

36/SWW/06

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STONEHENGE IMPROVEMENT OPTIONS UNVEILED

Possible options for the A303 around Stonehenge were outlined today by Stephen Ladyman, Minister of State for Transport, and David Lammy, Minister for Culture.

The options for improvements to the road follow the decision in July 2005 to look again at the planned bored tunnel, which has seen the cost escalate to £510m.

In addition to the bored tunnel, the following alternatives are also being looked at:

- Bypasses of the Stonehenge site, either to the north or south
- A 'cut and cover' tunnel past Stonehenge;
- Changes to the Countess Roundabout, closure of the A344/A303 junction and construction of the Winterbourne Stoke Bypass.

Stephen Ladyman said:

"The Government is committed to improving the A303 past the World Heritage Site at Stonehenge. I hope that everyone with an interest in this important issue will take this opportunity to contribute to the review process. I am keen to take account of as many views of possible before deciding on an option that will be in keeping with the special requirements of the location as well as being affordable, realistic and deliverable."

David Lammy said:

“This review is an important stage in our work. We need to find a solution for the A303 past Stonehenge that is right for the setting of the Stones and right for the historic landscape which surrounds them. Our aim is to realise the goals we have set out in the Stonehenge World Heritage Site Management Plan. This is an opportunity for us all to work together to find an answer that we can unite around and deliver. I look forward to hearing views.”

The public consultation will run from 23 January 2006 to 24 April 2006. As part of the consultation, public exhibitions will be held in both Salisbury on 9–11 February 2006 and in London on 17–18 February 2006. Representatives of the Highways Agency and its consultants will be available to explain the options and answer questions.

NOTES TO EDITORS:

1. The Highways Agency is an executive agency of the Department for Transport. It manages, maintains and improves the network of trunk roads and motorways in England on behalf of the Secretary of State. It works closely with other transport operators and with local authorities to integrate the trunk road network with the rest of England’s roads and other forms of travel.
2. The Highways Agency’s contractor for the scheme is a joint venture of Balfour Beatty/Costain, working with their designers, a joint venture of Halcrow/Gifford. The cost estimate of £510million for the planned scheme assumes a construction start date of 2008.
3. Following the Public Inquiry in 2004 into the Highways Agency’s proposals for improving the A303 past Stonehenge, the Inspector recommended a new dual carriageway should be built, along with a 2.1 km long bored tunnel, to remove the effects of the road and traffic from Britain’s most famous prehistoric site.
4. However, the cost of the new road has risen significantly since the Inquiry and this has prompted Ministers to request a review of the scheme to identify lower cost options.

5. In order to inform the review, the public will be consulted on the options identified for further consideration. The consultation responses will then be reviewed at the same time as further work on the performance of the short listed options is completed. This will lead to the production of a report to Ministers by early summer 2006 setting out the results of the consultation exercise and the detailed assessment of short listed options.

6. The public exhibition in Salisbury will be held at the White Hart Hotel, St John Street, Salisbury between 10am and 8pm on Thursday 9 and Friday 10 February and between 10am and 4pm on Saturday 11 February. A media opportunity will be held on 7 February, with invitations to be issued nearer the time.

7. The public exhibition in London will be held at The Society of Antiquaries, Burlington House, Piccadilly between 10am and 8pm on Friday 17 February and between 10am and 4pm on Saturday 18 February 2006.

8. Additional copies of the consultation leaflet and questionnaire will be available at the public exhibition and on the Highways Agency website www.highways.gov.uk/stonehenge

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