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Matter 5: Core Policy 2

Question 5.5. Transport. An Insurmountable Barrier? *The CS states that that there are in, highways and transportation terms, no insurmountable barriers to delivery; that the transport network, with improvements, will be able to support the levels of growth over the plan period; and that it is unlikely that new road building will be required. What is the evidence to support these statements??*

- 5.5.1 A question like this begs so many other questions about the fundamentals of everything before you, that I have hesitated very long about submitting anything further than my original on-line comments.
- 5.5.2 For me the problem of the whole strategy is that it is rooted in unreality. I realise that this is a problem with much or most of the ‘strategic’ thinking of local authorities across the country and it stems from the same problem at government level. The journey is planned on the assumption that we crew a sound vessel, that we journey on navigable waters, computing our course and our speed for a known destination, marginally adjusting for slight variations of conditions - but we do not imagine icebergs. Of course we must make assumptions about what lies ahead, but if the assumptions do not include the icebergs that we know are there, our strategy is a dreadful self-deception.
- 5.5.3 There are three gigantic icebergs ahead of us, none of which figure in any realistic way at all in the strategic thinking in Wiltshire:
- **Carbon:** presumably the strategic timescale before you is of the order of at least a decade. During that time we are supposed to be reducing carbon by 30% (20% already agreed, with the government pressing for 30% agreement in Europe). There is very little prospect of this kind of reduction taking place across the energy sector of the economy, the industrial sector or the existing domestic housing sector. The large growth in house-building will to some extent be governed by new standards (though very little seems to be in prospect at better than Class 4) for emissions during use, but over the next decade the embodied carbon in their building would massively outweigh any carbon savings elsewhere.

Transport is in fact the sector for which carbon emission is most discretionary, in that private motoring and much long-distance road freight is mostly about bad habit – we simply don’t need to do it, we don’t need to do it so much and we could find much more carbon-efficient ways of doing the travel and freight movement that we do do. This isn’t a technology argument – there is no sensible prospect outside the fantasy world of the King report, that cars are going to be significantly less carbon-emitting in their use and manufacture over the timescales that matter on climate and our climate commitments.

The argument is that we have to use cars (and long-distance road freight) much, much less and we have to change our habits very quickly. If we are serious about meeting climate commitments (and remember the science tells us that even these commitments are far too unambitious) we need to reduce car use over the next decade by more than 30% (*‘more than’* because we will not reduce carbon elsewhere in the economy by as much as this).

- **Resources:** There is very little doubt now that we are at or close to peak production of most of the resources we use in our modern economy, in transport, industry and agriculture. Oil in particular is possibly already past peak. This notion is no longer dismissable as the

preserve of environmental cranks – for example the UK Industry Taskforce on Peak Oil & Energy Security has just issued its second report on the matter¹ and concluded

There is a real need for more integration of sustainable transport policies with land use planning. In terms of contingency planning, Government needs to ensure that, as well as prioritising key worker groups in times of fuel shortage or disruptions to oil supply, public transport is also prioritised, bearing in mind its ability to move large numbers of people extremely efficiently. Public transport is well placed to deliver the low-cost, quick win solutions that we need.

All of this requires partnership between transport operators and local authorities. It also needs brave politicians with long-term vision. Technology will take us some way along the road. But behavioural change, modal shift to greener, smarter bus, coach and train travel and measures to support these modes will make or break our efforts to deliver a reduced oil-dependant, low carbon transport future.

Of course a resources famine may be just what the planet needs to offset the harm being done by profligate use of resources, if developed economies are not prepared to act for the future. The problem is that of control. Climate change imperatives say that 20 years from now we ought to have taken measures to reduce road-borne transport hugely but controllably, but post-Peak-Oil realities may reduce it hugely and uncontrollably.²

- **Recession:** The Strategy is replete with prediction, based on a business-as-usual philosophy – demographic trends are observed and must be extrapolated, housing is predicted and housing must be provided, traffic growth is predicted and we must allow for it (Wiltshire still thinks in terms of providing new highway capacity), economic growth may not be smooth but it is inevitable. Within this mode of thinking all effects are first order – recession is merely the course change brought about by some adverse weather conditions – we need to take some actions and spend some fuel getting the Titanic back on track and up to full speed again. Almost all economists work only in this first order mode – there is never a second-order question ‘*what if there is a big iceberg in the way?*’

Because the question is problematic does not mean we should not ask it. Some economists have asked it and are already arguing that the current Recession is not like any previous recession - an ordinary perturbation on the course of the world economy, but fundamentally about what drives the mechanism of the economy – cheap energy.³ If this happens to be true we will not look back on a single-dip or even a double-dip recession, but a steep slide away from a world peak of economic activity.

