A701 Relief Road and A702 Link Road 2025

Consultation page

Spokes response - May 2025

Summary

Spokes strongly object to the principle of the A701 Relief Road and A702 Link Road proposals. If built, these roads will aggravate most of the issues they are supposed to alleviate.

The proposed scheme particularly fails to meet the “Takes climate action” and “Improves our health and wellbeing” Priorities identified in the National Transport Strategy,[1] and also runs counter to the national commitment to reduce car-kilometres by 20% by 2030.[2]

The time, money and other resources being allocated to this project should instead be spent on projects which will actually help solve these problems, such as improving the public and active travel networks in Midlothian.

Below we list general and specific comments on the proposals.

Induced demand

The fundamental assumption of the proposal is that congestion can be relieved by increasing road capacity. This assumption is categorically incorrect. Instead, it has been well known for a long time that increasing road capacity will induce demand (that is, people who previously wouldn’t have driven will then choose to do so). On average, there is a one-to-one relationship, so a 10% increase in road capacity will be followed, within a few years, by a 10% increase in vehicles being driven.[3] A major study commissioned by CPRE "The Impact of Road Projects in England” [4] examined Highways England's reports on road developments. They found:

- Average traffic increases over the short run (3-7 years; seven schemes) were +7%
- Average increases over the long run (8-20 years; six schemes) were +47%
- Of 25 road schemes justified on the basis that they would benefit the local economy, only five had any evidence of any economic effects. These effects were as likely to suck money out of the local area as to bring it in.

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[1] https://www.transport.gov.scot/media/47052/national-transport-strategy.pdf
[2] https://www.transport.gov.scot/our-approach/environment/20-reduction-in-car-km-by-2030/
[3] The Fundamental Law of Road Congestion: Evidence from US Cities
[4] Lynn Sloman, Lisa Hopkinson, and Ian Taylor. The impact of road projects in England. Technical report, Transport for Quality of Life, 2017.

There can therefore be no long-term reduction in journey time expected. If there is evidence to suggest that the current proposals will not induce demand then this should be presented.

The consultation page says that the proposed route will reduce traffic on the A701 by 30-40%. This will not be maintained unless road capacity on the A701 is reduced. The ~3 minute journey time saving is negligible in the context of a peak-time journey from Penicuik to central Edinburgh taking ~60 minutes. Crucially, if the proposed increase in road capacity does initially result in lower journey times, that will induce demand, leading to more people driving, more congestion and, sooner or later, average journey times being higher than they are now.

Active travel infrastructure

There does not appear to be any active travel infrastructure included in the plans for the new roads. High quality protected cycleways should be included as part of any major road project.

The plans for the existing A701 should be made available so that they can be considered alongside the plans for the proposed roads. Furthermore, if the Council does unfortunately approve the new road, then the project should be legally and financially tied in with A701 physical measures to reduce motor traffic capacity and to provide high quality active travel routes and bus routes, and within a specified limited time frame.

Specific comments

- Traffic flow is predicted to increase at Straiton roundabout, which is already one of the most congested parts of the local road network. Even without any induced demand, this is likely to have detrimental effects on journey times in the area.
- Increasing traffic flows at Straiton roundabout is likely to have knock-on congestion effects on the A720. Traffic modelling of these effects have not been presented.
- Adding another arm to Straiton roundabout will make the junction more dangerous for motorists, pedestrians and cyclists.
- The proposed route jeopardises, or possibly precludes, the Straiton-Hillend active travel route identified in Midlothian’s Active Travel Plan.
- No cost estimates have been provided.