

CPRE



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WESTERN BYPASSES OF STOURBRIDGE AND WOLVERHAMPTON

This briefing by West Midlands CPRE sets out the current position in relation to the Western Bypasses of the West Midlands Conurbation recommended by the West Midlands Area Multi Modal Transport Study. We believe the Bypasses should not go ahead because:

1. They would cause irreparable damage to the Green Belt around the West of the Conurbation
2. They would lead to business moving out of the Conurbation undermining, not helping, urban regeneration
3. They would encourage longer journeys undermining the Government's goal of reducing the need to travel.
4. Solutions to the problems of access to, and mobility in, the Black Country can only be resolved within the Black Country itself.

1. The West Midlands Multi Modal Transport Study (WMAMMS)

In October 2001 the West Midlands Area Multi Modal Study reported on a variety of transport solutions for the West Midlands Conurbation, many of which WM CPRE supports. However, they also included a large amount of road building at the edge of the Conurbation in the Green Belt. We are concerned that this will use up large amounts of the cash needed for other solutions. We are also concerned that it will encourage people to move out of the conurbation, undermining urban regeneration. We are lastly concerned about the huge impact it might have on the countryside environment.

Our greatest concern is the two bypasses of Stourbridge and Wolverhampton which would run on a similar line to the old Western Orbital Motorway, which Ministers rejected in the 1990s because of its environmental damage, and revival of which the study itself rejects as not producing overall transport benefits for the Conurbation and as causing too much environmental damage.

The Multi Modal Study conclusions have now been passed through the Regional Planning Body with no opportunity for public comment before the RPB decided to support them. The conclusions formed part of consideration at the West Midlands Regional Planning Guidance Public Examination in June. The RPG Panel received 6,000 comments on the Western Bypass proposals, almost universally against their inclusion in RPG. The Panel will report in October/November and the Government will publish its resulting modifications to RPG in the New Year. This will include Ministers' decision on whether to proceed further with scheme development.

2. The Multi-Modal Study's Recommendations

The Study recommends the Bypasses and a motorway link from BNRR to M54 on the basis that they would lead to regeneration of the Black Country, but not as a strategic through route, (which the Western Orbital Motorway was promoted as) and not as a highly visible scheme with large overpasses. The WMAMMS report includes an indicative map of the potential 'least environmentally damaging' route for the Bypasses which uses some existing roads. It is still not clear if the bypasses would be bought forward by Highways Agency or local authorities. The Study does not prioritize the bypasses, but puts them in the 2011-2021 time frame, behind, for example, the M42 widening. It advocates less intrusive road measures (many of which we support) beforehand.

3. Draft Regional Planning Guidance

The Bypasses were included in a list of schemes (Proposal T16 and Transport Map) in RPG, but RPG blurred the distinction over timing potentially allowing the Bypasses to come forward earlier. A Feasibility Study was undertaken by the Highway Agency and AWM to support the evidence put forward in the Examination in Public in June-July, suggesting the bypasses are being pushed forward ahead of the WMAMMS recommendation. RPG was also lax in allowing peripheral Green Belt release of land for business use and for park and ride, which would add to the environmental and economic concern that the bypasses would suck business out of the Conurbation.

4. Black Country Regeneration Study

The Black Country Regeneration Study undertaken to support the case at Public Examination patently failed to prove the bypasses would aid regeneration. It demonstrated that traffic benefits would be indistinguishable in areas needing regeneration and it showed that areas away from the Black Country might benefit at the expense of the Black Country itself. Despite pro-bypasses rhetoric, the officers reporting to the Regional Planning Body admitted the study did not prove the case. It did however go on to advocate enlarging the road schemes by adding overpasses and a series of complementary dual carriageway link roads through the leafy suburbs of Stourbridge and Wolverhampton. It also claimed the bypasses would have a very significant effect on the M5/M6 route. That conclusion is inconsistent with evidence produced by the same consultants to the M6 Toll Public Inquiry, which we believe give a more realistic picture. In our view the levels of suppressed travel are already so great in the West Midlands that any release of pressure on the motorways would simply lead to a rapid filling up again.

5. Proposals for a further Study

The Regional Planning Body accepted that the Regeneration Study failed to prove the case, but instead of reviewing their support for the proposals, decided to institute a further study which the West Midlands LGA would lead on. It would seek to prove that removing through

traffic on the M5/M6 would have indirect regeneration benefits. A new policy, T17, was introduced at a late date for consideration at the RPG Examination, which would support such a study, but even if the Panel reject T17 the LGA is likely to undertake the study along with other regional parties. We have challenged the use of public money to examine a scheme which has already been studied and found wanting. We also believe the basic assumption is flawed. All the evidence is that Green Belt road building encourages an overall growth in traffic and that the M5 and M6 would simply fill up with new traffic as people were encouraged by the new roads to live further from where they work and shop.

6. What else is happening?

The West Midlands Transport Forum (supported by the Regional Assembly and AWM) has released a lobbying document 'Transport Priorities for the West Midlands' supporting the bypasses.

The business lobby, which exerted huge pressure for the bypass recommendation within the Multi-Modal study, is now pressing even harder for early delivery of the bypasses, while largely ignoring other key areas of the Study's recommendations such as Super Showcase Bus Routes.

At the same time the Highways Agency are questioning whether the bypasses take fully into account through traffic and are arguing for a more substantial and intrusive scheme, though not at present for the revival of a Western Orbital Motorway.

There is opposition from a number of District Councils, particularly South Staffordshire. Sandwell MBC have also questioned whether the bypasses would regenerate Sandwell, but may support a more intrusive orbital relief road.

