Group Against Motorway Expansion (GAME)

THE WAY AHEAD: AN ALTERNATIVE TO M6 WIDENING

... we also recognise that we cannot simply build our way out of the problems we face. It would be environmentally irresponsible – and would not work. So we must make our existing transport networks work more efficiently and in a more environmentally friendly way

The Prime Minister, Rt. Hon. Tony Blair
Foreword to *The Future of Transport White Paper* (2004)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

- The **government** wants to widen the M6 through Staffordshire and Cheshire.
- **GAME**, a coalition from Staffordshire, Cheshire and beyond, is proposing realistic alternatives.

The consequences of M6 widening

- The **local impact** would be devastating, e.g loss of farmland, woodlands & other wildlife habitats.
- The **global impact** would include even greater climate change because of more carbon emissions.
- The projected **completion date** is 2017, so widening would not address congestion problems now.
- With rising energy, oil and materials **costs**, the current estimate of £2.9 billion is very optimistic.

Our recommended short-term measures include …

- Limited and temporary use of hard shoulders to relieve congestion.
- Use of variable speed limits to match the prevailing traffic density.
- More focused use of information gantries to promote better lane use, and more penalties.
- Restrictions on HGVs using the centre lane at busiest times.
- Improvement of signs at motorway merging points to avoid the need to slow down to read.
- Measures to improve standards of motorway driving.
- Harsher fines for drivers/owners convicted of avoidable vehicle failure, and more spot checks.
- More severe penalties for poor or dangerous driving.
- Stricter policing of excessively speeding vehicles, combined with minimum speed limits.
- Increase in number of speed cameras, and in number and perceived relevance of 'speed signs'.
- Promotion of 'flexitime' in companies/organisations in order to 'flatten' peak travel periods, with more freight movement in the late evening and early hours.

For the medium- and long-term we recommend …

- local and national government, together with industry and the farming community, should draw up plans to 'localise' the production of goods and services;
- all developments should be assessed by local authorities for their impact on transport, in terms of the demands for commuting, shopping, leisure, schools, medical services, etc., and a cap placed on the overall 'carbon footprint' to encourage integration of facilities to reduce the need to travel;
- capital investment should be directed away from roads and into rail and other public transport;
- water-borne freight transport as a viable alternative to the road network should be expanded;
- working from home, intranet communities, teleconferencing facilities, etc. should be encouraged;
- commuters need to be coaxed out of their cars, thus reducing rush-hour pressure points, with cheaper and more accessible rail and coach travel, and greater funding for urban cycle paths;
- a media campaign to discourage speeding and unnecessary car use;
- the health benefits of walking and cycling as methods of travel should be promoted;
- compulsory Green Travel Plans for companies should be introduced;
- a national road pricing scheme should be introduced as soon as possible, with vehicle excise duty replaced by higher petrol tax.

Conclusions

- Motorway expansion does not solve congestion, and degrades the local and global environment.
- Climate scientists implore us with almost one voice to act decisively to avert climate catastrophe.

INTRODUCTION

Background

Over the last decade various schemes have been mooted to increase capacity along the M6 through Staffordshire and Cheshire. The latest proposals were published in 2004, when the Department for Transport (DfT) floated two options: construction of a tolled M6 Expressway to run alongside the existing M6, or widening the M6 by adding extra lanes.

In July 2006 the Roads Minister, Dr Stephen Ladyman, announced that the DfT had abandoned the Expressway idea, and intended to go ahead with adding an extra two lanes, at a current estimated cost of £2.9 billion. Construction will take six years, with completion currently projected for 2017.

GAME is a coalition of people drawn from communities in Staffordshire, Cheshire and beyond who are concerned by schemes that will increase capacity of the M6. The group was formed in 2004 to fight the original proposals. In January 2006, dismayed that people were not being given any real alternative apart from increasing road capacity, GAME published its own proposals, entitled 'A Third Option for the M6 Corridor Between Birmingham and the Northwest'.

Although we are glad the government has decided that the Expressway is not acceptable and is no longer pursuing this option, we remain opposed to the widening option as well. In this revised and updated version of 'A Third Option' we will set out why we believe our continued opposition is justified, and what should be done instead.

