) supporting the principle of an improvement of the A358/A303. 626 people (61%) responded that they also found the proposed route to be acceptable.

1.2.2 212 letter responses were received, again the majority of which (90%) arrived by post.

1.2.3 From both the comments sections of the questionnaires and the separate letters, the majority of the concerns over the scheme related to the proximity of the loop diverge at the M5 junction 25 to the Blackbrook estate. The concerns included the effects of noise, air and visual pollution, reduction in property values and the loss of the Blackbrook Pavilion playing fields. Of the 386 comments which were made in relation to why people do not find the proposed route acceptable, 38% of these stated that the Blackbrook loop was the reason

- 1.2.4 In general, the majority of the concerns raised could be incorporated as part of the detailed design stage for a preferred route without the need to significantly alter the alignment. They include protecting the environment (for example noise, air and visual pollution), ensuring minimum land take, improving the connectivity of the existing roads to the new route and ensuring safe access by non motorised users.
- 1.2.5 Three main alternatives to the proposed route were identified from the public consultation. These are being reviewed, developed and investigated as part of the report *A303/A358 South Petherton to M5 Taunton Comparison of Alternative Proposals S1, S2 and S3*.



REPORT ON PUBLIC CONSULTATION



2 INTRODUCTION

2.1 General

2.1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide a summary of the public consultation exercise undertaken for the A303/A358 South Petherton to M5 Taunton Improvement. The report describes the proposed scheme and the consultation arrangements, and provides factual information on the responses received.

2.2 Background

2.2.1 The London to the South West and South Wales Multi Modal Study (SWARMMS), which was published in May 2002, recommended the improvement of the A303 route from the M3 to the South West of England to provide a high standard alternative route to the M4/M5 corridor. Essentially this would require upgrading the remaining lengths of single carriageway on the A303 east of Ilminster to dual carriageway standard.

2.2.2 The study also looked at the A303/A30 between Ilminster and Honiton. Because the route runs through the Blackdown Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), SWARMMS also considered an alternative improvement to the A358 linking the A303 at Ilminster with the M5 at Taunton. This alternative route had initially been raised as an Objector's Alternative at the Public Inquiry for the A303/A30 Ilminster to Honiton schemes in 1996.

2.2.3 The SWARMMS study recommended linking a dualled A358 to the M5 near Taunton, provided that an acceptable means of connecting an upgraded A358 at its northern end to M5 could be found. SWARMMS also recommended that on balance the A358 alternative should be the preferred scheme since there is a policy presumption against new or improved infrastructure in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

2.2.4 The South West Regional Assembly subsequently carried out a review of the SWARMMS findings and, following a debate in July 2002, the Assembly recommended to the Secretary of State that both the A303/A30 Ilminster to Honiton and the A358 Ilminster to M5 should be dualled. In a response to this and SWARMMS the Secretary of State for Transport asked in December 2002 that the feasibility of improving both routes be considered further with a view to determining which of the routes should subsequently be upgraded.

2.2.5 A report was submitted to the SW Regional Assembly comparing the advantages of the A303/A30 and the A303/A358 alternatives and on 29 November 2004 the Secretary of State for Transport announced that the A358 alternative would be improved. The A358 proposals included 'free flow' links to and from the M5 to the south of the existing Junction 25. That is, two link roads would be provided to allow unrestricted movement of traffic from the westbound A358 to the southbound M5, and from the northbound M5 to the eastbound A358.

2.3 Previous Studies

A303 Ilminster Bypass

- 2.3.1 The existing A303 Ilminster Bypass was built in 1988 and lies between the Southfields Roundabout, which is 2km northwest of Ilminster, and heads eastwards to the Hayes End Roundabout, which is 1km south of South Petherton.
- 2.3.2 A scheme to widen the A303 Ilminster Bypass was previously designed in the early 1990's. The proposed improvement was for on-line widening to two 7.3m wide carriageways with a nominal 4.5m wide central reserve and 3.5m wide verges. The proposals required significant work to the existing structures to accommodate the widened carriageway.
- 2.3.3 The scheme was progressed up to the production of an Environmental Statement and Draft Orders in September 1996 before being put on hold in the 1997 Roads Review, along with other schemes on the A303 Trunk Road. This 1996 scheme (unlike the current proposal) did not include the replacement of the Hayes End junction with a grade-separated junction. As a result, the alignment followed the existing highway more closely than that which is now proposed.

A358 Ilminster to M5 Taunton

- 2.3.4 As the A358 is not a trunk road, no studies had been undertaken by the Highways Agency before SWARMMS. A preliminary assessment of a bypass for Henlade was made by Somerset County Council in 2000 for inclusion in the 2006 – 2011 Local Transport Plan as a high priority major scheme.
- 2.3.5 Subsequent to SWARMMS, consultations were held with Somerset County Council to discuss the implications of the SWARMMS strategy along with development pressures for the Taunton area. These discussions resulted in the investigation of further options, which included a new M5 junction to the north of Taunton, known as Junction 24A. It was concluded that these options would not be developed further until Somerset County Council had established the future need for the new motorway junction.
- 2.3.6 Options were also considered for the connection of the new Junction 24A to the existing Junction 25, and for A358 routes to the north of Henlade. Each of these options involved a route across the River Tone flood plain to the northeast of Taunton. These options could not be designed to comply with current trunk road design standards and it was therefore decided not to pursue these options any further. At the same time, variations to the route alignment were identified between the M5 and Hatch Beauchamp (Henlade Bypass) and from Ashill to the A303 Ilminster Bypass, but within the overall route corridor, for further investigation.
- 2.3.7 Options were identified from earlier work for further assessment; Option A, which included a free flow link to the M5 southbound carriageway only, and Option C, which included links to the both southbound and northbound M5 carriageways. Both options were otherwise identical. Option C was selected to be taken forward as part of the proposed route.
- 2.3.8 Variations to the Option A route alignment for a southern bypass to Henlade (options A1 and A6) and between Ashill and the Ilminster Bypass (options A1 to A7) were

developed. These options are illustrated on Figure 1.3 in the A358 Technical Appraisal Report.

- 2.3.9 As described above, through environmental and economic comparison and further value engineering and risk workshops, and through the consultation process with Statutory Environmental Bodies, two options were selected for further review to select an option for presentation at a public consultation exercise (Options A and B).
- 2.3.10 The two route options that have been considered to improve the A358 to dual carriageway standard are Option A, over a length of approximately 16km and Option B, approximately 14.8km in length. Both of these options largely follow the same alignment, which involve on-line widening of the existing A358, but differ at the south eastern end of the scheme, where they connect to the A303.
- 2.3.11 Following a meeting with the Environment Agency in August 06, Option B was dropped and a single route was developed for presentation at public consultation.

2.4 The Proposed Route

- 2.4.1 The A358 section of the route connects with the M5 junction 25 by a junction incorporating two free flow links, which facilitate the unrestricted movement of traffic from the westbound A358 to the southbound M5 and from the northbound M5 to the eastbound A358. These would connect the M5 to the south of the existing junction 25, with the Blackbrook roundabout and with the start of the new A358 offline section. There will be a new arm off the junction 25 roundabout, providing the connection with the proposed A358 and the existing link to the A358 will be maintained.
- 2.4.2 The offline section starting at the M5 junction runs south of Henlade and parallel to the existing A358 for 4.3km, re-joining it east of a new grade separated junction serving the A378 at Thornfalcon. From this point the existing road is widened as far as Southfields Roundabout, following the existing route.
- 2.4.3 New grade separated junctions are also proposed at Ashill and Southfields.
- 2.4.4 The A303 then connects at the new Southfields junction and heads east. The proposed route generally widens and follows the existing carriageway as far as the Hayes End junction.
- 2.4.5 At Hayes End, the existing at-grade roundabout would be replaced with a grade-separated junction consisting of slip roads linking to roundabouts. A new overbridge would link these roundabouts to form a dumbbell arrangement to the south of the existing road. On the north side of the dual carriageway the slip roads connect directly to the roundabout and a link road connects the roundabout to South Petherton. The proposed junction will require road lighting to allow drivers to appreciate the layout during the hours of darkness or poor visibility.

2.5 Purpose of Consultation

- 2.5.1 The purpose of the public consultation was to present the proposed route and to seek views on the outline proposals from the general public, local authorities and other interested bodies.

2.5.2 The display material at the exhibition made it clear that the junction proposals were indicative only and may be subject to change as detailed design progresses, with consideration of the comments received during the consultation.

