

A35(T) CHIDEOCK-MORCOMBELAKE BYPASS

REPORT TO THE TRUNK ROADS REVIEW

1 Brief

- 1.1 The aim of this report is to set out the need for a Chideock-Morcombelake Bypass as recognised by the 1994 Inquiry and subsequent events.

2 Findings of Inquiry

- 2.1 The Inspector concluded that all sections of the A35 between the terminal points of the proposed bypass were seriously substandard and inadequate and did not offer road users the level of safety or facility which could reasonably be expected and that the deficiencies needed to be addressed and resolved (IR 108.3-108.11).

- 2.2 We should like to draw particular attention to paragraph 108.6/7 which states: "A matter for special concern is the substantial number of side roads and accesses in both villages which have wholly inadequate visibility splays."

"The combination of parked vehicles, local traffic, through trunk road traffic and pedestrians, is manifestly unsatisfactory."

- 2.3 The Inspector also noted that "the A35 trunk road performs a vital function in acting as a spine road through the County of Dorset, linking it to southern England and to the south-west peninsula".
- 2.4 The Inspector also concluded that "the National Trust would not be reasonable, and would not be seen to be reasonable" in sustaining an objection if the bypass were built to single-carriageway standard. Para 115.17 states: "Taking an overall balanced view of all the issues, I consider that the impact on the Golden Cap Estate would be acceptable. Any balanced view must give substantial weight to countryside, environmental and ecological values. However, it must also take account of other issues about which there is now far more information than was available to the National Trust, and those with whom it consulted, when the decision was made to declare the land inalienable. The issues include:
- * high local unemployment and the need for economic investment
 - * the inadequacies of the existing road
 - * traffic growth
 - * road safety and the importance of reducing road deaths and injuries

* the standard of landscaping proposed

3 Current Situation

3.1 Figures obtained from the Highways Agency reveal that the AADT flow through the village in 1996 was 12,907. The AADT flow in 1991 was 11,176 vehicles, representing an increase of approximately 15.5%. Assuming that this rate of growth remains constant over the next fifteen years, the predicated high growth rate of 20,400 for the year 2013 will be exceeded. Thus -

	<u>At 15.5% increase</u>
2001	14,907
2006	17,217
2011	19,885
2013	21,118

3.2 The latest traffic flow figure of 14,080 per annual day on a Monday in June this year emphasises the increasing dangers to residents and road-users, particularly when it is considered that these figures do not reflect the much higher August totals of 18,181 per 16 hours, representing one vehicle every 3.17 seconds passing a given point. It is important to view this figure in the light of stopping time at 30 mph on a dry road - some 2.73 seconds - this gives a safety margin of 0.44 seconds. It should be borne in mind that the populations of Chideock and Morcombelake are predominantly elderly, thus making the normal business of using the road to visit shops, Post Office, Church and friends particularly hazardous especially in the summer months.

3.3 The geography of the Chideock area has created a particular hazard when heavy lorries descend from either end of the village. This was underlined again by the accident in July this year when a brick lorry swerved to avoid a collision with a vehicle emerging from a side road and almost demolished a listed cottage in the main street - (*see Appendix 1*). It was not an isolated incident. Consideration should be given to the safety of the whole village in the event of a petrol tanker crashing at this spot. The geography of the area, and the number of thatched properties on the main street, makes a fire-ball running the length of the village main road a very real possibility.

3.4 In Morcombelake an apparently level road encourages greater speed and overtaking on blind corners. In addition, the Morcombelake to Charmouth stretch of the A35 passes over notoriously difficult terrain which continues to suffer from subsidence. Recent accidents in both villages have shown dramatically that there is no room for complacency on the safety issue.

- 3.5 The installation of the speed camera in Chideock has helped to slow traffic down as it enters the village from the east. However, this now encourages traffic - particularly heavier and more slow-moving vehicles - to increase speed as they leave the restricted area on the approach to the western exit to the village, a particularly steep hill. The addition of a further speed camera at the western end of Chideock will not solve the problem of runaway lorries whose brakes fail as they negotiate this notoriously difficult stretch of road. The existence of the escape lane, provided after the death of a lorry driver in 1991 (*See Appendix 2*) as a result of just such an accident when two cottages were demolished, proves the point. The escape lane is regularly used.
- 3.6 The cottage in Chideock, damaged in July this year, was hit by a 19 ton brick lorry; EC regulations permit 44 ton lorries to use our trunk roads. The Fulvens stretch of the A35 west of Morcombelake (referred to above) was recently repaired at a cost of £435,000 for an approximately 100 metre stretch; 44 ton lorries would, presumably, be likely to aggravate the geotechnical problems with all the potential dangers that implies.
- 3.7 The accident involving the brick lorry closed the main road through Chideock for 2 hours and the road to Seatown was closed for 5 hours. Thus emergency services did not have access east to west during that time.