But even if it is not true, the optimists themselves are saying that we need decades to unsaddle ourselves from the debt we have taken on. It is very difficult to see how this can not affect our perspective of strategy, considering that all the housing and transport predictions pre-date the banking crisis and are founded on a perception of a future that is clearly so at odds with events.

¹ ‘*The Oil Crunch - A wake-up call for the UK economy*’; Second report of the ITPOES; February 2010

² paraphrasing Rosina Bierbaum’s book title: *Confronting Climate Change: Avoiding the Unmanageable and Managing the Unavoidable*

³ See, for example, James Hamilton’s presentation to the US Congress. Hamilton is an economist, not an environmental campaigner: http://www.econbrowser.com/archives/2009/05/Hamilton_JEC_2009_05_20.html

- 5.5.4 I perfectly understand that the consequences of scenarios of post-Peak-resources and permanent Recession are beyond the planning capabilities of local authorities (considering that national governments have not yet begun to face up to the possibilities). All that can really be said about them is that the process of implementation of strategy should be structured so that it is flexible to a much more changeable world than we have been used to. We might plan for housing and its transport needs, but we should be in no hurry to provide for what may never happen.
- 5.5.5 Much more to the point (and much more relevant to the duty of developing strategy), however, is that these scenarios would have the consequence of forcing upon us the same changes that we should be making to combat climate change. We can have a view about the resources and recession scenarios that might colour our view about strategy. But our views on climate change (whether in the mainstream of science, or in the Lawson/Monckton school of non-scientific denial, or in the Lomborg school that sees no point in action) are not the imperatives when it comes to strategy development.
- 5.5.6 The imperative for the strategy comes out of the Climate Change Act. Local authorities will be increasingly held to account for what they are doing to bring about the levels of carbon reduction to which we are committed as a nation. And as indicated above, the only possible way in which those carbon reductions can be achieved is by transport bearing at least its proportionate share of the reduction and probably a lot more. And furthermore the only plausible route to such reduction lies in reduced private transport use and long-distance road freight. Any strategy that does not contain specific and significant transport carbon reduction is clearly at odds with Government policy and the UK's international commitments.
- 5.5.7 If we look at the Options Assessment Report of the Transport Strategy we see that objectives are ranked (at least one assumes this is some sort of priority ranking) as Primary, Secondary or Tertiary. Quite apart from the observation that objectives seem generally to have been assigned randomly to these levels, one cannot but be astonished that reduction of climate change gas emissions ranks as a Secondary objective.
- 5.5.8 Carbon emissions in fact hardly get a mention throughout the 11 volumes of the Transport Strategy. To the extent that they are considered at all, the strategy proposes a 'radical' option that does not reduce carbon from transport one iota.
- 5.5.9 Your question 5.5 relates to whether road-building is necessary to meet the growth plans/predictions within the strategy. Indeed the wording implies that you need the Council to demonstrate that they will not need to build roads.⁴ The issue is surely not whether the planned growth levels will require more road capacity, but whether these growth levels get in the way of the imperative of reducing traffic. More road capacity can only make that objective more difficult to achieve.

Question 5.6. Transport. What, Who and When? *What are the highway and transportation measures, or range of potential measures, that would need to be put in place in order to ensure that the transport network would be able to support the Strategic Sites? In developing these sites can congestion and safety problems on the major transport corridors of the A303 and A36 be overcome, can pressure on the Salisbury ring road be accommodated and can meaningful alternative*

⁴ In fact a very fair criticism of Wiltshire Council would be that it has been over-willing to build roads in the past and still has many road projects in its sights (including, in the RFA submissions, a very large, but unspecified infrastructure project in Salisbury) – indeed so unreconstructed is it that, even after the very clear Westbury Bypass decision, it has reiterated a desire to bring back what it calls the bypass 'project'.

transport choices to the private car be provided? Who would be responsible for financing and implementing any measures that would be required and when would they be implemented?