2.6 Route Improvement Objectives

2.6.1 Within the overall aims of the Government's expenditure on roads, The Secretary of State's objectives for the scheme are:

- To provide part of the second strategic route between London and the South West.
- To provide an alternative trunk road route to the A303/A30 through the Blackdown Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty for traffic travelling between Ilminster and Exeter.
- To improve safety for all road users, including pedestrians, equestrians and cyclists, and 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 trunk 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 local flood plains.

3 GENERAL

3.1 Consultation Arrangements

Reports

- 3.1.1 Stage 2 Environmental Assessment Reports (EARs) were issued to selected consultees as part of the consultation process, including the Statutory Environmental Bodies (SEBs). These included Natural England, English Heritage and the Environment Agency, with an invitation for them to make comments and request any further consultation, on 27 February 2007.
- 3.1.2 These reports included assessments of environmental impacts and effects on the surroundings. They also included chapters on traffic forecasting and economics, as well as illustrative design plans for the scheme.
- 3.1.3 The Scheme Assessment Report (SAR) was made available to members of the public by depositing copies in locations along the length of the proposed route on 26 and 27 February 2007. The deposit locations are given in Appendix 6.
- 3.1.4 The responses from the consultation with SEBs are discussed in Section 6 of this report.
- 3.1.5 Consultation was also sought with Government Bodies, County Borough, Parish and District Councils and local businesses. These organisations were sent a copy of the exhibition leaflet and invited to attend the exhibition venues to view the material on display.

Leaflet and Questionnaires

- 3.1.6 A Public Consultation leaflet was prepared containing information on the scheme proposals. It was distributed before and at each of the exhibition venues. Details of the exhibition dates and venues were also given within the leaflet. A plan showing the venue locations is available in Appendix 6.
- 3.1.7 The leaflet included a questionnaire for respondents to complete and return to the Highways Agency. Questions were asked to gauge opinion on the proposals shown at the exhibition. The option was given for respondents to make comments on the scheme, whether they believed the proposed route to be acceptable and any aspects of the proposed route they would like to see changed.
- 3.1.8 The leaflet contained contact details to enable comments to be made to the Highways Agency. These consisted of postal address, email and website address, telephone number and the address for the Highways Agency Information Line (HAIL). It also clearly displayed the closing date for responses of 18 May 2007. A copy of the leaflet and questionnaire is included in Appendix 2.
- 3.1.9 Leaflets were delivered directly through the doors of properties within 100m of the proposed route on the 05 March 2007 and 26 February 2007. However, properties situated within 100m, but shielded by other properties facing onto the route, did not receive leaflets in this drop.

3.1.10 The public consultation leaflets and questionnaires were also distributed to deposit points including local businesses, libraries and post offices on 26 and 27 February 2007. These locations were then checked and re-supplied on 16 March 2007, where necessary and included:

- Highways Agency, Temple Quay House
- Ilminster Town Council
- Somerset County Council (also SAR deposit point)
- Taunton Deane Borough Council (also SAR deposit point)
- South Somerset District Council
- South Somerset District Council (Chard Area Office, SAR deposit point)
- Ilminster Library (also SAR deposit point)
- Chard Library
- Taunton Library (also SAR deposit point)
- South Petherton Library (also SAR deposit point)
- Ilminster Tourist Information Centre
- Taunton Tourist Information Centre
- Yeovil Tourist Information Centre
- South Somerset Tourist Information Office
- Ilminster Post Office
- Ilton Post Office and Stores
- Horton Post Office and Stores
- Henlade Post Office
- South Petherton Post Office
- Shepton Beauchamp Post Office and Stores
- Taunton Deane Motorway Service Area
- Sedgemoor Services – Somerset Visitors Centre
- Bridgwater Motorway Service Area
- Exeter Motorway Service Area

- Cullompton Motorway Service Area
- Little Chef, Southfields
- Harp Road Garage
- Ashill Car Sales and Shop
- Ashill Village Hall
- Hatch Beauchamp Garage
- Thornfalcon Filling Station and Shop
- George Inn, Donyatt

3.1.11 The Highways Agency directly mailed affected landowners, commencing on 23 February.

3.1.12 A leaflet drop was also made to residents located near the second exhibition venue at South Petherton on 16 March 2007.

3.1.13 The approximate numbers of leaflets (including the questionnaire) delivered to various parties before and during the exhibitions are shown in the table below.

Table 3.1 Numbers of public consultation leaflets delivered

Delivery Date	26 February 2007	27 February 2007	05 March 2007	16 March 2007
Recipient				
Deposit Points	2,825	1,750		1,250
Public (residential and commercial properties)	222	-	93	-
Total	3,047	1,750	93	1,250

3.1.14 The leaflet and consultation questionnaire were also made available from the Highways Agency website. This meant they could, if desirable to respondents, be completed and submitted electronically.

3.1.15 Copies of the leaflet and consultation questionnaire were available at the exhibition venues.

Advertising

- 3.1.16 The public consultation exhibitions were advertised as follows:
- Highways Agency website for the A303/A358 South Petherton to M5 Taunton Scheme (<http://www.highways.gov.uk/roads/projects/14075.aspx>)
 - Highways Agency press notice published on 26 February 2007
 - Formal invitation to attend the preview of the public consultation exhibition sent to Members of Parliament, MEPs and local councillors (dated 12 February 2007)
 - Advertisements placed in the local newspapers, the Somerset County Gazette and the Western Gazette on 22 February, 1 March 2007 and 22 March 2007
 - Notices posted at each of the deposit point
 - Copies of posters sent to the Parish Councils
 - Notices posted at the exhibition venues on the day of the exhibition

- 3.1.17 Further details of the advertising of the public consultation exhibitions are contained in Appendix 1.

Public Exhibition

- 3.1.18 Public consultation exhibitions were held in March and May 2007. Details are shown in section 3.2, including the number of visitors that attended. The exhibitions were attended by staff from the Highways Agency, Parsons Brinckerhoff and Somerset County Council, who were available to answer questions on the proposals from members of the public.
- 3.1.19 The venues were selected with the aim of covering the scheme area as far as possible and providing opportunity to attend for members of the public across the area. The locations are shown in the public consultation leaflet in Appendix 2 and on the fold out drawing in Appendix 6.
- 3.1.20 The public consultation exhibitions presented the scheme proposals on display boards with a combination of drawings and descriptive text. The display material can be seen in Appendix 5. It should be noted that the proposals shown were based on the preliminary design and therefore subject to change as detailed design progresses.
- 3.1.21 Also displayed at the public exhibition was a 3-D visualisation. This consisted of a computer-generated virtual-reality-style drive-through and fly-over of parts of the proposals.
- 3.1.22 The visualisation covered the following areas:
- Drive-through of route between Junction 25 and the Thornfalcon Junction

- Drive-through of route between the Thornfalcon Junction and the Haydon Farm Junction
- Fly-around of the Haydon Farm Junction
- Fly-around of the Thornfalcon Junction
- Fly-around of Ashill/Southfields
- Fly-around of the Hayes End Junction

3.1.23 This aimed to clarify the proposals and was presented on a large television screen, running a programme of approximately fifteen minutes on a continuous loop.

3.1.24 Before the opening of the public exhibition on Friday 2 March 2007, a preview exhibition was held for councillors and other invitees at which Highways Agency, Parsons Brinckerhoff and Somerset County Council staff were available to explain the proposals and answer questions.

3.1.25 At each of the exhibition venues, there was a facility for members of the public to make written comments, or request that a member of the exhibition staff recorded their views in the 'promises book'. These are currently being addressed by the Highways Agency.

Consultation Period

3.1.26 The closing date for receipt of comments at this stage of consultation was 18 May 2007. This gave a period of consultation period of 12 working weeks from the date the questionnaire and leaflet were first distributed and 11 weeks after the first exhibition. This date was stated on both the leaflet and the questionnaire.

3.2 Attendance at the Exhibition

3.2.1 The following table summarises the attendance at the exhibitions.

Table 3.2 Public exhibition venues and attendance

Venue	Date	Opening Times	Number of Visitors
Holiday Inn, Taunton (Preview)	Thursday 1 March 2007	7pm – 9pm	39
Holiday Inn, Taunton	Friday 2 March 2007	10am – 8pm	
	Saturday 3 March 2007	10am – 4pm	865
David Hall, South Petherton	Friday 9 March 2007	10am – 8pm	
	Saturday 10 March 2007	10am – 3pm	757
Village Hall, Ashill	Friday 23 March 2007	10am – 8pm	441
Village Hall, Ruishton	Saturday 24 March 2007	10am – 4pm	346
		Total	2,448

3.2.2 After the initially planned exhibitions had taken place, and following concerns raised formally by South Somerset District Council, a further exhibition was held at Ilminster as detailed below. The Ilminster Chamber of Commerce raised similar concerns in their written response during the consultation.

