

NYC Councillor's Report Regarding the A66 Upgrade and Scotch Corner

I had a meeting with National Highways on 23rd July 2024 which was organised by Middleton Tyas PC, the objective of which was to discuss where we are currently with the upgrade, what is the time frame, and particularly what are NH's plans for Scotch Corner roundabout. I made it very clear from the outset that I have felt particularly frustrated by the lack of vision and planning proposals demonstrated to date for SC roundabout.

In my view to build a road from SC to Penrith which is upgraded to dual carriageway in 6 sections without improvements to the roundabout, will simply result in an even bigger bottle neck than at present and that is without the predicted 30% increase in traffic when the Designer Outlet eventually opens.

So, this is where we now are.

7th March 2024 – the Development Consent Order was signed off allowing the Upgrade Project to proceed.

18th April 2024 – A Legal Challenge to the Project was received from Transport Action Network known as TAN. This is an action group based in the south of England who reportedly raised £35,000 to finance their legal challenge. I further understand that some of them have 'form' – The times 9th April 2024. I very much doubt if any of them have ever been on the A66.

The Legal Challenge that has been brought by TAN is not in connection with the plans for the A66, but rather the Legal Procedure followed by NH in getting to where we are now.

An appeal brought forwards on Carbon Emissions was refused. Therefore TAN are the only objectors.

23rd October 2024 – A Court will decide whether or not to accept TAN's challenge. It will sit in London and specialist planning judges will take part in the proceedings.

June 2023 – Costain left the project as the contractor for the sections east of the Pennines. They have now been replaced by Balfour Beatty who have recently signed the contract.

September 2024 – the upgrade will commence with 'low risk' work on the west side ie. making parking spaces for the contractors earth moving equipment, with a view to commencing the actual road construction on the west of the pennines in March next year.

It will be early 2026 before physical works in the construction of the North Yorkshire section commences.

So when do you anticipate the work on SC roundabout to commence was my next question?

I was very disappointed to learn that this will take place between 2027 and 2029. It just doesn't appear to be a priority for NH. An engineer from Balfour Beatty was present in the meeting. When I stated that in my opinion another lane is required when you leave Middleton Tyas so that traffic which is south bound on the A1 never actually enters the roundabout, with two lanes for traffic going to either Richmond, the A66 west or A1 north, is a minimum requirement, I was met with a stoney silence. Then the Balfour Beatty engineer piped up that 'there may be some flexibility with the design'.

We basically have that design as you come from the west and it works well. I then went on to ask about the possibility of having three lanes on the north side of the roundabout as we currently have on the south side. There would after all appear to be sufficient room to accommodate this. The Balfour Beatty engineer stated that 'there may be some flexibility with the design'.

When I stated that anyone resident in the surrounding area and especially those who live in Middleton Tyas will tell you that SC can often be grid locked on a Friday afternoon, the senior NH representative present said, 'We don't want to overdeliver for a few days a year. This is all down to cost'.

A further consideration is the requirements regarding road improvements around SC before the Designer Outlet can open. Apparently the developer is in discussion with NH about these but I have been unable to find out any further information.

In summary, the proposed upgrade of the A66 is biggest 'Tier 1 Project' in the North of England. It will take five years from 2025 to 2030 to complete. We have campaigned for years to get to this stage. We have seen traffic chaos yet again this week when a lorry broke down near the Ravensworth turn off resulting in west bound traffic tailing back as far as Scotch Corner. And as we are all painfully aware, there have been numerous fatalities over the years.

I have to say that given the government's position of cancelling many large capital projects and what I perceived to be a distinct lack of enthusiasm from the NH staff and the representative from Balfour Beatty, I am concerned that there is more than a possibility that the A66 upgrade and Scotch Corner roundabout improvements will fall victim to the government axe.

It will be a tragedy if this proves to be the case. I wish I could say that I am optimistic that the A66 £1.5bn upgrade will go ahead. I do hope I my thoughts are proved wrong.

Angus Thompson.

8th August 2024.