

Summary of TSLM's Closing Statement At the Public Inquiry into the Heysham M6 Link

TSLM objects to the Heysham M6 Link, because

- it will:

- NOT provide a long-term solution to the district's problems
- NOT solve congestion or reduce the need to travel
- NOT achieve the claimed economic benefits.

- It will:

- damage local communities
- have adverse effects on the Green Belt, landscape & biodiversity
- encourage unsustainable transport patterns and CO2 emissions

- and it faces widespread public opposition.

- It is an old-fashioned scheme, with a road-focused approach.
- Government guidance has not been followed when it should have been: the government produced it, so an application for planning permission should abide by it.
- A Park & Ride scheme was proposed late, but
 - it was not part of the planning application
 - it has not been assessed
 - LCC claim it is integral, but there is no guarantee that it will go ahead.
- The Environmental Statement, on which the application is based, is inadequate in many respects, and not fit for purpose.

The agenda for the Inquiry was set by the Secretary of State at the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG, Hazel Blears), who highlighted matters on which she "wished to be informed":

A. Does the scheme accord with local & regional development plans?

- It is inconsistent with the Development Plan, going against some key long-term aims, e.g. encouraging more sustainable transport choices.
- Although accepted in the Regional Funding Allocation process, that process was suspect
- Regional policy supports a link road in general, has not examined the pros and cons of the Northern Route.
- It is very significant that Lancaster City Council has withdrawn its support for the scheme.

B. Is this the best and most sustainable route?

- LCC has not properly investigated non-road options. So it cannot claim that this is the best solution to meet its objectives,
- It has not even looked at other northern routes,
- LCC says a Western Route would be impossible, because it might affect a European site, but
 - It has not carried out the assessments necessary to establish this, and

- Even if it were so, it has not established that a western route could not still be justified by “overriding public interest”.
- So LCC cannot demonstrate that the Northern Route is more appropriate than the Western Route

- Also, if there is no “overriding public interest” (relieving congestion and bringing jobs) that would outweigh possible harm to the European site on the Western Route, LCC cannot then claim that those benefits would outweigh harm to the (nationally-designated) Green Belt on the Northern Route.

C. Is the development sustainable? Does it reduce the need to travel, encourage public transport, counteract climate change and promote the economy?

- It will not reduce the need to travel or reduce reliance on the car: that is not the purpose of a road-building scheme.
- It may not even reduce congestion, as more road space encourages more cars, perhaps deterred previously from taking to the roads.
- It does not help public transport: LCC only says it has “potential” to do so, but hasn’t worked out the details; it is leaving that to a study only just commissioned.
- There is no evidence that sustainable transport measures are impossible without a road. LCC is pursuing some now, and will continue to do so.
- The claimed economic benefits are not proven, and government insists that they must be proven and not just assumed.
- Heysham Port is experiencing considerable investment, and more is planned; naturally, the Port would like more government investment in roads, but it has not said that it would suffer if no road is built.
- Similarly, Lancaster & Morecambe generally is expanding, without a road.
- The forecast economic justification for the scheme depends on assumptions, which are not stated and cannot be tested. But as the LCC witness said: you wouldn’t spend £140 million to create 1,100 jobs.
- The jobs forecast has fallen dramatically from 6,018 (2005) to 1,812 (2006), then to 1,100 (2007), now 949. LCC admits that only 595 would go to residents of Lancaster & Morecambe. Strangely LCC, which approved the scheme on the higher figure (6,018), has not considered whether it should change its view now the benefits have diminished to one tenth of the original.

D. Does it follow government guidance on the Green Belt?

- The route is in the North Lancashire Green Belt, and would severely damage it and its purposes.
- The planning application failed to notice the existence of the Green Belt, or its implications.
- It is “inappropriate development”, and could only be allowed in “very special circumstances”. These circumstances are claimed to be (1) reduced congestion, (2) economic benefits (3) no alternative, and (4) Development Plan endorsement.
 - But the first two (reduced congestion and economic benefits) are claimed by all road schemes, so they are not “very special”.
 - The lack of an alternative route, or non-road-building option, has not been proved.
 - The Development Plan contains no specific approval for the Northern Route.

- In any case, the claimed benefits are local, against the national Green Belt designation

E. Does the scheme protect the character and diversity of the countryside?

- It would significantly damage the character of the landscape, bringing intrusion of noise, light pollution and visual impact in a tranquil rural area. LCC accepts that the damage would be severe.
- The proposed mitigation measures have not been decided yet, and would not alleviate the damage.
- It is clearly an unacceptable disbenefit.

F. Would the scheme affect biodiversity?

- It would have an unacceptable adverse impact on protected species and their habitats, including otters, salmon, crayfish, bats and rare fungi and plants. The planning application did not properly assess these impacts.
- LCC claims the harmful effects will be countered by mitigation measures, but the mitigation scheme on which it relies is not available, is not written down, and is not even complete. It could amount to anything.

G. Does the scheme promote more sustainable transport choices and reduce the need to travel, especially by car?

- In the *whole* area, traffic conditions on present trends will be worse in 2025 with the scheme, than in 2001.
- The scheme gives a benefit in 2010, but then starts getting worse again.
- The benefits claimed sound good, but they are based on unrealistic assumptions, and on further analysis they are much more marginal.
- The Secretary of State is concerned to be informed about public transport and the need to reduce travel, especially by car, which this scheme does not do. In fact, it increases car use.
- However, policies do exist to reduce traffic, and can be applied (e.g. smarter measures, road space re-allocation, road user charging).
- All of LCC's "opportunities" to implement sustainable policies are unrealistic and imprecise.
- Further, LCC has not considered whether the problems it has identified could be addressed by non-road-building solutions. Their last multi-modal study was in 1998. They did not go back to first principles, as required by government guidance.
- Perversely, in 2005 they compared the Northern Route to their "Next Best Option", the Western Route, which a year before they had decided was unbuildable – clearly just "going through the motions".

H. Other

Noise: the road would lead to unacceptable levels of noise at people's homes; in many cases, double the level of noise.

Air Quality: the road would lead to unacceptable increases in the levels of pollutants, which have no safe lower limits.

Flood Risk: LCC failed even to consider the recent government guidance and tests. The Lune Bridge lies within the zone of highest flood risk, but LCC failed to

- Investigate if it could be built in a less risky area
- Consider if the wider benefits outweighed the risk
- Consider the effects of climate change.

Conclusion

This scheme presents a notable catalogue of disbenefits and harms: harm to the Green Belt, ecological interests, local and national policies protecting the open countryside, and local and national policies concerning sustainable transport, sustainable development and climate change; not to mention the clear detriment to Lancaster and Morecambe College, itself a significant and valuable component of the local economy and civil life. LCC has failed to demonstrate that significant benefits will arise.

On any fair view of the evidence presented at this inquiry, LCC's proposal fall a long way short of presenting a respectable, let alone compelling, case for driving a road through both the countryside and through the Secretary of State's policy, which is what LCC is asking the Secretary of State to do by approving this application for planning permission.

TSLM requests request that the Secretary of State refuse the application made by LCC.

Legal Submission

TSLM also made a legal submission, that it would actually be unlawful for the Secretary of State to grant planning permission, because the Environmental Statement (ES), on which the planning application is based, is deficient in some key areas, and so does not meet with the legal definition of an ES.

Key areas are:

- the park and ride proposal, which LCC say is integral to the scheme
- mitigation measures for landscape and wildlife, not yet decided
- effects on Green Belt and the setting of the historic city