Table 3.3 Attendance at the Ile Youth Centre exhibition

Venue	Date	Opening Times	Number of Visitors
Ile Youth Centre, Ilminster	Friday 11 May 2007	12am – 7pm	140
		Grand Total	2,549

3.3 Other Meetings

3.3.1 A further public meeting with presentation was held at the Blackbrook Pavilion on the 29 March 2007. This meeting was requested by a local councillor further to concerns raised by residents of the Blackbrook Estate, at the western end of the A358. Their concerns included how noise and visual impacts would affect them, the use of the Blackbrook playing fields in the proposed scheme and capacity issues with the M5 junction 25. Details of the presentation are provided in Appendix 7.

3.3.2 A number of Parish Council and other public meetings were also attended on request during the consultation period. Again, plans were displayed and committee members and the public were invited to ask questions of representatives from the Highways Agency, Parsons Brinckerhoff and Somerset County Council. A complete list of the non-exhibition meetings attended is shown in the following table.

3.3.3 Attendance figures at these meetings were not formally recorded. No meetings were attended between 12 April 2007 and the local council elections on 5 May 2007 as these dates represent a pre-election embargo period.

Table 3.4 Other meetings

Date	Parish Council/Organisation/Group	Representation
7 March 2007	Ruishton/Thornfalcon	Highways Agency/Parsons Brinckerhoff
14 March 2007	Hatch Beauchamp/Neroche	Highways Agency/Somerset County Council
15 March 2007	Stoke St Mary	Highways Agency
21 March 2007	South Somerset District Council Area West Committee	Highways Agency
27 March 2007	West Hatch Parish Council	Highways Agency
28 March 2007	South Somerset District Council Area North Committee	Highways Agency

29 March 2007	Blackbrook Residents Meeting	Highways Agency/Parsons Brinckerhoff
4 April 2007	South Somerset District Council Executive Committee	Highways Agency
14 May 2007	South West Regional Assembly Transport Group	Highways Agency/Parsons Brinckerhoff

3.4 Local Press Coverage

- 3.4.1 The scheme was covered by the local press including the Chard and Ilminster News and the Somerset County Gazette.
- 3.4.2 The articles (see Appendix 9) cover all aspects of the scheme. Some are factual and report only the detail of the proposals, for example informing of the times for the exhibition, the scheme costs, and describe the new junction proposals.
- 3.4.3 Others portray the opinions of residents, businesses or Councils in relation to the scheme. Several of the articles deal specifically with the effect on the community at Ilminster. It is described that many fear that the improvements to the A358/A303 will remove trade and businesses opportunities from the town centre.
- 3.4.4 The Chard and Ilminster News carried a story relating to the perceived negative effects that the scheme will have on the Blackbrook Pavilion and the Blackbrook Estate. The article states that the residents are stating their concerns. A similar article in the Somerset County Gazette further states that a public meeting will be held on the 29 March 2007 to allow Blackbrook residents to express their views.

3.5 Effectiveness of the Consultation

- 3.5.1 Feedback on the quality, convenience and level of publicity of the exhibitions was obtained through the use of ‘How was it for you?’ forms, which were only available at the exhibition venues.
- 3.5.2 43 feedback forms were collected from the Holiday Inn, Ashill and Ruishton venues. Of these 43, 91% felt that the exhibition provided sufficient information for the public and other attendees to understand the proposals. 91% thought the panels were easy to understand and 70% felt that the 3D Visualisation contributed to this understanding.
- 3.5.3 42 out of the 43 believed that the location was convenient for them and the feedback shows that 67% travelled to the exhibitions by car.
- 3.5.4 30% of those who completed the feedback forms did not believe there was enough publicity for the exhibition dates and venues.
- 3.5.5 Photographs of each of the exhibition venues are included in Appendix 4.
- 3.5.6 The general response to the Blackbrook Pavilion public meeting, contained within written responses received after the event, was that many did not feel it was run very effectively. This related mainly to the lack of a suitable public address system in the hall, making it difficult for people to hear what was being said, given that other activities were taking place in the hall simultaneously.



A303/A358 South Petherton to M5 Taunton Improvement Questionnaire

Please read the brochure before completing the questionnaire.

When you have completed the questionnaire, please post it in the enclosed pre-paid envelope to reach us no later than 18 May 2007.

1. Do you support in principle an improvement to the A303/A358 South Petherton to M5 Taunton?

Yes No

2. Do you find the proposed route shown in red on the brochure sketch plan generally acceptable?

Yes No

If you answered no, please give your reasons:

.....
.....
.....
.....

3. Is there any part of the proposed route you would like to see changed?

Yes No

If you answered yes, briefly describe the change:

.....
.....
.....
.....

4. Please give your name, address and postcode

This will only be used as a means of analysing the location of responses as part of the consultation exercise.

Please use block capitals

Name:

Address:
.
.

Postcode:

5. Please use this section for any further comments you wish to make:

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This document has been prepared in accordance with the criteria of the Cabinet Office Code of Practice. A copy of the criteria is available on request from the address opposite or is available on the Cabinet Offices's website at:

www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/regulation/consultation/code/index.asp

Information provided in response to this consultation, including personal information, may be published or disclosed in accordance with the access to information regimes (these are primarily the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA), the Data Protection Act 1998 (DPA) and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004).

If you want the information that you provide to be treated as confidential, please be aware that, under the FOIA, there is a statutory Code of Practice with which public authorities must comply and which deals, amongst other things, with obligations of confidence. In view of this it would be helpful if you could explain to us why you regard the information you have provided as confidential. If we receive a request for disclosure of the information we will take full account of your explanation, but we cannot give an assurance that confidentiality disclaimer generated by your IT system will not, of itself, be regarded as binding on the Agency.

The Agency will process your personal data in accordance with the DPA and in the majority of circumstances; this will mean that your personal data will not be disclosed to third parties.

4 QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES

4.1 Questionnaire

4.1.1 For the purposes of the report, 'local' is defined as those people residing within the postal code areas of TA***. The total number of responses was 1,020 of which 904 were from within the TA*** band. Of the remaining responses, 116 were from other postcodes outside of the 'local' area. A complete list of the postcodes from which responses were received can be found in Appendix 6.

4.1.2 The analysis below includes all 1,020 responses. A figure identifying the general support for the scheme, based on the responses to question 1 of the questionnaire, is shown in Appendix 6.

4.1.3 The 1,020 questionnaire responses were returned in various formats. The breakdown of responses and the method through which they were received is shown below:

- Highways Agency website = 182
- Post = 803
- Handed in at exhibitions = 35

4.1.4 There were a further 212 responses made by letter or email to the Highways Agency. These written responses included requests for additional information, suggested alternatives and comments. 190 of these letters were received by post and the remaining 22 by email. 30 gave support for the scheme and the remaining 182 were in opposition to the scheme. The letters received from the general public are discussed in section 5. The formal letter responses, which were received by the Highways Agency from organisations including statutory bodies or councils, are discussed in section 6 of this report.

4.2 Yes/No Responses

4.2.1 Question 1 Do you support in principle an improvement to the A303/A358 South Petherton to M5 Taunton?

- Yes ~ 771
- No ~ 236
- Don't Know/No Opinion/Blank ~ 13

4.2.2 Question 2 Do you find the proposed route shown in red on the brochure sketch plan generally acceptable?

- Yes ~ 626
- No ~ 380

- Don't Know/No Opinion/Blank ~ 14

4.2.3 The responses to question 2 are subject to comments made in the space available on the questionnaire. The comments and reasons are summarised in the following paragraphs under section 4.3.

4.2.4 Question 3 Is there any part of the proposed route you would like to see changed?

- Yes ~ 572
- No ~ 390
- Don't Know/No Opinion/Blank ~ 58

4.2.5 The responses to question 3 are also subject to comments. The responses received are summarised under section 4.4.

4.3 Written Comments - Responses to Questions 1 & 2

4.3.1 *Those who **do not** support the scheme and **do not** find the route acceptable (total number of responses in this range 217) give a range of reasons. These include requests to reconsider the dualling of the A303 across the Blackdown Hills. Some have suggested that the Exeter-Honiton link is not complete until this work is carried out. It is believed that the completion of this link will minimise the need for improvements at the M5 junction. It is also suggested that the Blackdown Hills link would alleviate congestion on the A358 and on the M5.*

4.3.2 Many of the residents of the Blackbrook Estate (adjacent to the M5 junction loop diverge) have objected, in the majority due to the loss of what is considered by them to be valuable amenity land; including playing fields associated with the Blackbrook Pavilion leisure centre. Some have raised concerns over the proximity of the loop diverge to residential properties, which they believe will create noise, visual and air pollution problems to local residents. There is also an overall issue of concern for the diminution of the value of property.

