

Submission to the Active Traffic Management (ATM) feasibility study from Campaign for Better Transport

Introduction

We welcome the feasibility study into Active Traffic Management (ATM), especially as an alternative to conventional motorway widening. However we have some concerns which we would like to formally submit into the study, outside of the informal stakeholder meetings we have been attending. We would like the below concerns and views to be included in the final report.

Benefits of ATM versus widening

We would certainly welcome ATM as an alternative to expensive and destructive motorway widening. Many of the widening schemes in the programme, and proposed schemes like the M6 j11-19 widening would have serious impacts on landscapes. Widening is extremely expensive, and sends the wrong message to the travelling public that the Government wants to increase traffic growth.

Strategy, objectives and purpose of ATM

We are unclear what the long-term strategy is for ATM. If it is simply to create a little extra capacity that will simply fill up again in a few years we would not support ATM. This would again be another sticking plaster solution that does not deal with long term challenges.

We could only support ATM that will help the Department to meet its environmental objectives. We would like to see ATM designed so that it achieves modal shift and contributes to a reduction in CO2 and air pollution. The tone of the stakeholder meetings was that ATM was viewed as simply a way to get more traffic on the roads, nothing more. There seemed a disappointing lack of ambition within the Department to achieve anything positive from ATM, just a desire to facilitate increased traffic growth – a 'predict and provide' mentality.

Measures to lock in benefits essential

To prevent capacity increases leading to a predictable increase in traffic, it is essential to provide measures to lock in the benefits of ATM. We were pleased that that some of these measures were included in agendas for the stakeholder meetings. However we were disappointed that there seemed to be a general negativity and apathy at the ATM stakeholder meetings towards these measures – a 'cannot-do' attitude.

We would like to see the new lane being used as a High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) lane. We would in particular like to see the lane being used as a bus or coach lane to encourage significant modal shift. There is an urgent need to make public transport more attractive and convenient, and a bus/coach HOV lane would certainly achieve this, and encourage a switch from car to bus by providing more reliable journey times. This would achieve significant benefits and help the Government towards its carbon reduction targets. It is hard to find any more efficient High Occupancy Vehicle than a well filled large bus or coach.

It should also be used for traditional car sharing. We would strongly oppose any moves to create a lorry only lane, as this would lead to an increase in road freight transport to the detriment of rail freight.

We agree with the Commission for Integrated Transport (CfIT) that there is also an opportunity to implement road pricing on a future lane. This could lock in the benefits, and also have the advantage of warming the public up towards road pricing.

Impact on the local road network

We are concerned that capacity increases on the core motorway network, without any measure to lock in the benefits, will simply lead to an unacceptable pressure on the local road network which has not been upgraded in parallel to deal with it. Increasing traffic growth on the core network could have devastating effects in rural areas in particular, and routes from motorway to urban centres. We have

yet to be convinced that this had been adequately assessed by the Department during the stakeholder meetings.

Low speed limits

We believe that slower speed limits are crucial to achieve most of the benefits of ATM. We are concerned at any discussion about potentially raising the limit above 50mph. The good results from the M42 pilot (reduction in carbon emissions, air pollution and accidents), we believe, were due to the low speed limit of 50 mph on all four lanes. We would strongly oppose any move to increase limits above 50mph, as this would wipe out the benefits on which our current support for ATM is based.

Introducing lower speed limits offers a real opportunity for the Department to communicate clear Act On CO2 messages to the public – that driving at slower speeds reduces CO2 and saves the motorist money. However we are also not convinced that reducing CO2 is a strong enough Departmental objective for ATM, and we believe this objective needs to be prioritised and made clear to the public.

M25

We are very concerned that it appears that the Department has excluded the M25 from the ATM study and is continuing plans for conventional widening. We are not convinced that there has been a robust cost-benefit analysis of this decision, and the M25 should have at least been **considered** in the ATM study.

The M25 DBFO project will be an enormous burden on the public purse. Two years ago the PFI project was expected to cost over £5 billion. Some of the proposed M25 widening also runs through the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and would destroy significant amounts of irreplaceable ancient woodland.

We have not seen convincing evidence the IDM measures proposed by the Highways Agency will work either. Again, traffic levels will simply rise and this will yet another costly mistake. Please consider including the M25 in the feasibility study.

Problems with conventional appraisal techniques

We also have concerns that analysis of the costs and benefits of widening versus ATM are being undertaken using the old NATA appraisal system. NATA is currently under review, and is widely regarded to be seriously flawed. We are concerned that any version of ATM that is sustainable and encourages modal shift will not look good in conventional NATA cost-benefit term. This is due to NATA rewarding schemes which increase fuel consumption, and therefore additional fuel tax revenue. Schemes which reduce traffic and encourage more sustainable travel are counted within NATA as a disbenefit.

Even smoothing out the flow of traffic would score badly as less fuel is consumed. NATA also overly-rewards journey time savings, not reliability, and so 50mph ATM would not score well under NATA. Under an appraisal methodology that rewards reliability, ATM and lower speeds would score better.

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