7. Why WM CPRE believe the bypasses should not go ahead

WM CPRE rejects the assertion that building Bypasses around the Black Country will help regeneration areas inside the Conurbation. All the evidence, including the influential report by the Standing Advisory Committee on Trunk Road Assessment, suggests infrastructure has a limited impact on regeneration except in the immediate vicinity of the road. The Black Country Spine Road and Black Country Route, to take one example, have attracted commercial and industrial development to sites directly served by them, but have had limited impacts on the wider conurbation. At the same time a new road can allow a stronger economy to out-compete a weaker one and undermine its vitality.

In the case of the Western Bypasses we believe the major benefit would be to:

1. Green Belt sites in the corridor, which would out compete Brownfield sites within the Black Country
2. the M42 corridor, which is already the most attractive in the region and would become more accessible from the Stourbridge and Wolverhampton areas

3. in retail terms, Merry Hill, which would be able to attract trade from outside its current sub-regional catchment area, increasing travel around the region.

Such advantages would only disbenefit the core urban regeneration areas. The proposed bypass around Hastings was rejected because the regeneration benefits were found to be weak. And notably, Sandwell Council, one of the local authorities supposed to benefit from the bypasses, has supported our view that the roads would have a negative effect on regeneration.

At the same time the environmental impact would be huge. Unlike the M6 Toll, the Bypasses do not pass through a corridor where there is already major road impacts, nor does it pass close to towns where regeneration is required, such as Chasetown and Burntwood. The Green Belt west of the Conurbation is of a very high quality and is the beginning of the acknowledged tranquil area of the Marches. It is also highly visible from, for example, the Clent Hills and Kinver Edge. The change from built-up area to unspoiled countryside is dramatic, particularly west of Norton and Wordsley in Stourbridge and to the west of Wolverhampton where the Green Belt has maintained a high-quality farming landscape.

Photographs and maps of the landscape where the Western Bypasses would run can be seen on the website:

www.antibypasscampaign.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/bypassmaps.htm

8. WM CPRE advocates an alternative strategy

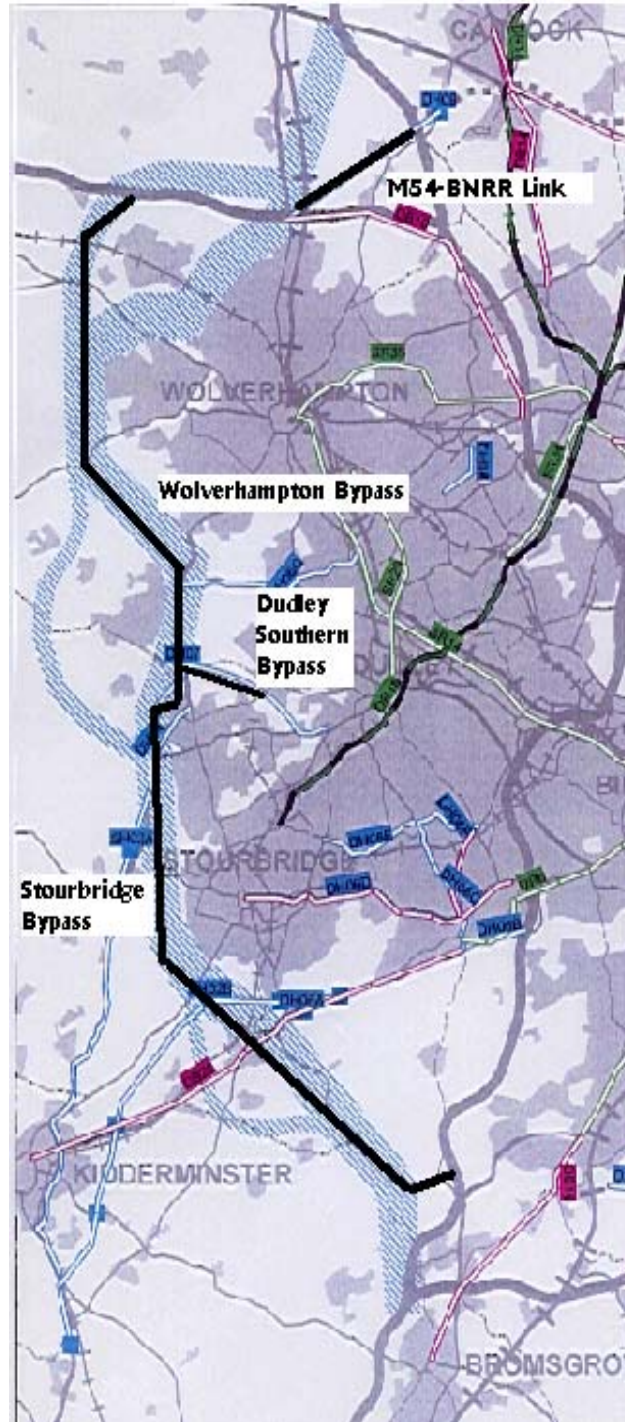
Regeneration of the Black Country is a complex issue involving education, skills, technology and marketing, but which can be supported by infrastructure which addresses congestion inside the Conurbation instead of building roads round the edge. We support the West Midlands Multi-Modal Study recommendations on public transport as well as the smaller-scale road proposals in the conurbation. However, given the funding limitations applied to transport in the West Midlands, early construction of the Bypasses would almost certainly compete with investment needed in public transport, which accounts for 75% of the WMAMMS investment recommendations.

Given all these considerations we believe the Western Bypasses schemes should be removed from all future Regional plans.

Sept 2002

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WM CPRE's Schematic representation of Indicative Bypass Routes



The hatched background lines represent the corridor options considered by WMAMMS