4.3.3 *Those who **do not** support the scheme but who **do** find the route acceptable (total number of responses in this range 17) have given no reasons why they find the route acceptable.*

4.3.4 *Those who **do** support the scheme and **do** find the route acceptable (total number of responses in this range 604), have given no reasons why they find the route acceptable. These respondents however have made several other comments in their responses to questions 1 & 2.*

4.3.5 One such comment suggests that the Haydon Farm junction be straight rather than circular and a second asks that land take be minimised.

4.3.6 Overall, it was requested that as little land as possible should be taken in constructing the scheme. Some responses highlighted concerns over the scale of the proposals.

4.3.7 An additional or repositioned junction is requested in the belief that the Ashill junction is too close to Ilminster, with no other junction for some distance.

- 4.3.8 Whilst there was overall support for the scheme under this category of responses, local access featured as a common concern. Specifically, residents requested that local access be maintained to Bickenhall Lane, Meare Green and Hatch Beauchamp.
- 4.3.9 *Those who do support the scheme but do not find the proposed route acceptable (total number of responses in this range 159), focus their concerns on the Blackbrook loop diverge and also the M5, including J25. Many of these objections are conditioned by comments that they are in support of the scheme overall, but not the Blackbrook loop. The reasons for this echo those in paragraph 4.3.2, but in addition register concern over how the loop will affect the Fire Control Centre at Blackbrook and the effect the scheme will have on the environment around Blackbrook. In the context of the responses, 'environment' in this case is taken to mean the natural environment (floral and faunal) and not just air, noise or visual pollution effects.*
- 4.3.10 Similarly, noise and disruption during construction from the work on the motorway slip road are stated to have a negative effect on the Ruishton Nursing Home. It is felt that a slip road here will increase congestion on the M5. The suggestion is made to take the M5 traffic off at Walford Cross (which is located on the A38 adjacent to the M5 and north of junction 25). One particular response noted that the radius at junction 25a is very tight and that they have issues with potential braking or gear changing noise. There was also concern over high-sided vehicles over-turning on the loop.
- 4.3.11 One response states that the highway is elevated through Hatch Green and concerns are expressed over noise pollution from the elevated section.
- 4.3.12 Again, local accessibility problems are raised, specifically direct access to Hatch Beauchamp and to Folly Drove, Stewley. A suggestion is made to relocate the Ashill junction to Stewley Cross. Many comment that minor roads are not shown and it appears that they have assumed that access is severed altogether. The question is asked if there are there enough junctions for people to join. A further response made in relation to Stewley Cross raises concern over the distance of the new junction from the main road. It is claimed that there is a large amount of traffic using this road and that traffic counts should be undertaken.
- 4.3.13 It is also believed that the improvements will bring about increased traffic volumes through Hatch Beauchamp and Ashill. Furthermore, several comments were made by respondents who believed that Ashill would effectively lose its bypass if the improvements go ahead, due to the increase in local traffic using the road through Ashill.
- 4.3.14 There is a recommendation that the new road should eliminate the southerly Southfields loop by following a direct line from the B3168 to Ashill, north of Rapps. A feeder road could then serve Ilminster, Chard and Broadway.
- 4.3.15 Residents of South Petherton have questioned the complexity of the junction at South Petherton. Users would like the designers to ensure adequate facilities for pedestrians, equestrians and cyclists are able to cross the A303 safely at the location. It was also noted that many of the pedestrians and cyclists are young children from Watergore and Over Stratton going to school in South Petherton. This proved to be a common thread through the responses and of great concern to many people.
- 4.3.16 Residents of Watergore (near to South Petherton) are worried that noise pollution will adversely affect them.

- 4.3.17 It is stated that the dual carriageway and new South Petherton slip road are too close to Hayes End, including the school.
- 4.3.18 The need for the junction at Horton, in place of the existing one was questioned.
- 4.3.19 The table below summarises the reasons given by respondents who **do not** find the route acceptable, in response to question 2. It lists the common reasons, along with the numbers of comments received that relate to each point. It should be noted that a single questionnaire response may contain reference to a number of reasons why they do not find the route acceptable, therefore the total of the numbers below will differ from that of the overall 'No' responses to question 2, as stated in paragraph 4.2.3 (380).

Table 4.1 Reasons why people do not find the route acceptable

Reasons why people do not find the proposed route acceptable	Numbers of Comments
Blackbrook loop (includes intrusive to residents, concerns over air, noise, visual pollution, loss of playing fields etc at this location)	147
A303 Blackdown Hills route is a better alternative	36
Route will cause or increase congestion on the M5 and at J25	27
The money used to fund the scheme would be better spent on public transport/encouraging people not to use their cars	21
Environmental impacts generally (includes impacts to wildlife, air, noise and visual pollution, health concerns)	18
Negative effects on Henlade/need for a bypass at Henlade (this comment is interpreted as referring to the segregation of Henlade from Lower Henlade)	16
Connectivity to local/minor roads is poor	15
Excessive use or loss of land (including agricultural land)	15
Reduction in the value of property (relating to properties outside Blackbrook responses)	15
South Petherton junction too complex	9
Congestion along the remainder of the route corridor generally	7
Route encroaches on Watergore	8
The improvements will encourage high speeds	6
Road will be dangerous to non-motorised users	6
Other reasons*	40

*Other reasons, incorporates those reasons with less than 4 responses or those where no reason was given in the comments box

4.4 Written Comments - Responses to Question 3

- 4.4.1 In response to the question relating to whether people would like to see the route changed, there were a variety of reasons and several suggestions made.
- 4.4.2 A large number of responses focused on their preference to undertake the Blackdown Hills dualling scheme over the A303/A358 scheme. Again, this was stated as making the best use of the Exeter-Honiton link and the work already undertaken on parts of the A303 network.
- 4.4.3 The opposition to the Blackbrook loop diverge is also apparent in this category of responses. Many request that the junction with the M5 is moved further south to avoid congestion problems through Henlade (taken to mean Lower Henlade) and on the M5 itself.
- 4.4.4 A number of the responses state that Henlade (taken to mean Lower Henlade or refer to the severance of Henlade from Lower Henlade) needs a bypass as part of the improvements. There are several alternative suggestions, which include taking a bypass to the south of Henlade, another taking a bypass north around Creech and joining the M5 at Walford Cross. A similar suggestion was made in previous responses.
- 4.4.5 Requests are made to integrate the scheme with a proposed Park and Ride scheme at Cambria Farm, Henlade, to ensure that the anticipated Park and Ride traffic can access the main through routes easily.
- 4.4.6 Residents of Hatch Beauchamp have concerns over the degree of accessibility for the village to the A358 and some make a suggestion to include a junction closer to Hatch Beauchamp. In general, the accessibility of minor roads and driveways to the A358 features throughout these responses. Further to the issue of access to Hatch Beauchamp, the same query on access is raised in relation to Bickenhall Lane and to Buckland St Mary. It is stated that these types of roads have been merged and forced to use 'twisty' lanes, which are not felt to be suitable for regular traffic. The question is asked if traffic surveys of the minor roads have been carried out.
- 4.4.7 It is stated that tourists will be diverted around Ilminster, as this will no longer be a through route. This set of responses also suggests that a junction is added to the east of Ilminster and west of Seavington St Michael to reduce the traffic flow through Seavington and Watergore by diverting east bound local traffic onto the bypass.
- 4.4.8 It is suggested that the Ashill junction be located at Capland. This follows on from concerns expressed in earlier responses whereby residents fear the traffic flow through the village will increase. Others would like to see the route go to the south of Ashill.
- 4.4.9 At South Petherton, the opinion is expressed that the junction, including extensive lighting, will not fit in with the surrounding environment. However, the need to make a junction at this location safe for use by non-motorised users is recognised as being important.

4.4.10 The table below summarises the reasons given by respondents **who want to see the route changed**, in response to question 3. It lists the common reasons, along with the numbers of comments received that relate to each point. As with responses to question 2, it should be noted that a single questionnaire response may contain reference to a number of reasons why they would like to see the route changed. Therefore, the total of the numbers below will differ from that of the overall ‘Yes’ responses to question 3, as stated in paragraph 3.2.5 (572).

