

Bath needs an alternative route for the A36-A46 through traffic

This is the text submitted by FoBRA's Transport Lead to the Bath Chronicle and published on its Letters page (in a slightly abbreviated form) on 23rd Nov 17:

“Stephen Marks's letter (16 November) argues against a 'link road' to remove the A36-A46 through traffic from Bath.

The fact is that this traffic makes a major contribution to congestion and air pollution in the city. Obviously it adds to the heavy congestion and air pollution on London Road and Bathwick Street, but this also has knock-on effects throughout the city, with traffic regularly backed up into the city centre as far as Queen Square. B&NES's draft Air Quality Action Plan shows that HGVs comprise 5% of the traffic on London Road, but contribute 33% of the air pollution. On top of that, there is the sheer ugliness of HGVs in the World Heritage Site, and the hazard to cyclists.

Without an alternative route for the current A46-A36 traffic, it is impossible to see how traffic and air pollution on London Road can be significantly reduced. The Department for Transport (DfT) will not allow B&NES to limit HGV traffic on this route in the absence of an alternative route acceptable to Wiltshire, as B&NES found out when it tried to place a restriction on HGV movements on Bathwick Street.

The last major study of this issue was the 2004 Bristol/Bath to South Coast Study, which showed that an alternative route would very significantly reduce traffic on London Road and Bathwick Street. 716 through journeys per day by HGVs on the A36-A46 route would be reduced to 24. 12-hour traffic flows on Cleveland Bridge would be reduced by some 6,000 vehicles and on London Road by some 7,000 vehicles, with important environmental benefits for Bath.

The alternative route need not be the 'link road' from Batheaston bypass to the A36 in the area of Dry Arch. An upgraded A350 could help, provided DfT would then allow B&NES to limit HGV movement through Bath. However, there is at least one other alternative: an upgraded route from Bathford to Beckington, with a new river crossing just east of Bradford-on-Avon. This was proposed by the Highways Agency in 1997, but eventually dropped. It would have the additional benefit of relieving the awful traffic problem in Bradford-on-Avon. We hope that the feasibility studies now under consideration will address all options.

Some of the opposition to these studies seems to stem from a dislike of the idea of new or upgraded roads. It is strange that while Frome, Warminster, Keynsham and other nearby towns (as well as Batheaston) all have bypasses, to the great benefit of those places, the idea of providing an alternative route for the heavy traffic that currently passes through the World Heritage City of Bath seems so difficult for some to contemplate. Bath is a very special place and deserves at least as much protection from through traffic. This is a serious problem that requires careful study.

Patrick Rotheram

19th Nov 17

Transport Lead, Federation of Bath Residents' Associations
17 Vineyards”