GAME seeks to present realistic and viable alternatives, and not simply to oppose all and any new roadbuilding schemes. We are not NIMBYs, but people who feel that traditional approaches to solving traffic problems are now redundant and damaging – and our views are backed up by the failure of schemes such as the Newbury Bypass either to resolve congestion or to reduce accidents. In particular, the reality of accelerating global warming must cause everyone to rethink conventional attitudes to economic development.

The implications of M6 widening

Local impact

Currently the detailed plans for widening are still being drawn up, but any scheme is bound to impact adversely on people living near the M6, who already have to endure high levels of noise and pollution. In particular:

- Valuable farmland, ancient woodlands and other wildlife habitats will be lost forever, and many towns, villages and hamlets will suffer irreparable damage to their surroundings.
- Bridges and underpasses may not be rebuilt, leading to access problems and loss of rights of way.
- There will inevitably be extra congestion during and after the widening process. Neighbouring villages and farms will also be affected.
- Increased traffic will bring increased air and light pollution, and greater noise, vibration, and smells, with adverse effects on the health of people and livestock in the vicinity.
- Greater surface-water run-off will adversely affect flood plains.
- Widening will result in more congestion at either end of the widened section on completion, namely the three lanes from junction 11a south on the untolled M6, and

three lanes north of junction 19 (off which runs the A556, already named Britain's most congested road).
- More traffic will feed off the expanded motorway system onto trunk roads and minor roads, into towns and cities, increasing the risk of accidents and worsening congestion elsewhere.
- The plans will have an adverse impact on house prices because of 'planning blight'.

Global impact

Building extra roads generates more traffic, and hence more carbon emissions, leading to climate change. This is an established fact, accepted by the DfT and others. Therefore, it is stating the obvious to say that expanding the motorway network is not a sustainable solution. What is the point of improved access to a port in southeast England if that facility is inundated by rising sea levels due to global warming?

Moreover, any large-scale construction project, such as the proposed M6 widening, itself generates large amounts of CO_2, through the extraction, processing, manufacturing and installation of materials required to add extra lanes. This spending of 'environmental capital' must be included in any impact assessment.

It is generally accepted, vociferously so by our government, that climate change is already affecting our global ecosystem, and will wreak widespread havoc around the world unless decisive action is taken now. In this context, does it make sense to expand our road network to accommodate more vehicles? We say an emphatic 'No'.

Here we put forward measures to reduce road traffic, and propose the framework for a new approach to transportation and travel. Only by doing this can we remove the need for more roadbuilding, including M6 widening.

As Tony Blair said in the Foreword to *Securing the Future*, the Government's Sustainable Development Strategy, published in March 2005:

> ***Make the wrong choices now and future generations will live with a changed climate, depleted resources and without the green space and biodiversity that contribute both to our standard of living and our quality of life.***

Traffic congestion should be used as a catalyst for change. Widening the M6 removes this catalyst. It reduces the incentive to develop industries and a way of life that require less transportation, and is part of a more

MIDMAN RECOMMENDATIONS

Public transport schemes
- New rail lines and junctions, including a new Stafford 'cut-off' line, reopening of the Sandbach–Northwich line, and building a western rail link to Manchester Airport.
- New Birmingham–Manchester train services (including new routes).
- Longer trains and longer platforms.
- Creation of a parkway station near M6 on the Mid-Cheshire line between Northwich and Knutsford.
- Additional parking at major railway stations.
- Bus priorities and bus quality partnerships.
- Enhanced local public transport services (bus and rail) including timetable and service information.
- Improved public transport fare structures.

Freight
- Rail freight capacity enhancement.

Behavioural change initiatives
- Company travel plans.
- Greater use of teleworking and video-conferencing.
- Public awareness campaigns.
- Increased parking charges in conurbations.
- Workplace parking charges and congestion charging in conurbations.

general attempt to pursue 'business as usual'. This scenario is no longer tenable. We have to take a different approach to solving transport problems.