Table 4.2 Reasons why people want to see the route changed

Reasons why people want to see the route changed	Numbers of Comments
Blackbrook loop (includes intrusive to residents, concerns over air, noise, visual pollution, loss of playing fields etc at this location)	176
They don't see the need for the scheme	43
The South Petherton junction is too complicated	41
Concerns over the environmental impacts generally (includes impacts to wildlife, air, noise, light and visual pollution, health concerns)	35
To include more provision for NMUs	33
The A303 Blackdown Hills should be improved instead	31
To improve connections of local/minor roads to the new route	29
Its proximity to Watgore (increased noise, visual pollution, affect on property values etc, at this location only)	28
Concerns over congestion or safety on the existing roads/lanes once the new route/improvements are in place	27
Scheme needs to include a bypass for Henlade (this comment is interpreted as referring to the segregation of Henlade from Lower Henlade)	23
Believe the route will cause or increase congestion on the M5 and at J25	16
Junction is needed at Hatch Beauchamp	12
Proximity to houses	11
Other reasons*	94

*Other reasons, incorporates those reasons with less than 4 responses or those where no reason was given in the comments box

4.5 Written Comments - Responses given in closing comments

- 4.5.1 Only additional comments are described in this section. Many of the comments made in the available space at the end of the questionnaire have already been described in the responses and comments from questions 2 and 3.
- 4.5.2 It is clear that in general the scheme is welcomed. It is stated that the route should lead to a great improvement in traffic flow at Henlade and Ruishton and the layout looks well thought through. Many believe the improvement to be long overdue and there is some frustration that it may be further delayed awaiting a decision on the Stonehenge scheme.
- 4.5.3 There is a lot of support evident for the route option proposed and for improvements at Henlade.
- 4.5.4 A question was raised over how a local flood problem at Ruishton would be addressed as part of the scheme.
- 4.5.5 There are repeated requests to consider the environmental impact of the scheme, specifically incorporating landscaping to 'soften' the visual and noise impacts. In relation to this, concerns are expressed over the disruption and delays that may be suffered during construction.
- 4.5.6 There is support for the Ashill junction and also for the Ashill overbridge.
- 4.5.7 Further to a point made in previous responses, it is stated that it will be essential to have a junction at Ilminster.
- 4.5.8 A request was made to improve the junction at the top of Stoke Road.
- 4.5.9 In this section, there were more comments in relation to the perceived negative effect on businesses, for example the Thornfalcon Garage. Conversely, several other local businesses stated that they welcomed the potential of having improved links with the M5.
- 4.5.10 It is suggested that the junction at South Petherton is moved westwards. The provision of two bridges would allow residents of Yeabridge/Over Stratton and Watgore to remain part of the 'Parish'. It was also felt that the junction at South Petherton was too complicated.
- 4.5.11 Rapps/Cad Road is believed to be a rat run and it is thought that the improvement, including the junction nearby, will exacerbate this situation.
- 4.5.12 A number of general concerns relate to people's preference to encourage and integrate the use of public transport and reduce car use.
- 4.5.13 On the issue of inclusive travel for non-motorised users, a bridleway is requested between Hatch Beauchamp and Curland (which is near to Staplefitzpaine to the south of the scheme). There is some concern over the apparent loss of public footpaths (it is stated these are labelled as bridleways on the plans) 24/42 and 24/89, near to Frogmary Green. There are also repeated requests to ensure that pedestrians are considered carefully, especially where known crossing points (the example given is at South Petherton), currently exist.



5 LETTER RESPONSES

5.1 General

5.1.1 Responses from individuals are described in this section. Responses from organisations such as local authorities are covered in section 6.

5.2 Those who do not support the scheme or aspects of the route

5.2.1 In the letter responses that meet the criteria for this category, respondents present their arguments against the A303/A358 preferred option or parts of it. The majority of the comments relate to the use of the Blackbrook playing fields and sports pavilion grounds for the loop diverge.

5.2.2 Some of the alternative proposals include one is to make use of unused land to the rear of the Tennis Club at Blackbrook. Further proposals discuss relocating the M5 slip road further south, avoiding existing communities. A similar suggestion is described as making use of the green space between the Shoreditch and Trull Bridges (both south of the M5 junction 25) instead of going through the Blackbrook playing fields.

5.2.3 A major alternative that is suggested in one letter response proposes that the M5 slip is moved further south and an over-bridge is installed diagonally across the existing M5 carriageway for eastbound traffic. The author is aware of the environmental implications of this option as it may affect a flood plain. This option (Alternative S1) is discussed further in section 7. In the absence of this alternative, the author requests that full height noise reduction panels are installed around the loop, landscaping is used to screen the effects of the loop and continuous air monitoring is undertaken to ensure there are no adverse effects on local populations.

5.2.4 Further concerns are raised in relation to increased traffic volumes on the M5 and how the motorway would be able to cope with the perceived increase in traffic accessing the A358 at this location. Others also believed that junction 25 is already over capacity and would not be able to cope with increased traffic volumes. Many responses deal with the issue of the environmental effects and feel that the scheme does not contribute to the reduction of car use, pollution and carbon emissions.

5.2.5 Agricultural access forms a large part of one particular written response. The author raises the Southfields junction as a concern area, stating that an agricultural access should be allowed off the junction. In the same response there are concern that the old A358 from Horton Cross roundabout will become attractive to travellers. The impact of St Aldhelm's overbridge on a local farm is also raised as an issue. This response states that while the author understands the need for the Ding bridge, it would be better if it were lower. It suggests that the Ashill junction should be moved from its proposed location west, to Kenny Overbridge and then the Ilton to Ashill road should be extended to the north side of the A358.

5.2.6 Several of the residents of Watgore have made representation in writing. Many of the Watgore respondents claim that Watgore was omitted from the plans and this appears to have given the impression that the village has not been considered in the proposals. The request is made to ensure that Watgore is considered when the final design is drawn up. Specific issues include, noise including the incomplete

sound barrier constructed in part in the 1980s, pedestrian access and the complex junction at South Petherton (also a common thread in the questionnaire and written comment responses).

5.2.7 At Seavington (close to Watergore), some concerns are expressed in relation to commercial vehicles accessing the potato packing business near Seavington St Michael. It is requested that a suitable access be designed to prevent repetition of near-miss accidents that have occurred in the existing situation.

5.2.8 The owner of the Hatch Park Estate has made a lengthy response in writing which incorporates a number of issues. These include specifically; use of bund screening adjacent to Hatch Park stables, need for low-noise surfacing, need to ensure drainage and the stream alongside Griffin Lane are integrated correctly due to historical flooding problems, concerns over the effect potential temporary road closures and diversions would have on farming operations, as well as the severance to farming operations following the scheme.

5.3 Those who do support the scheme and do find the route acceptable

5.3.1 Comments made by letter include many in support of the scheme. The letters contain requests for further information and clarification on the knock-on effects of the A303/A358 improvements on other “strategic routes” in the southwest.

5.3.2 It is believed that the improvements will benefit the economy of Taunton as well as reducing traffic congestion. A number of supportive responses state that the work should be undertaken as quickly as possible.

6 RESPONSES FROM AUTHORITIES, ORGANISATIONS AND STATUTORY BODIES

6.1 General

6.1.1 The responses received expressed general support for the proposed scheme; however, the groups consulted raised various issues to be considered as the design is developed. Some of the respondents also requested that they be consulted further throughout the detailed design stage.

6.2 The Environment Agency

6.2.1 The Environment Agency (EA) identifies flood risk across the Broughton Brook and Black Brook as a consideration in the design of the M5 junction. It is requested that alternatives avoiding Flood Zone 3 be investigated. The Agency believes that the increased surface water disposal at Thornfalcon is likely to have a significant impact unless properly mitigated.

6.2.2 They suggest that the alignment through this area is regraded on the existing dual carriageway and skew off the line just east of Henlade; generating what they believe will be less surface water and construction waste. The EA will require that all abstracts are fully identified and investigated, as identified in the Background Water Quality and Drainage Report. It is also requested that fisheries information should be more detailed and specifically mentions Black Brooks, River Rag, River Ding and River Isle.

6.2.3 At the Ilminster end of the scheme, the EA will need to consider any design alternative 'more recently suggested' and the effects they may have on addition surface water disposal. The River Isle at Cocks Bridge is raised specifically as being an area of significant ecological importance. The EA will also need to comment on the flood risk mitigation designs for the whole scheme more thoroughly throughout the next stage of the design process.

6.3 Natural England

6.3.1 Natural England sent a written response stating that at this time they did have any comments on the Stage 2 Environmental Assessment Report. However, they have since stated (in an email in week ending 27/07/07) that there may be further comments from others within Natural England. These comments remain outstanding.

6.4 English Heritage

6.4.1 English Heritage state that all geophysics evaluation should start as soon as decisions on progressing the scheme are made. They have also made reference to previous correspondence in relation to historic buildings. They request that their comments, in relation to the how the scheme will influence the setting of historical buildings in the area, are included.

