

Draft 15 November 2021

To: All Cabinet Members of Wakefield Council
Town Hall, Wakefield

Dear Councillor

NEWTON BAR HIGHWAY SCHEME

I refer to recent discussions that our group has held with a number of Council members and officers concerning the above scheme proposal.

Wakefield Friends of the Earth registers in the strongest possible terms its opposition to the Newton Bar highways scheme on the outskirts of Wakefield city centre. The reasons for our objection are both local and national - or even global - in their nature.

Firstly, from a local perspective

Our observations show that, even at peak times - with the possible exception of traffic on Bar Lane - there is no extensive congestion in the vicinity of Newton Bar. Congestion is not disproportionate to what may be expected on a main arterial road on the fringes of a city centre. Traffic levels at Newton Bar, in fact, have barely increased at all over the past 20 years. **Levels of congestion at Newton Bar simply do NOT justify spending £9m on this scheme.**

That said, anyway, **our group cannot envisage this scheme actually reducing congestion in the area.** The configuration of the road system leading to and from the existing roundabout - including a major junction, three other roundabouts, pedestrian crossings, traffic light controls and single carriageway roads in most cases - militates against any additional capacity at Newton Bar roundabout alone, having any materially positive effect on local traffic flows.

Indeed, the scheme proposed is so complex, we would argue it is over-engineered. It would appear to require, for example, the introduction of 24-hour traffic lights to control traffic flows across the roundabout. **This could only serve to slow traffic using the roundabout during off-peak travel periods**, which amount to more than 90% of a normal week.

It is accepted that Newton Bar roundabout is a wholly unsafe junction to attempt to traverse on foot. Pedestrians do so at their personal peril and likewise cyclists. So **the quite minor improvements that are proposed in cycling and walking infrastructure are inadequate and unacceptable** to us. Moreover, the scheme does little to provide for the expected growth in demand from cycling, especially E-cycling and related innovative developments.

The loss of 107 mature trees and many other woody plants would be a wholly unacceptable cost. The alleged benefits of the Newton Bar scheme - which we believe to be illusory, or at best, exaggerated - do not justify the loss of such a significant local public amenity and wildlife habitat. Moreover, chopping down these trees would release tonnes of sequestered carbon into the atmosphere...which point leads us on to consider wider issues than just the local.

But finally on the local dimension, we would ask the Council, in deciding to proceed with the Newton Bar scheme, **what consideration has been given to the Council's declarations of climate and biodiversity emergencies?** And, **has the scheme been the subject of appropriate Council-level scrutiny?**

Now, from a national or perhaps global perspective

By law, **the UK must reduce polluting emissions by 78% by 2035 compared to 1990 levels.** In West Yorkshire, emissions from the transport sector have the highest share - approaching 40% of total emissions are from transport.

So it will not be possible to achieve the statutory target unless there are large cuts in transport emissions in our area.

To meet the UK's legal targets, statutory transport body Transport for the North's (TfN) draft decarbonisation strategy, recognises that **emissions from the transport sector must reduce significantly before 2035.** In that timeframe, electric vehicles or any powered by green hydrogen, will provide only part of the solution to reducing transport emissions.

So, to cut emissions from transport during the next ten years - which we need to do to meet statutory targets - **there needs to be LESS TRAFFIC on the roads.**

The Yorkshire & Humber Climate Commission's Climate Action Plan recognises the need to accelerate investment in transport systems, to reduce their energy demand, promote public transport and enable active modes of travel. The Commission accepts that it must **find the money to invest in public transport and in joined-up plans for walking and cycling.**

The West Yorkshire Combined Authority's Climate and Environment Plan states that "*To reduce emissions to virtually zero within the [transport] sector will require a **fundamental change in the need and how we travel, with fewer journeys...and more of the journeys made being undertaken by public transport, cycling and walking***". **The WYCA Carbon Emissions Reduction Pathways study states that private car use must decline by between 38% and 21% by 2038.**

In contrast, Wakefield Friends of the Earth believes that **implementation of the Newton Bar scheme would increase road capacity and generate an increase in vehicle traffic in the area.**

We believe and propose that the £9m of public money that is earmarked for the Newton Bar roundabout scheme, would be put to better use in providing, firstly, improved bus services across the Wakefield district; and secondly, in creating improved, segregated cycling and walking infrastructure.

To conclude, Wakefield Friends of the Earth reiterates its opposition to the proposed Newton Bar roundabout highway scheme - certainly in its present form - on the outskirts of Wakefield City Centre. We call on Wakefield Council to reconsider its support for this damaging, costly and unnecessary scheme.

Please CANCEL the Newton Bar scheme ~~and/or or~~ agree to lobby WYCA to accept its cancellation along with the return of its investment monies, minus any incurred and necessary contractor costs.

Yours sincerely



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