OVERVIEW

We present an integrated approach that incorporates a range of strategies. Many of these were considered in the MidMan Report published in 2002 (see Box). Given the most recent predictions about the accelerated rate of climate change, we feel that the MidMan strategy objective of M6 widening is no longer valid. However, efforts should be intensified to implement the other two key objectives:

- ***to provide realistic and practicable ways by which rail passenger and freight usage can be increased in particular, and public transport usage increased in general;***
- ***to encourage general reductions in car usage through measures such as travel behaviour initiatives, and through pricing measures in the major conurbations.***

Implementation of such strategies is now imperative, and should become part of the wider government Sustainable Development Strategy *Securing the Future*. Initiatives to deliver this should incorporate a 'hearts and minds' campaign to raise general awareness of the issues.

In July 2006 the House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee issued 'Reducing Carbon Emissions from Transport'. It reported that:

> ***Transport is the only sector of the UK economy in which carbon emissions were higher in 2004 than the baseline year of 1990, and the only sector in which emissions are projected to be higher in 2020 than in 1990.***

In the light of this, it concluded that:

> ***Transport has an especially important role to play in responding to the challenge of averting dangerous climate change.***

CARBON EMISSIONS FROM ROAD TRAFFIC
Domestic road transport emitted some 33 million tonnes (or megatonnes) of carbon (MtC) in 2004, representing 21% of the UK's total carbon emissions. Cars produced over 60% of the total CO_2, with most of the remainder derived from heavy goods vehicles (HGVs) and vans. The latest projections from the Department of Trade and Industry are that total emissions within this sector will rise to over 36 Mt by 2020.

The Committee recalled the view of Tony Blair, who in his letter of appointment to the new Secretary of State for Transport in May 2006, wrote: 'in particular transport will be critical to our long-term goal of reducing carbon emissions'.

So, even the Prime Minister appears to advise the Transport Secretary to put reducing carbon emissions at the top of the agenda.

GAME is part of a rapidly growing cross-party constituency among the electorate who believe we have reached a crunch point, a time when the potential environmental catastrophe resulting from global warming makes traditional models of economic growth and infrastructure investment at best unsuitable, and at worst downright suicidal. In spite of having the knowledge and the means to avert this disaster, we continue to rush lemming-like towards the precipice.

On a more pragmatic level, according to the government, the earliest completion date for the widening scheme is 2017. So it does nothing to address congestion over the next 10 years. In fact, such a huge roadbuilding project can only exacerbate congestion during the construction period,

and any benefits from the extra highway capacity achieved would be very short-lived, as demonstrated by the 2006 report 'Beyond Transport Infrastructure' published jointly by the Countryside Agency and CPRE.

The cost of road building is escalating in an unprecedented way. Costs for Highways Agency schemes are now running on average 67% over original estimates, with industry analysts predicting 33% inflation within the next five years. With rapidly rising energy, oil and materials costs, we doubt whether in 10 years time this mammoth widening project can be delivered for the estimated £2.9 billion. This money, we believe, is better spent in other ways.

The measures we propose are divided into those that can help to tackle congestion in the short term, and steps in the medium and long term that seek to change attitudes to transport and travel. We have built a society in which travel is no longer regarded as a luxury but as a necessity, and we are rapidly destroying much of the remaining infrastructure that enables people to live without a car. Our ultimate goals must be to reduce the perceived need for transportation, to promote truly sustainable local communities, and to encourage people to use other forms of transport

SHORT-TERM MEASURES

These are aimed at increasing the perceived capacity of the existing M6 (and other motorways) in the immediate future. They are designed to keep the traffic flowing at a constant relatively high speed and to avoid holdups, blockages and bunching. Some of the £3 billion currently earmarked for M6 widening could be spent on these measures.

The main causes of holdups, blockages and bunching are:

- accidents (either caused by bad driving, or vehicle failure or fires), which account for 60–90% of holdups;
- lane holdups (caused by slow or overtaking vehicles);
- merging of motorways;
- excessive volume of traffic at 'peak' periods;
- frequent and often protracted road repairs.