4 The De-trunking Issue

- 4.1 Those opposed to the bypass suggest that by de-trunking the A35 and introducing extensive traffic-calming measures along its Dorchester-Honiton stretch the problem could be solved. They argue that traffic flows could be reduced to approximately 2% of their current total if traffic was diverted onto the A37/A303 route instead. The Inspector made it clear in his report that this is not a viable alternative to a local bypass "... only up to 7% of existing A35 traffic could eventually be encouraged to transfer to the alternative route. Such a small reduction in the A35 traffic flows, even if it were possible to achieve, would have an insignificant effect in alleviating the current problems." (Para 16.3, page 27). The goal of a 98% traffic reduction therefore seems totally unrealistic.
- 4.2 De-trunking cannot force traffic to use an alternative route and even if traffic-calming measures are introduced along the length of the Dorchester-Honiton stretch of the A35 many heavy goods vehicles will continue to use the route, either because of the extra cost involved or because they need to make deliveries to Bridport, Lyme Regis and Axminster. (*See Appendices 3 & 4*).
- 4.3 Assuming a figure of 10% of total traffic flow for heavy goods vehicles, the average number of HGVs re-routing away from Chideock and Morcombelake would be approximately 1.408 per average annual day, giving a figure of 366,080 vehicle journeys per year (on a 5-day week basis). The additional distance is 17 miles and this would increase the cost of each journey by £17.96

(calculated on an average cost of 105.66 pence per mile). The cost to the road haulage industry would therefore increase by £6,574,796 per annum.

- 4.4 In addition to the extra cost, the environmental impact of the extra fuel consumption required for this detour would be detrimental. It should be noted that on 23 October 1997 a report in New Scientist magazine gave details of “the most dangerous cancer-causing chemical ever discovered...”. The compound - 3-nitrobenzanthrone - has been found in diesel and exhaust fumes from engines under stress (going up hill or overloaded). This compound produced the highest score ever reported in a scientific test measuring carcinogenic potential.

5 Economic Issues

- 5.1 Both the West Dorset District Council and Dorset County Council have recently confirmed their commitment to the A35 as a vital ‘corridor’ route through Dorset, a point also underlined by the Inspector at the Inquiry.
- 5.2 Recent reports carried out on behalf of West Dorset District council have underlined the economic important of tourism for the area. In Chideock it is tourism which is the only significant generator of employment. If traffic was removed from the village centre the hotels and guest houses would benefit significantly. The construction of a bypass would boost the regional and local economies by making the area more accessible to both commercial and tourist traffic.
- 5.3 An amount of £3,224,550 has already been spent to acquire land in connection with the A35 Chideock-Morcombelake bypass:

Agricultural Properties	£1,620,550
Residential Properties	£1,604,000

Along with this figure, should be included £7,200,000 spent up to and including the Inquiry - a total of £10,424,550. Any attempt to re-classify the A35 between Dorchester and Honiton ignores the large sums of public money already spent on bypasses provided around Dorchester, Bridport, Charmouth, Axminster and the current work at Puddletown.

6 Environmental Issues

- 6.1 Our MP, Mr Oliver Letwin, has drawn attention to Chideock as one of the ‘architectural gems’ of West Dorset. The heart of the village most affected by the current route of the Trunk Road is a Conservation Area. It has one of the highest proportions of listed buildings of any village in Dorset and we believe that more emphasis should be given to protecting the built environment as an intrinsic and equally precious part of the landscape. There is, for instance, clear evidence from owners of some of the most ancient properties on the main road in Chideock that not only is the wear and tear of the existing traffic having a damaging effect on their homes but that the vibration from the use of ‘rumble

strips' recently introduced as part of traffic calming have accelerated the process. The kind of traffic-calming measures necessary to discourage through-traffic in the unlikely event of de-trunking may well also have a negative effect.

- 6.2 The Environmental Statement issued in May 1993 by Adrian Lisney & Partners states: "Noise levels at properties lining the existing A35 through both villages are already high. By 2011 they could increase by up to 10dB, a doubling in perceived noise. Pollution levels from vehicle emissions are also high and during periods of congestion carbon monoxide levels (CO) could exceed World Health Organisation Standards". This statement was based on an assumption that traffic would rise to 18,000 by 2011 - in fact on present increases this figure will be achieved by 2008.

7 Conclusion

- 7.1 The 1994 Inquiry was held because it was recognised that the community faced very severe difficulties. These problems have not diminished because there has been a change of government and the bypass was cancelled. It must be clearly understood that doing nothing is not an option. The dangers caused by the routing of the A35 along our main streets mean that this issue must be addressed.
- 7.2 In view of the problems of increased traffic flow, safety risks, noise, pollution, and damage to property and the fact that at least £10,424,550 has already been spent on the Inquiry and acquisition of land and property on the line of the bypass, we strongly believe that this land should remain in public ownership and an urgent commencing date be agreed for the construction of the bypass.

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