

South Gloucestershire Council A4174 Junction Improvement Scheme (launched 24 May 2021)

BRIEFING SUPPLIED BY COUNCILLOR DOWLING

South Glos. Council claim that their road widening proposals and new ‘through roundabouts’ on the A4174 will both relieve congestion and reduce traffic on other nearby routes. The full list of their objectives within their consultation documents are as follows below (a – f):

(with my responses in green)

- a) **Reduce carbon emissions through relieving delays and congestion** – we know that a fundamental rule of traffic is that building new roads and increasing capacity just makes people drive more, and locks in car dependency.
- b) **Minimise the impact of traffic to the natural environment, and where possible, improve the environment** – this is disingenuous for the above reasons, and plus the proposals involve the loss of 30 trees on one of the through roundabouts alone! The statement also doesn’t square with the years of disruption, and carbon heavy road building processes that will be required to deliver these plans. I would question whether a carbon calculation has been carried out as part of the business case to inform the impact of these proposals on the environment and any mitigation/offsetting plans?
- c) **Improve access to the north east Bristol fringe to help open up business opportunities** – active travel is the solution to opening up access to the area in a sustainable way, and there is absolutely nothing in the proposals for active travel improvements (which is in fact a requirement of government’s own guidance in its new LTN 1/20 document).
- d) **Protect and enhance access for non-car users** – no evidence for this in the proposals.
- e) **Improve traffic safety** – through roundabouts are counter intuitive for drivers as you must head left if you want to turn right on the roundabout, and thus could confuse drivers, potentially leading to more accidents. In addition, the basic rule of signalised junction design is that they should still be safe to use if the controller fails and the junction experiences an ‘all out’ signals situation (more common than you would imagine, especially for authorities that do not maintain their assets – more of which I will come on to later). In the case of through roundabouts, drivers will not know which way to head if the traffic signals fail resulting in a dangerous situation.
- f) **Improve road network resilience and journey time reliability** – there will be no improvements for the side roads that are used for getting onto the through roundabouts (where congestion will increase, and air quality will get worse). South Glos. Council’s consultants claimed in the Council briefing I attended in May that their modelling shows side roads will ‘not get any worse’. This is not an acceptable situation when we know that many of the side roads are already over saturated (such as Aldermoor Way by Longwell Green retail park). In addition, and after spending £30M, drivers will still have to wait at traffic lights on the ring road! The modelling put forward at the Councillor briefing was flawed – the consultants were not even familiar with some of the junctions being mentioned by councillors. It has evidently been a desk top design by a consultant that will get rich profits from delivering this scheme but will have no responsibility for it afterwards.

Further information and feedback from other stakeholders:

It should be noted that, South Glos. Council has declared a climate emergency, and their own climate emergency plan states that '**we must reduce vehicle milage!**'

The West of England's new metro mayor has criticised the plans to widen Bristol ring road - Dan Norris said "**bigger roads generate more car journeys, and does not solve congestion.**"

The South Glos. Greens also strongly oppose the planned changes ... In their statement, in response to the proposals, they say "The proposals for five monstrous mega-roundabouts will do nothing to tackle the climate emergency and will instead cause "**environmental damage and an increase in car dependency.**" **The South Glos. Greens recommends therefore that the council scraps the plans and focuses on improving cycling infrastructure and enhanced bus routes instead.**

Local residents have also shared with me their concerns about many years of disruption to the roads and the potential worsening of air quality if these plans go ahead.

Finally, it has been shown time and time again that building new roads and increasing capacity is self-defeating. A famous quote mentions that "**adding car lanes to deal with traffic congestion is like loosening you belt to cure obesity.**"

Technical points:

Since the pandemic started people's travel and work patterns have changed significantly, and therefore any congestion that was experienced on the ring road prior to March 2020 may not be to the same level now. Certainly, in Bristol, the data shows that the morning peak has been greatly reduced. So therefore, what is being addressed by these plans? Does the business case still stack up, and have any surveys been undertaken to assess travel patterns and traffic flows since the pandemic? In addition, any congestion issues on the ring road prior to the pandemic were mostly concentrated at the Hambrook and Hicks Gate junctions, so increasing capacity in between these junctions will simply kick the can down the road.

Have the existing signalised junctions that run on MOVA¹ been revalidated? At a fraction of the cost of these proposals, South Glos. council could revalidate the existing junctions to make them run more efficiently. When was the last time this was done?

All new traffic signal installations create a massive maintenance liability in the medium and long term for councils. And government funding does not cover the costs as I know full well from my day job. Therefore, South Glos. Council cannot possibly afford to maintain their signals assets as it is, let alone these new proposals; and to make matters worse, they have recently pulled out of the regions Joint Arrangement signals contract as well. As mentioned by Councillor Sally Hill, a direct labour organisation (DLO) like South Glos. runs is out-dated because they operate without any time targets or penalties.

¹*MOVA is a form of adaptive signal control which detects traffic and adapts timings automatically to make the junction work as efficiently as possible. MOVA models should be revalidated via a rolling programme over time to keep them optimised.*

PROPOSAL TO FULL COUNCIL 22 JULY 2021:

"To object to South Gloucestershire Council's plans for the A4174 Junction Improvement Scheme"

Councillors were invited by James Dowling to meet informally to consider this consultation. On Saturday 3 July those who expressed an interest met to discuss, with the following outcome:

It was considered that not only would the plans increase car journeys, worsen air pollution and lock in car dependency, that the plans will also bring years of disruption for local residents. It is noted that, in February 2021, Emersons Green Town Council declared a Climate Emergency. As such, members are urged to pass the motion to object to the South Gloucestershire Council's plans for road widening and the creation of five mega 'throughabouts' on the A4174 ring road on this basis.