6.5 Blackdown Hills AONB

- 6.5.1 Blackdown AONB acknowledges that providing alternative trunk road route that avoids the Blackdown Hills is one of the objectives of this scheme. They do not wish to comment on any details of the scheme but would offer some general comments worth consideration.
- 6.5.2 It is claimed that while tranquillity may have already been affected through the area of the scheme, it should be possible to use good lighting and surfacing design to limit any further negative impacts. They suggest that the construction of various overbridges along the A358 will require careful consideration to minimise land take and the visual impact on the route.

6.6 Taunton Deane Borough Council

- 6.6.1 In their response, Taunton Dean Borough Council state that they have taken in account the strength of the public opinion against the compact loop at Blackbrook. The Council’s response incorporates a strong objection to the unacceptable impact on the residential amenities, loss of playing fields and adverse impact on the environment of the Blackbrook Leisure Centre.
- 6.6.2 They urge the Highways Agency to examine the potential for accommodating the alternative junction arrangement that they propose on a sketch plan and that can be found in the appendices to this report (Alternative S2). It is requested that consideration is given to people’s perception that the projected vehicle flows are too low and the importance of providing adequate mitigation measures for the occupants of Stoke Road, which will be in very close proximity to the new road. Some consideration should also be given to minimising the adverse impact on the garage business at Thornfalcon and the need to deter deer from crossing the road. The issue of congestion on the M5 is raised as being a potential problem once the scheme is complete.

6.7 Somerset County Council

- 6.7.1 Somerset County Council (SCC) reiterates its support for the scheme in their letter. The letter goes on to say that, it is believed that the improvements to the route will tackle congestion, pollution and road casualties and improve the economic competitiveness of the region.
- 6.7.2 They set out a number of concerns relating to alignment and welcome the opportunity of further involvement in the establishment of the final design. In summary, the issues raised include those listed below. The specific recommendations resulting from this (and other) responses are in section 8.2 of this report.
 - The lack of NMU provision
 - Size and complexity of South Petherton junction not appropriate
 - Noise pollution at Watergore and Seavington
 - Loss of trade for Ilminster

- Height of embankment in vicinity of Ding Mill culvert
- Location of some of the new junctions
- Connections for local travel
- Blackbrook loop and its effect on the local community, including the fire control centre.

6.8 South Somerset District Council

6.8.1 In the written response from South Somerset District Council (SSDC), they state their emphatic support for the dualling of the A358/A303. The Council's main concerns relate to the safety of route users, including the Parrett Trail and Sustrans routes in the area. They request facilities for safe routes to schools.

6.8.2 As there will be reduced links onto and off the dual carriageway, vehicles such as milk tankers and farm vehicles may have to travel much further distances. The Council asks that care be taken to ensure that provision is made for these types of vehicles to access and cross the dual carriageway.

6.8.3 Some concern is expressed in relation to proposals to divert potential tourism away from Ilminster and also the employment effects at Hort Bridge, in relation to the South Somerset Local Plan.

6.8.4 SSDC is also concerned that the Park and Ride at Cambria Park will not integrate with the new scheme.

6.8.5 SSDC consulted each of their area Committees. Many of these Committees made their own representations in writing and these have been covered already in this section of the report. The only responses not reported follow in the paragraphs below.

6.8.6 The Area West Committee was generally in favour of the scheme. The main items of concern were:

- Lack of a junction at Ilminster and the effect on trade in the town
- Potential for HGVs to overturn on the dumbbell roundabouts
- Land allocations are considered in developing projected traffic flows
- Land take is minimised
- Reduced number of junctions and accesses (i.e. will there be sufficient remaining), accessibility for NMUs
- Low noise surfacing must be used
- New Ashill junction should include access to Ilton Business Park

6.8.7 The Area North Committee also welcomed the scheme and raised the following issues:

- Access for NMUs
- Need to involve SSDC's Rights of Way team in discussions relating to public footpaths
- Noise abatement measures which they feel should be included in the design
- Local residents to be kept fully informed
- Clarification on the access of some local roads
- Clarification on the arrangements for a grade separated junction at Cartgate
- On completion of the scheme the existing stretch of the A303 should be renumbered to a lower order highway

6.8.8 The Council's Principal Landscape Architect states that in order to reduce the visual prominence of the Hayes End and Southfields junctions, the height and intensity of the lighting associated with the roundabouts should be kept to a minimum. There should also be a strong planting presence and other elevated elements to ensure that both traffic movement and lighting at night is visually contained. The height prominence of the Ashill overbridge is stated as being a particular concern and it is suggested that either the level of the main carriageway is dropped or another location is found in which to locate the structure. The on-line solution was welcomed but it was recognised that the construction must be integrated into the landscape pattern to disguise the road's presence. It is also suggested that off-site planting is utilised.

6.9 Parish Councils

6.9.1 Martock Parish Council attended the Area North Committee meeting and would like consideration given to including junction proposals that they have been trying to secure for some time. Specifically, they raised access and egress at Cartgate and nearby Tintinhull Fortes, as well as the Cartgate Roundabout.

6.9.2 Stoke St Mary Parish Council thanked the Highways Agency for their contribution in helping the community to understand the proposals. Issues raised by the Parish Council include:

- The need to clean out the watercourse of Blackbrook to ensure the flooding problem in the area does not persist
- Stoke St Mary and Haydon have suffered in the past by being used as a rat run (also stated in an earlier representation), it is believed that this may be of particular concern during the construction phase
- Noise from traffic, they believe that increased traffic volumes will outweigh the benefits of the low noise surfacing
- The Highways Agency must confer with Somerset County Council over the Cambria Farm Park and Ride scheme
- Avoid excessive lighting at the Thornfalcon Junction

- 6.9.3 Stocklinch Parish Council is in favour of the scheme and believes that low noise surfacing must be used.
- 6.9.4 Broadway Parish Council would like consideration given to making a junction at Stewley Cross, a suggestion also made in an earlier questionnaire response. This would give access “to the A358 through Broadway instead of the Rapps proposal”.
- 6.9.5 Ruishton and Thornfalcon Parish Council include in their written response concerns over the effectiveness of the M5 junction in coping with the traffic being attracted to the route by the A358 upgrade. It is also questioned, whether the concrete lined cutting through Henlade (as shown on the plans) will amplify/create a noise problem. The letter includes concerns over accessibility to existing lanes, light pollution caused by the Thornfalcon junction (a concern expressed elsewhere in these responses), the impact of the improvements on business (although they are not specific in saying what effects they anticipate) and the numbers of footpaths that will be crossed by the new highway.
- 6.9.6 Neroche Parish Council highlight in their response that low noise road surfacing should be offered as part of the scheme, the cross-community links should be preserved where possible and that where large numbers of HGVs are using the lanes of Bickenhall and Batten’s Green, consideration is given to improvements to the access and condition of these small highways.
- 6.9.7 Seavington Parish Council would like written assurance that there will be no diversion on the old A303, which passes through Seavington St Michael. They would like to see the footpath at the end of Upton Lane maintained to allow access for workers to Branston’s. It is also suggested that while alternatives at Watergore may be being considered, the option of re-designing the junction at Branston’s is given some thought to aid the movement of very large HGVs at this location.
- 6.9.8 Compton Dundon Parish Council request that a weight limit is introduced on the B3151 following the completion of the scheme to prevent HGVs from using this as a short cut between the A303 and the M5. The B3151 is north of Tintinhull and Langport and some distance from the scheme.
- 6.10 South West of England Regional Development Agency**
- 6.10.1 The South West of England Regional Development Agency request that dialogue is maintained in the development of the scheme and also in relation to the Stonehenge scheme and the establishment of the second strategic route through the southwest.
- 6.11 South West Regional Assembly**
- 6.11.1 The South West Regional Assembly supports the work carried out by the Highways Agency but urges that efforts be made to explore alternatives that can justify the overall cost and value for money of the scheme. The SWRA asks that public and private consultation remain ongoing and that the safety issues identified on the A303 West of Ilminster are addressed in the design. They also request that the route is prioritised as a second strategic route and that opportunities for use of the road for shorter distance commuting are limited.

6.12 Devon County Council

- 6.12.1 Devon County Council (DCC) has specifically raised concerns over how the scheme will be funded based on the Regional Assembly's annual budget. They also question the timeliness of the A358/A303 Consultation until a decision is made on the Stonehenge scheme. DCC have expressed an interest in the justification behind the free-flow slip roads on the M5.

