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## Bexhill Hastings Link Road

### Objection to:

- The East Sussex County Council (Bexhill to Hastings Link Road) Compulsory Purchase Order 2009
- The East Sussex County Council (Bexhill to Hastings Link Road) (Planning) Compulsory Purchase Order 2009
- The East Sussex County Council (Bexhill to Hastings Link Road) Side Roads Order 2009

### 1. Financial cost

The original scheme was costed at £47.3 million, but the most recent estimates are currently standing at £96 million. Judging by other recent road building schemes, final outturn costs are likely to be even higher. This level of expenditure is not justified, considering how the money could be spent elsewhere.

The combined population of Bexhill and Hastings is 125,524 (2001 Census). £96 million equates to £765 for every person across the two towns. By way of contrast, the Sustrans TravelSmart programme costs around £25 per household and has resulted in a 10% to 13% reduction of car trips in several towns across the country<sup>1</sup>.

The Sustrans Bike It programme has consistently shown substantial increases in cycling to the schools it works with.<sup>2</sup> On average, levels of cycling are trebled at the project schools. We have no doubt that similar results could be achieved in Bexhill and Hastings.

We believe that a package of “smarter choices” measures, including TravelSmart, ActiveTravel, school and workplace travel plans, Bike It, car clubs, car sharing, teleworking and teleconferencing would significantly reduce car journeys across the two towns at a fraction of the cost of the proposed road.

A modest sum of say £10 million should be allowed to transform Bexhill and Hastings into Sustainable Travel Towns, to include infrastructure for walking, cycling and public transport in addition to the smarter choices outlined above.

A similar decision was made by the Welsh Assembly Government when they cancelled the Newport M4 scheme. The costs of this road had risen to an unsustainable level and they decided to pursue a package of smarter choices measures instead.

(Appendices 1 – 3 give an example of alternative expenditure, relevant initiatives and supporting evidence).

## 2. Carbon dioxide emissions

A comparison of Appraisal Summary Tables for 59 Major Road Schemes shows the Bexhill Hastings Link Road as the second worst road scheme in the whole country, with an estimated net impact of 5420 tonnes of carbon per annum<sup>3</sup>.

Since this road was originally planned, climate change has risen up the political agenda and the Government has a commitment to reduce carbon dioxide emissions across the country by 80% by 2050 through the Climate Change Act. This road scheme must be urgently re-assessed in the light of these climate change targets.

A package of sustainable transport measures would significantly reduce carbon dioxide emissions across the two towns at a fraction of the cost. Such measures must be appraised before any further work is undertaken on this unnecessary road scheme<sup>4</sup>.

## 3. Benefit Cost Ratio

We find it very hard to believe that the BCR can increase from 2.6 to 3.4 when the cost has doubled. However, even if we take at face value the 3.4 figure, this compares very poorly with sustainable transport measures. An appraisal of three walking and cycling schemes showed BCRs in the range 14.9 to 29.3<sup>5</sup>. The full range of alternatives to the building of the new road must be properly assessed as recommended by The Denvil Coombe Practice in their July 2006 report for East Sussex Transport 2000.

One of these alternatives should be the construction of a seafront path for walking and cycling between Glyne Gap and Cinque Ports Way. This provides a safe and convenient alternative to the A259 and is likely to be well used and offer a very high BCR. East Sussex County Council has successfully submitted this scheme to the Connect2 lottery programme managed by Sustrans. The scheme cost is estimated at around £600,000 which is a very modest investment compared to a new road. With good promotion and connecting links to the wider community and local schools we believe this route can make a significant contribution to reducing congestion on the A259. Construction of this path is due to commence in 2011.

## 4. North Bexhill Development

We do not believe that the road is required to service the proposed housing and industrial development areas to the North of Bexhill. Indeed, if the development cannot go ahead without the road, we would suggest that the development itself is unsustainable. A more modest development proposal could be serviced with a shorter road linked to the existing network in Bexhill. A package of smarter choice measures planned into the development at the outset would reduce the need to travel by car.

Government has recently adopted a target for the proposed eco-towns of "at least 50 per cent of trips originating in eco-towns to be made by non-car means, with the potential for this to increase over time to at least 60 per cent".<sup>6</sup> We recommend that this target is adopted for all new development, including North Bexhill. If this target were rigorously adopted by East Sussex, it would fatally undermine the case for the road.