Solutions:

- Limited and temporary use of hard shoulders to relieve congestion where there are pressing safety concerns, such as between service station exits and motorway junctions, provided access for emergency vehicles is safeguarded.
- Use of variable speed limits to match the prevailing traffic density, thereby maximising traffic flow and minimising vehicle emissions (as also suggested by MidMan).
- More focused and selective use of information gantries to promote better lane use, and penalties for breaching lane restrictions.
- Restrictions on HGVs using the centre lane at busiest times, and on HGVs overtaking within, say, 2 miles of junctions.
- The improvement of signs at motorway merging points to avoid the need to slow down to read direction signs.
- Measures to improve standards of motorway driving, and, as part of a more stringent overall driving test, enhanced training in motorway driving and a more rigorous health/eyesight test (the current eyesight test is insufficient).
- Harsher fines for drivers/owners convicted of avoidable vehicle failure, and more spot checks.

- Swifter 'clean-up' after accidents, and more appropriate application of the crime scene policy.
- More severe penalties for poor or dangerous driving, such as 'tailgating'.
- Stricter policing of excessively speeding vehicles, combined with relatively high minimum speed limits (this latter measure to be helped by the introduction of engine size/gross loaded weight ratio limits).
- Increase in number of speed cameras and number and perceived relevance of 'speed signs'. This may well entail the removal of 'advisory' status and the upgrading of all to 'mandatory' status. This would have to be accompanied by public service broadcasts and other suitable publicity to explain the relevance and importance of driver compliance.
- A review of the motorway repair and maintenance strategies to minimise disruption. Are there sufficient financial incentives to maximise speed of repairs?
- Promotion of 'flexitime' in companies and other organisations to extend the working day and hence 'flatten' peak travel periods, with more freight movement in the late evening and early hours where feasible.

Besides these motorway traffic management techniques there are many others in use (or being tested) both here and abroad (such as road pricing and variable lane use).

These 'minor' alterations should sufficiently enlarge the perceived motorway capacity until the longer-term traffic-cutting measures (see below) begin to take effect.

MEDIUM- AND LONG-TERM MEASURES

These are designed to reduce the overall need to transport goods and people, particularly by road. Travelling by road can no longer be regarded as a cheap option – either by planners, business or motorists. Road users must begin to bear the true costs of this form of transport, in particular the impact of their carbon emissions and other forms of pollution.

We regard radical changes in planning policies and greater localisation and decentralisation of production, services and employment to be of paramount importance (see Box).

This scenario is not outlandish or impractical, nor does it imply a return to a 'cottage industry' economy. In fact it has been mapped out already for the Department of Transport in the 'Vibat (Visioning and Backcasting for UK Transport Policy) Report', published in 2005.

This outlines a society based on 'smart social policy' driven by a desire for improved quality of life.

WHAT IS 'LOCALISATION'?

The concept of localisation is essentially about 'local goods for local people'. In other words, enabling communities to benefit from goods and services that are produced or provided within their village or town, instead of relying on goods imported from distant regions or other countries. Simply, the goal is to encourage people to live and work locally.

This requires a set of political and economic measures, and active government intervention at many levels, primarily through a mix of incentives and penalties in planning and taxation.

In sustainable communities there is no place for 'megasized' shopping malls selling goods that have travelled halfway round the world. Instead the emphasis is on local shops selling local produce; local healthcare facilities, not distant superhospitals; and smaller local schools, not huge central academies.

The priorities are still in efficient production, but not necessarily in the lowest cost locations, as consumers are prepared to pay slightly more for goods that are produced locally and that have a lower transport cost associated with them.

Overall ... there is less travel and journey lengths are shorter. ... There is a strong shift to public transport and to the greater use of local facilities. Land use planning favours compactness, public transport orientated development patterns with mixed use and high-quality local environments.