6.13 Wiltshire County Council

- 6.13.1 Representatives of Wiltshire County Council also have no major objections to the scheme and support the principle of having a second strategic route to serve the South West. They do however believe that Stonehenge should be given preference over this scheme. This is because of its greater beneficial outcomes in terms of reducing major delays and the environmental and cultural benefits. The Council also have concerns over scheme funding and how smaller regional schemes may suffer if the A358/A303 is to be funded from the Regional Funding Allocation.

6.14 Dorset County Council

- 6.14.1 Dorset County Council have responded to the consultation in a letter expressing their support for the scheme as a 'second strategic route' into the south west of England. They believe that this scheme will assist in the regeneration and business development of the area. While they support the scheme, Dorset County Council are concerned that funding which would normally be used to support urban growth, is allocated to this scheme instead, as it appears to them that there is insufficient funding currently available to fund the project.

6.15 Chambers of Commerce

- 6.15.1 The Ilminster Chamber of Commerce and Industry written response gives what they describe as broad approval of the scheme. They do however raise concerns over the appropriateness of the Southfields junction in the context of its surroundings, a concern raised in earlier responses. They also state that there are plans to construct a large commercial development close to this junction and ask if this has been considered in its design. The Chamber is also concerned that the scheme will not encourage visitors into the town. The suggestion is made to locate a junction at Ilminster. They also request sufficient signage from South Petherton and Southfields junctions.
- 6.15.2 Plymouth Chamber of Commerce writes to confirm its support for the improvements to the A303/A358 as a second strategic route. However, they do tentatively suggest that perhaps merging the A303 with the M5 via the A358 will lead to congestion issues in the future.
- 6.15.3 The South West Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Exeter Business Forum give full support to the scheme. They recognise it to be a vitally important inter-regional east-west trunk and trade route. They would also like to see the construction programme accelerated to help to complement the A354 relief road improvement project serving Weymouth and in time for the Olympic Games. Exeter Business Forum would also like climbing lanes to be constructed at key locations on the A303/A30 between Horton Cross and Honiton.

6.16 DEFRA

6.16.1 DEFRA's independent response in writing states that its main concern is the loss of high quality land of agricultural grades 1, 2 and 3a. The section around Henlade/Thornfalcon is stated to have the most adverse effect on good soil and loss of the best quality land across the scheme. It is said that the route 'may' also pass through or near an AONB and this must be given consideration. DEFRA has no formal comments to make in relation to the scheme.

6.17 British Horse Society/South Somerset Bridleways Association

6.17.1 A copy of a letter addressed to Somerset County Council was received from the South Somerset Bridleways Association, which reiterates other parties concerns over NMUs but obviously deal specifically with ensuring the provision is made for existing and possible new bridleways.

6.18 Sport England

6.18.1 Sport England makes written representation, and expresses their concern over the potential loss of the sports pitches at Blackbrook. They do state that they are aware that the Highways Agency has indicated that suitable alternative pitches will need to be provided. They request an assessment that considers the potential impact of playing pitch provision in Taunton. Sport England states that at present, and until such an assessment is undertaken, they oppose the current proposals, specifically the junction at Haydon Farm.

6.19 Local Schools

6.19.1 Earlier concerns made in relation to the proximity of the A303 route to the school at South Petherton, are expanded upon in a letter response from the Governors.

6.19.2 Heathfield Community School state that they use the Blackbrook playing fields and that they would not like to see this area of recreational space lost.

6.20 Sustrans

6.20.1 Sustrans' written response includes points on the assessment of accessibility for NMUs by way of a Non Motorised Users Audit; they state that this would need to be done to ensure the most effective solutions for NMU use of the new scheme. It is also requested that land is included in the acquisition programme for links at Ilminster and Ruishton, a grade separated crossing is included at Ilminster, traffic-free paths are constructed in line with the National Cycle Network Guidelines, and that new paths are dedicated as bridleways or cycle tracks. Sustrans have provided a second written response, which addresses the following issues:

- Crossing facilities on the A303 at South Petherton and the River Parrett Trail
- NMU crossing facilities at the Thornfalcon Junction, where the highway is widened and a new bridge installed. Sustrans state that where there are

multiple roundabouts adjacent to crossing facilities, they would expect to see adequate provision for NMUs

- Sustrans expect the old A358 alignment, specifically between Ruishton and the M5 junction, to be traffic calmed, to avoid it becoming a high speed rat run
- Public transport integration into the scheme
- Safe facilities for NMUs (particularly school children) emerging from schools at Horton, Ashill, Hatch Beauchamp and Ruishton

6.21 The Ramblers' Association

6.21.1 The Ramblers' Association highlight in their response that it is important that the existing public Rights of Way and crossings are taken into consideration during the scheme upgrade. They continue by stating that the access arrangements to the M5 south of junction 25 are highly obtrusive with significant health and safety issues for the residents at Blackbrook.

6.22 Other Organisations

6.22.1 A written representation was received by the Communities and Local Government FiRe Control Project. Due to the proximity of the proposed Fire Control Centre to the Blackbrook Loop, it stated that the loop option is not acceptable. It is claimed that the building could be subject to damage in a road traffic accident, and that its position in relation to the loop might aid in facilitating an attack by hostile parties.

6.22.2 Taunton and District Civic Society state in their written response that they broadly support the proposal to improve the A303 and A358. They support, very strongly, the proposed route through Henlade, even though it will cause some disruption to those living on Stoke Road. They are not, however, in support of the 'free-flow' connection to the M5 and the Blackbrook loop across the playing fields.

6.22.3 Shell UK Limited (in conjunction with Travelodge Hotels Limited) responds by stating their concerns over the effect the improvements will have on business at their Ilminster services. They ask to be kept informed of the scheme's progress.

7 SUGGESTED ALTERNATIVES

7.1 General

7.1.1 The following alternatives have resulted from suggestions made by consultees and supported through suggestions from local residents, either at the exhibitions or in written responses following the events. The alternatives named S1, S2 and S3 have been developed from these suggestions to comply with the accepted highway design standards. The original sketches showing the alternatives, as submitted by the consultees, can be found in Appendix 8.

7.2 S1 – South of Current Loop Position

7.2.1 Alternative S1 is based on proposals submitted to the Highways Agency by a local resident via e-mail on 13 March 2007 and also by Taunton Deane Borough Council through HAIL.

7.2.2 The northbound exit slip road would diverge from the M5 northbound approximately 260m south of the existing Holway Road overbridge. A taper diverge slip road would be constructed on embankment eventually crossing the M5 motorway on a new skewed overbridge.

7.2.3 The connector road would then take traffic eastwards past Haydon Farm on a straight section, crossing the new A358 with a new overbridge, linking to a slip road entry to A358 eastbound, in a similar way to the loop option.

7.2.4 The alignment would require alteration to the existing Haydon Lane overbridge, by opening up the western span and reconstructing the existing spill-through abutment as a solid faced concrete structure. Clear passage under the western span would be achieved either by provision of a single lane slip road, widening to two lanes once past the overbridge, or by providing a two-lane slip without hard shoulders.

7.3 S2 – North of Blackbrook Pavilion Leisure Centre

7.3.1 Alternative S2 is based on an alternative submitted by Taunton Deane Borough Council in their letter to the Highways Agency dated 23 April 2007.

7.3.2 The northbound exit slip road would diverge from the M5 northbound immediately north of the existing Holway Road overbridge. A taper diverge slip road would be constructed on embankment eventually crossing the M5 motorway on a new skewed overbridge.

7.3.3 A connector road would then take traffic eastwards past Haydon Farm and cross the new A358 with a new overbridge, linking to a slip road entry to A358 eastbound, again similar to the loop option.

7.4 S3 – South of South Henlade

7.4.1 Alternative S3 is a possible alternative based on a suggestion by Somerset County Council (SCC) in their letter to Highways Agency dated 14 May 2007 to investigate a

possible route south of Lower Henlade further. It was also supported by comments and alternatives suggested in other responses during the consultation period.

- 7.4.2 The main-line alignment from Thornfalcon to M5 junction 25 would be re-aligned southwards to pass south of Lower Henlade.

7.5 Connection to M5 North of Junction 25

- 7.5.1 Several of the letters responses from the public, along with some of the comments made in the questionnaire, suggested moving the M5 junction north of junction 25.

- 7.5.2 The SWARMMS report, published in May 2002, recommended upgrading the A358 west of Ilminster instead of the A303/A30 provided "an acceptable mean of connecting an upgraded A358 ... with the M5" could be identified. The south-bound free-flow junction proposals have been designed to address this requirement. The north-south movements are not strategic traffic, with much of this traffic joining or leaving the A303 at Yeovil. However, to provide relief to the existing Junction 25 on the M5, alternative northbound links with M5 were considered, but were rejected due to the impact on the flood plain, geometric design issues and community severance.