This view is supported by the August 2004 report by Urban & Regional Policy for East Sussex Transport 2000. The overview concludes that:

"The regeneration argument for BHLR rests primarily upon the opening up of land for a proposed high quality Business Park in North Bexhill. However, this would require inward investment, for which there are many more attractive locations in the region: market demand in this area would be weak regardless of the BHLR. There is other land suitable for expansion of local businesses, and ample capacity for planned housing provision can be provided without BHLR.

"The approach to economic regeneration adopted by SEEDA and currently being carried out by the Hastings/Bexhill Task Force focuses on growing the existing manufacturing base and building on potential strengths in knowledge-based industries and tourism. In this view regenerating the local environment of Hastings/Bexhill and enhancing the quality of life it offers are critical to success. The BHLR and associated business park are at best irrelevant and at worst highly damaging to this vision. Any short-run gain from development would be dwarfed by longer-run increases in traffic and car-dependency..."

## 5. Impact on public transport

The existing rail line offers a viable alternative to the A259 for a significant number of journeys. With good promotion, increased frequency and new stations, there is excellent potential to transfer passengers from road to rail in this corridor. Construction of the new road would divert traffic away from the coastal road and is likely to undermine the market for rail.

Stagecoach Buses have stated that they do not want to run a commercial bus service on the new road. This suggests that there is limited demand for travel within the proposed Link Road corridor.

## 6 Impact on Public Health

The Department for Health's (DfH) Hastings Health Profile 2009 (Appendix 4) shows that Hastings suffers from life expectancy below the average for England. It also shows that Hastings over 38% of people living in neighbourhoods identified as among the most deprived fifth nationally. It also reports that incapacity benefits for mental illness are above average.

The DfH report "Be Active, Be Healthy" (Feb09) estimated the annual cost to Hastings and Rother PCT of inactivity at approximately £2.36million per 100,000 population.

The East Sussex Strategic Partnership Local Area Agreement on Health and Well Being states:

***"Our strategic priority for 2026 is to reduce health and care inequalities within and between communities and improve overall health and wellbeing."***

Sustrans contends that in the timescales the LAA addresses there would be significant benefits to the Bexhill and Hastings populations from an area wide Active Travel program which would help achieve the goals of improving public health as well as sustainable transport. There would also be significant future financial savings for the PCT and this could potentially build on the existing successful work of Active Hastings..

(Appendices 6-8 give full details of relevant initiatives, benefits and financial cases).

## 7. Conclusion

We urge the County Council and Government to cancel this expensive road scheme and fully appraise the alternative options:

- on-line improvements to the A259 to provide bus priority measures
- car parking control and pricing measures
- TravelSmart, Active Travel and other smarter choices measures
- seafront shared path for walking and cycling
- improved rail services and new stations
- Bexhill and Hastings as Sustainable Travel Demonstration Towns.

Simon Pratt, Regional Director, Sustrans South East  
19 October 2009

Appendices:

- 1) Concept note of potential Smarter Measures Package
- 2) TravelSmart project review
- 3) Bike It project review
- 4) Health Profile – Hastings 2009 DfH and Association of Public Health Observatories
- 5) Extract of East Sussex Strategic Partnership Local Area Agreement Chapter 3
- 6) Take Action on Active Travel – Policy Argument for investment in active travel.
- 7) The value of investment in Active Travel – cost benefit analysis of active travel schemes - Sustrans Information Sheet FH10.
- 8) Active Travel and Mental Well Being – Sustrans Information Sheet FH07

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<sup>1</sup> TravelSmart Project Review 2009, September 2009

<sup>2</sup> Bike It Project Review 2008

<sup>3</sup> Parliamentary Written Answer by Gillian Merron MP, 17 May 2007, Hansard, Column 841W

<sup>4</sup> Sustrans information sheet on “Low carbon travel: Reducing the climate change impact of road transport”, April 2007 [www.sustrans.org.uk/lowlcarbontravel](http://www.sustrans.org.uk/lowlcarbontravel)

<sup>5</sup> Economic appraisal of local walking and cycling routes, Sustrans, September 2006

<sup>6</sup> Planning Policy Statement: eco-towns, July 2009