

Dear Cllr Romero

I write in my capacity as Chair of FOBRA and following intensive discussions about the issue of Cleveland Bridge at our Committee meeting last week.

We are disappointed to learn that B&NES Council is pressing ahead with repair work to enable unrestricted use of Cleveland Bridge by HGVs to resume. We understand that you consider that you have no choice because the bridge is part of the Primary Route Network (PRN). However, according to the Department for Transport (DfT) guidance on the PRN, it is B&NES Council that has the primary responsibility for Cleveland Bridge and should set the policy for the bridge (although it has a duty to consult neighbouring highway authorities including the Highways Agency, and the Secretary of State for Transport has the right to intervene). B&NES is not just the agent of DfT. We suggest that B&NES should exercise that responsibility by putting the repair work 'on hold' while discussions take place with DfT and neighbouring authorities.

We have raised this with Wera Hobhouse MP, who says that the then Secretary of State said in 2012 that B&NES could not unilaterally set the weight limit on Cleveland Bridge. But the appeal decision she is referring to did not disagree with the aim of removing HGVs from Bath; on the contrary, it offered support and advice on doing so. In any case, much has changed since 2012. Apart from the deterioration of the bridge due to the constant heavy traffic, we now have the Climate Emergency declaration, the Clean Air Plan, and the Liveable Neighbourhoods strategy. All of these would greatly benefit from a permanent weight limit on Cleveland Bridge. Heavy HGV traffic on this route affects traffic over a much wider area including the city centre, as vehicles find it very difficult to get out onto the London Road and traffic often backs up. The return of large HGVs would also be an obstacle to retaining the increased levels of active travel that have been so welcome in the months since the temporary weight limit was introduced.

We know that Wera Hobhouse has written to Grant Shapps MP, Secretary of State for Transport, urging that there should be a permanent 18 tonne weight limit on Cleveland Bridge and inviting him to discuss in the Western Gateway Transport Board upgrading the A350, removing the A36/A46 from the Strategic Road Network, and directing A4 Bristol-bound traffic to the A420. This is most welcome, but you and she will have little or no leverage once the repair work is in hand. Putting the repair works on hold while this is discussed would greatly strengthen your negotiating hand.

We have seen the Western Gateway Draft Strategic Transport Plan 2020-2025, which identifies the 'Missing Link' strategic corridor from the Midlands to the South Coast and contains proposals for upgrading the A350 over time. Clearly this should be supported, but it will take years to come to fruition. In the meantime, a priority should be to detrunk the A36-A46 route, giving it the same status as the two other routes in the area from the M4 to the south coast, the A37 and A350. It is quite anomalous that the A36-A46 alone of these is part of the national Strategic Road Network.

We are also deeply concerned about the arrangements for traffic diversion if and when the repair work goes ahead. Our Transport Lead, Patrick Rotheram, wrote to Cllrs. Wright and Butters about this on 7 July ([text attached at Annex](#)). So far there has been no response. We think there is potential for traffic chaos in Bath if this is not handled properly, and urge that you please engage with our concerns.

Given the age and poor condition of Cleveland Bridge, the proposed repairs are likely to offer only a few years of extra life if unrestricted HGV traffic is allowed to return. Incidentally, we note that the Government is consulting on a maximum HGV weight limit of 48 tonnes on specific routes; we trust that Cleveland Bridge would be considered totally unsuitable to such a loading increase.

We hope you will consider seriously our suggestion for putting the bridge repair work on hold pending discussions with DfT and others. In the end, you may be directed to carry out the work, but it is surely worth trying. Public petitions are all very well (and I have suggested that our members sign Wera's), but we do elect you to look after the interests of people in Bath; and this is a matter of vital interest to the residents of the city.

I look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience.

Regards

Justin Draeger

Chair – FOBRA