- 7.5.3 One of the main alternatives suggested was to site the new junction at Walford Cross (junction with the A38/A361) near Creech St Michael and joining the M5 north of junction 25. However, due to the impact on the River Tone flood plain areas to the northeast of Taunton and geometric design issues, this option is discounted.

7.6 Connection to M5 South of Junction 25

- 7.6.1 Several of the letter responses suggested that Taunton does not have the infrastructure to cope with the junction that is currently in place at the M5 junction 25. The respondents believe that the improvements will increase the volume of traffic using the existing junction. It is suggested therefore, that the new junction arrangement with the M5, should be relocated south of the existing junction 25, avoiding the residential areas of Taunton. Due to the likely significant environmental impact of crossing a tranquil rural area and the additional cost of relocating the offline section to the south, this option is discounted.

7.7 Hayes End

- 7.7.1 It was suggested that it would benefit the residents of Watergore if the proposed A303 were to be moved away from properties, for example further north.

- 7.7.2 At Hayes End, the alignment of the new dual carriageway is constrained by the cemetery immediately adjacent to the existing roundabout. On account of this, the geometric design standards for high speed dual carriageways are such that there is little scope for modifying the carriageway alignment significantly from the one shown at the exhibitions. Any alternative would impact on the cemetery and possibly require demolition of property, neither of which are acceptable.

7.8 Rapps Option

- 7.8.1 An option was considered which provided a direct link from the A358 at Ashill to the A303 at Burleaze Farm. This suggestion featured in the consultation responses but it should be noted that it was discounted before the Public Consultation due to the likely environmental objections, as the route crossed the River Isle flood plain.

7.9 Review of Alternatives

- 7.9.1 A review of the developed alternatives for S1, S2 and S3 has been undertaken and is summarised as part of the July 2007 Parsons Brinckerhoff report *A303/A358 South Petherton To M5 Taunton Comparison of Alternative Proposals S1, S2 And S3*. This report includes drawings of each of the options as they have been developed from the original suggestions.



8 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 General Issues

8.1.1 The general concerns raised during the consultation are listed below. Those listed will not affect the route alignment and should be considered in the detailed design stage of the preferred route.

- Environment – deterioration in noise and air quality, and visual impact. This would include light pollution from any new lit junctions along the length of the scheme
- A common thread was also the concern of road noise. To address this it will be important to use a low noise surfacing system
- Traffic and safety – HGVs using existing routes and through local villages
- Connections to local and minor roads – these could increase traffic through the local villages, although local residents also require access to the A358. It may be necessary to involve SCC in developing connections throughout the route, as they may be able to provide appropriate evidence of the impacts and thus assist in investigating the levels of severance caused
- Landscape design featured throughout the responses and should be used to minimise visual and noise impacts where possible
- Provision for NMUs. This includes pedestrians, equestrians and cyclists and would incorporate inclusion of crossing facilities, bridleways and footpaths. Representations made by Sustrans, The Ramblers, The British Horse Society and individual members of the public have all raised the issue of crossing points and underpasses where public rights of way currently exist or will be moved. A majority of the County, District and Parish councils also highlighted the need for safe and coherent NMU facilities and suggested they could assist with the investigation of these issues
- Land take. A number of responses highlight that land take should be minimised and severance of land should be kept to a minimum
- Access for agriculture and business, access to the road network for both local farmers and for businesses is seen as being of key importance

8.2 Specific Issues

8.2.1 The issues listed below related to those listed in paragraph 8.1.1 above but are more specifically linked to parts of the scheme. Like the above list, they would also have minimal impact the preferred alignment and should be considered in relation to the development of the alignment at detailed design stage.

- It was felt that Henlade would suffer negative impacts as a result of the scheme. Many responses requested a bypass for Henlade (this is interpreted as a reference to Lower Henlade or possibly the severance of Henlade from Lower

Henlade, as Henlade is bypassed). These negative effects are stated to include increased noise and traffic disruption, particularly for properties on the Stoke Road section of the route. It will be necessary to assess and mitigate these impacts where possible

- Residents of Watergore showed strong opinion against the proximity of the scheme to their homes. Measures should be incorporated to minimise any negative noise impacts from the existing Ilminster bypass.
- Noise impacts should also be mitigated at Seavington and Ashill.
- Concerns were raised over the effects of light pollution from the Thornfalcon junction and how appropriate the layout is to the surroundings. This to be borne in mind when undertaking lighting and final junction layout design at this location
- Many people were concerned that the South Petherton junction is too complex and does not allow easy connection to the existing road network. It is also stated that there must be suitable provision for non-motorised users between South Petherton and Over Stratton. Particular concern for NMU provision, was raised by SCC at the Bridge House Junction, east of South Petherton. These matters should be considered when finalising the layout for the South Petherton junction. It may also be necessary to look at the provision of an additional link into South Street, South Petherton from the northern roundabout at Hayes End. This would address concerns over the design standards of the street. Finally, consideration should be given to the relocation of this junction to Frogmary Green
- In finalising the layout for the Southfields junction, it is suggested that it may be possible to reconfigure the existing roundabout to simplify the overall layout of the new junction
- Congestion on the existing route, because of the scheme, was said to be an issue at locations including the M5 junction 25, Henlade (and Lower Henlade), Ashill, Hatch Beauchamp and Henlade. These possible effects should be taken into account when siting junctions onto the new route from the existing road network and the traffic through these settlements modelled with the scheme in place. SCC have suggested that they may be able to provide supporting evidence to assist with the development of the design in this respect
- Accessibility to Hatch Beauchamp was not felt to be sufficient by many. Consideration should be given to siting a junction nearer to Hatch Beauchamp and to maintaining access between Hatch Beauchamp and Bickenhall. This should incorporate NMU access
- The proposals to realign Kenny overbridge are a considerable distance south of the existing connection. Review this connection, as it may be possible to find a compromise between the existing and the current proposal
- Review the position of the St Aldhelms bridge, as it is felt to be too far south. Using the original location may be possible, however this may encourage increased speeds in the vicinity of Shrubbery Farm
- Traffic flow counts on the existing local and minor road network should be carried out to assess the effects of the scheme on the existing network and accessibility should be considered in the detailed design. This should incorporate a study into

potential 'rat-runs' - for example through Stoke St Mary, Haydon, and Rapps/Cad Road

- A suggestion was made to relocate the Ashill junction to Stewley Cross. This should be assessed at detailed design stage, taking into account additional traffic data from the existing minor road network. It should be recognised that moving the junction north or south would affect more properties
- It will also be necessary to consider the impact of the Ashill junction on the landscape and its surroundings
- A request is made to review the height of the Ding Mill Culvert and consequently the height of the embankment adjacent to it
- HGV access to businesses along the route, specifically the potato packing plant at Seavington was raised. The accessibility of the junction and access roads in the vicinity of the plant should be further investigated
- Ensure that the bus route passing through Capland can be maintained and liaise with SCC over the Park and Ride facilities proposed for Henlade
- Provide sufficient signage to ensure minimal loss of trade and negative effects on businesses in Ilminster
- Further detailed proposals for flood mitigation are required by the Environment Agency, but the reporting should take into account locally identified flood problems at Black Brook and Ruishton

8.2.2 The following list of concerns would have a more significant effect on the preferred route by resulting in its deviation from that shown at the public consultation.

- The position and layout effects of the Blackbrook loop at the M5 junction 25 on the residents of Blackbrook, including noise, air and visual pollution
- Assess the Lower Henlade alternative put forward by various parties in response to the public consultation (Alternative S3)
- Impact on local amenities – major concerns regarding impact on the Blackbrook playing fields and tennis club
- Other schemes – a number of responses queried the preference of the A303/A358 improvement over the A303 Blackdown Hills Improvement
- Consider whether the scheme needs to be extended eastwards in view of the proximity and complexity of junctions between Cartgate and South Petherton

8.3 Recommendations

8.3.1 It is recommended that the main alignment of the proposed A303 Ilminster Bypass and the A358 Ilminster to Taunton route between the A303 and the proposed A378 Thornfalcon Junction be announced as the Preferred Route.

- 8.3.2 The recommendation on the main A358 alignment of the route between the proposed A378 Thornfalcon junction and M5 Junction 25 is subject to the outcome of a separate study into alternative S3 proposed during the public consultation.
- 8.3.3 The recommendation on the free-flow link between the A358 and the M5 is subject to the outcome of a separate study into the two alternatives S1 and S2, proposed during the public consultation.
- 8.3.4 If the proposed free-flow link is adopted, then no further consultation will be necessary. If one of the alternatives is selected as the proposed route, then it will probably be necessary to hold another, more limited public consultation into the free-flow link proposals only.