Solutions:

- Local and national government, together with industry and the farming community, should draw up plans to 'localise' the production of goods and services, especially food production and distribution.
- All developments must be rigorously assessed by local authorities for their impact on the transport system, particularly in terms of the demands for commuting, shopping, leisure, schools, medical services, etc., and a cap placed on the overall 'carbon footprint' to encourage integration of facilities to reduce the need to travel.
- Redirect capital investment away from roadbuilding into the rail network, and into promoting light rail, trams, and buses, and making these safe, reliable, convenient and attractive modes of transport.
- Expand the use of water-borne freight transport as a viable alternative to the road network, whether by sea, river or canal.
- Encourage 'working from home', intranet communities, teleconferencing facilities, etc. by means of improved tax incentives, for example.
- Commuters need to be coaxed out of their cars, thus reducing rush-hour pressure points, with cheaper and more accessible rail and coach travel, and greater funding for urban cycle paths.
- A media campaign is needed to discourage speeding and unnecessary car use, like those used successfully in previous decades for seat belts and drink driving.
- Promote the health benefits of walking and cycling as methods of travel, in accord with the Government's 'Choosing Health' white paper.
- Compulsory Green Travel Plans for companies, including incentives to encourage greener travel options.
- Introduce a national road pricing scheme as soon as possible, with vehicle excise duty replaced by higher petrol tax. The road network must be fairly and effectively managed, with monies raised going in part to finance the above alternatives.

CONCLUSIONS

Expansion of the motorway network, whether widening of the M6 or other similar schemes, can never be a sustainable solution. Such schemes do little or nothing to solve congestion in the short term, and in the long term will lead to significant increases in carbon emissions and other pollutants, depletion of finite resources, greater noise levels, and general degradation of the local and global environment.

Prime minister Tony Blair is not alone in recognising the overriding importance of combating global warming. All the main political parties now accept the urgency of dealing with the problem of carbon dioxide emissions. Climate scientists implore us, with virtually one voice, that we must act decisively and promptly to avert climate catastrophe. All our efforts, whether as politicians, planners, or citizens, must be harnessed to this end. To do otherwise is reckless folly.

Instead of this outmoded and perilous policy of building extra road capacity to accommodate traffic growth, we present realistic and pragmatic alternatives, all compatible with the UK's Sustainable Development Strategy. Our approach is one that will invigorate local communities, help to safeguard the environment, and pave the way to a more sustainable economy and a more integrated society.

We concede that such an option requires a raft of inducements, incentives and policy changes, in diverse areas of our lives. It is challenging, and requires vision and commitment to implement. But such an option can, we believe, become part of a sea change in attitudes that will mark a shift towards implementing more sustainable economic development. In the words of the 'Vibat Report' (DfT, 2005):

> ***It is concluded that major and innovative policy changes are required, as the business as usual approach will not achieve the [carbon dioxide] target reduction set. There is no alternative to radical transport policy change if the CO_2 emissions target is to be reached in transport. However, the conclusions are positive: a 60% emissions reduction in the transport sector can be met with radical change.***

Such conclusions from the Report's authors, David Banister (Bartlett School of Planning, UCL) and Robin Hickman (Halcrow Consulting Engineers), stress the need for radical new thinking on transport.

But it seems that the DfT and Highways Agency have failed to take this message on board. As the Vibat Report clearly emphasises:

> ***The transport world has moved on apace. A new determinant is now the global environmental imperative. The new realism in 2005 is that CO_2 emission targets necessitate radical change in the transport sector. We need to start implementing traffic demand management strategies across the UK, and critically to appraise transport investment plans against global environmental targets.***

Scrapping plans to widen the M6 could help convince us and other members of the public that the DfT and Highways Agency have finally begun to grasp the 'new realism'. We all have a role to play in implementing the radical new transport strategies that are needed if our children and grandchildren are to have a planet fit for living on.

CONTRIBUTORS

Alison Crane	Beryl Metcalfe	Beverley Mayer
David Jones	John Gale	Malcolm Carroll
Rebecca Lush (Road Block)	Robert Hine	Roger Oldfield
Ruth Eagle	Stuart Greenhalgh	

On behalf of GAME, October 2006

CONTACTS:
John Gale **Tel. 01785 214894**
Email: **nom6widening@googlemail.com**
To visit or join the email group log on to: **nom6e@googlegroups.com**

Compiled by ROBERT HINE EDITORIAL SERVICES
www.robhine.co.uk
254 Tixall Road, Stafford, ST16 3UE, UK. Tel./fax +44(0)1785 603387. Email: roberthine@btinternet.com