

To all members of the West Yorkshire
Combined Authority, the WYCA
Transport Committee and the WYCA
Climate Change Committee.



Dear Elected Member,

I am writing to you about the A650/Newton Bar Roundabout “junction improvement scheme” that is due to break ground in January.

I am writing to demand that this scheme is cancelled by WYCA, with the contractor costs being paid from the project budget.

I will explain the reasoning below, and make concrete suggestions to replace the current scheme with a scheme that focuses on improving safety and free movement of buses, pedestrians and cyclists through the junction.

I am writing on behalf of Just Transition Wakefield.

Just Transition Wakefield is a climate campaign group formed initially by Wakefield Trades Council and Wakefield Friends of the Earth, but now including a wide range of organisations and individuals. As a group we work across Wakefield District and with partners across West Yorkshire.

Critique of the current scheme.

1. The scheme is based on outdated and inappropriate models of traffic growth. These assume a constant increase in car ownership and private car commuting, based on 20th century models. They are not fit for purpose in the 21st century when we are actively planning for reductions in car use and increasing use of public and active transport. Our guiding principle should be “Build for the traffic you want, not the traffic you have”.

Even more critically, when examining the data, it is clear that traffic growth in West Yorkshire was essentially zero in the decade 2000 to 2010 and very low in the decade 2011 to 2021. Traffic monitoring on the A61 approaching the Newton Bar roundabout illustrates this clearly: <https://roadtrafficstats.uk/traffic-statistics-wakefield-a61-wakefield-16578>

Data we have seen suggests that traffic queues less than 1,000m in both peaks do not qualify for congestion amelioration. We have never observed queues like this at this junction.

Therefore, it is clear that this scheme is an historical anachronism, and to go ahead with it will be to build a monument to the 20th century paradigm of car ownership.

2. As the scheme currently stands, at least 107 mature trees will be destroyed, releasing tonnes of sequestered carbon into the atmosphere from both the tree carcasses, from the soil and in the future loss of carbon sequestration. New trees planted will take decades to replace the sequestration power of these mature trees. This is incompatible with your declared climate emergency.
3. The loss of these mature trees and associated shrubbery will damage the ecosystem in the area by removing habitats including well-established soil biomes that have remained undisturbed for years. This is incompatible with the ecological emergency that is unfolding in parallel to the climate crisis.
4. The loss of these mature trees, and their replacement with a huge road system, will not provide a positive visual aesthetic to welcome people into the city, and will in fact tell the world that Wakefield is anything but a green city.
5. The loss of these mature trees will remove the ability of the site to absorb air pollution from traffic. As society moves to electric cars, whilst gaseous emissions such as carbon dioxide and nitrous oxide will decrease, studies show that particulate pollution will increase – particularly PM10 and PM2.5. We need these trees to help manage this airborne pollution throughout the transition to zero carbon transport.
6. The cycle and pedestrian proposals are inadequate for anticipated future demand, forcing both to be held together in the central reservation whilst waiting for lights – this does not allow for any significant planned increase in cycle commuting.
7. The proposed slip road to “accelerate” traffic from the city onto the A650 and the motorway network is misguided and mis-designed. The complexities of the junction require traffic light control not traffic merging. Therefore there will be no benefit to this traffic. We have counted 11 sets of lights to manage traffic flow through the junction, with further pedestrian lights adding to the mix and no doubt driver frustration.
8. The proposed “hamburger” road through the roundabout is designed to accelerate traffic flow from the A650 (from the motorway network) into the city. However, it is again the wrong solution. The traffic leaving the roundabout has barely 200 yards before stopping for the Leeds Road/Wentworth Street/Bradford Old Road interchange. Again, this restricts traffic flowing off the roundabout already and this congestion point will remain unchanged – the proposal will not deliver improved traffic flow. This is before considering that traffic using the “hamburger” road will have to pass through two sets of lights.
9. The proposals make no change to traffic flows along Bar Lane, or exiting Bar Lane at Newton Bar – the only place where congestion is a

problem – although nothing like the scale of the traffic problems in bigger cities such as Leeds.

10. Finally, we have not seen the detail since planning on the area known locally as “The Green”. This is earmarked for either a flood attenuation pond or underground tank. We do not believe that the local community who use the green are really aware of the threat to their amenity.

It is clear to everyone looking at the proposals that the scheme is designed to increase traffic flows between the city and the motorway network. In other words, it is designed to encourage and increase long-distance commuting in private cars – the exact opposite of what is needed to mitigate the accelerating climate emergency. This is why we are demanding that WYCA cancel the scheme and bear the contractor costs from the project funds. We believe that this is a better use of public money than spending £9,500,000 to trash an ecosystem without any significant improvements in traffic flows.

We are very happy to work with WYCA and Wakefield Council to look at a new scheme within the remaining project fund that would deliver the kind of improvements that we need for the future zero carbon world we are all aiming for, specifically safe routes for pedestrians and cyclists and freer bus movement through the junction.

Alongside this specific scheme, we have to insist that WYCA at least pause ALL currently planned road schemes to re-evaluate them against your own Carbon Emissions Reduction Pathway criteria. From this re-evaluation, we may implement some road schemes. Others will be stopped, others may be redesigned. We cannot continue to plough ahead with habitual solutions to historic problems. We know that new roads generate new traffic. We know that we need to help people decide to leave their cars at home. We know that we have a collective responsibility to cut emissions to zero by 2038. If we continue to build new roads and try and accelerate traffic, we are working against our own stated policy. This is the time to stop and re-start in a new direction so that we can hit that challenge of zero carbon by 2038.

The UK has just spent a fortnight engaged in detailed climate study through COP26 reporting. Many of us have been on the streets to demand change, many others have listened to the daily news updates and reports. Tracy, our own West Yorkshire Mayor, has made very clear statements about cities and regions taking leadership roles and moving ahead of central government. This is WYCA's opportunity to draw a red line on climate damage and become a climate leader in the region.

As Greta Thunberg said on Twitter: “the people in power don't need conferences, treaties or agreements to start taking real climate action. They can start today.” This is West Yorkshire's opportunity to be the force for good, on the right side of history.

I am writing to the elected members of the Combined Authority Committee, the Transport Committee and the Climate change Committee. This is because we cannot meet our 2038 target without climate change policies working coherently throughout the combined authority. Climate policies cannot be siloed and isolated. We have to understand that delivering the emissions reductions needs effective policies in transport, regeneration, social care, education and training – every aspect of the economy. This letter is your opportunity to make this pause and make climate adaptation and mitigation an integral part of WYCA's work.

This is why we appeal to you to enable Wakefield Council to cancel this specific scheme, by thinking outside of normal protocols, and cover the contractor costs from cancelling the scheme from the project funds. This action will avoid the waste of the full £9.5 million, AND allow you to establish the authority as a climate leader not a climate laggard.

Yours faithfully,



Stuart Boothman
On behalf of
Just Transition Wakefield

16th November 2021

<https://justtransitionwakefield.org.uk>
jtw@justtransitionwakefield.org.uk