- 5.6.1 I would like to deal with the two corridors separately because I think they present two very different challenges.
- 5.6.2 **A303:** My prime motive for responding to the original consultation was in relation to the A303 and its effects on Stonehenge. The House of Commons Public Accounts Committee described the setting of Stonehenge as a '*national disgrace*' owing to amongst other things the '*stranglehold of roads and traffic*'. The Highways Agency at the Stonehenge Inquiry cited the '*national disgrace*' quotation in its argument for the tunnel scheme.
- 5.6.3 The Government signed up to the Stonehenge Management Plan including the statement:
- Measures should be identified which will provide comprehensive treatment of important road links within the WHS in order to reduce traffic movements and congestion, improve safety and enhance the historic environment.*
- 5.6.4 We know that the tunnel scheme at Stonehenge was not approved for cost reasons and it was made clear that there was no prospect of it being built within any foreseeable future. Since that time there have been investigations of other possible diversionary routes, but these appear to have been discounted (as I understand it largely for reasons of military uses of land adjacent to the boundaries of the World Heritage Site).
- 5.6.5 It is thus clear that there can be no scheme that relieves the Stonehenge monument of the A303 traffic. This leaves the government almost in a logical no-mans-land – it agrees the setting of the monument is a '*national disgrace*'; it undertook at the time of designation in 1986 to improve the setting of the stones; it recognised that reduction of traffic past the stones was an essential requisite of that improvement. So the national disgrace remains without prospect of traffic relief by infrastructure improvement.
- 5.6.6 The only way out of the no-mans-land is to reduce the traffic on the A303. Whether or not there is political will to do this, what is completely clear is that anything that encourages further traffic growth on this corridor is to be absolutely deplored, if the government means what it says about a national disgrace.
- 5.6.7 The government is not saying this explicitly, though if it were honest it would. But it has given a very interesting pointer. Where there was talk of a Second Strategic Route⁵ to the west country from London, the A303 was the primary reference. The Secretary of State's revisions to the RSS have now clearly suppressed this direct association between the Second Strategic Route and the A303, it being made clear that the strategic route is both a rail and road corridor.
- 5.6.8 Wiltshire Council is persistently not seeing this, the dualling of the whole A303 remaining a stated ambition of the strategy. Clearly on-line dualling of the A303 at the monument would be immensely damaging of the archaeological integrity of the WHS itself, quite apart from the monument's cultural setting. But dualling it anywhere else along its length would inevitably induce further traffic on to the A303 and past the monument.

⁵ i.e. where the M4-M5 was deemed to be the first strategic route

- 5.6.9 Worse than this, the Council seems to be going out of its way to encourage additional traffic on to the A303 and in particular, by rubber-stamping the Retail Distribution Centre⁶ at Solstice Park, it is knowingly putting significant additional heavy goods traffic past the monument.
- 5.6.10 **A36:** The Salisbury transport study explores a fairly narrow range of options for access to the city centre, including one which is deemed ‘radical’, though in the ‘long-term’ this is thought likely to achieve a maximum of 3% reduction in traffic (Options Assessment §5.70), which itself does not obviously relate to the 0% carbon reduction in Table 6.5. This is all pretty irrelevant to the climate task for carbon reduction of the order of 20-30% over a decade.
- 5.6.11 But the ‘radical’ option does point the way, to the extent that the analysis suggests an economic as well as environmental benefit from reducing traffic and improving access through modal shift. Which makes one naturally ask the question: why not go much further in what seems to be a win-win direction?
- 5.6.12 But, however ambitious we might be at changing the efficiency and economic and environmental benefit of access to the city centre, there remains the problem of through traffic, principally on the A36. If access traffic is reduced by modal shift the through traffic will not only be increased relatively, but absolutely, since congestion reduction will lead to induction.
- 5.6.13 There are ways of countering induction which amount to reducing the attractiveness of the corridor as a whole (e.g. by new speed limits elsewhere along it, thus securing additional safety benefit and carbon reductions). The A36 is a trunk road and might be thought to be outside the local authority power to influence. But this is a matter which seems to have been the choice of Wiltshire Council. The Department for Transport wanted to detrunk this road a couple of years ago, but Wiltshire Council resisted this and the DfT reluctantly agreed to drop the idea.
- 5.6.14 But there is also real potential to achieve traffic reduction on the A36 and A350 through modal shift. The parallel railway from Southampton to Bristol has been much neglected and Wiltshire has never shown any real interest in supporting it. Thus for example a scheme to reintroduce services on the Trans-Wilts line from Chippenham to Salisbury was costed at around £100,000 per year and received no support from the WC, whilst at the same time this authority was prepared to spend something above £1M per year developing the abortive Westbury Bypass scheme over 4 years.
- 5.6.15 **Funding transport alternatives:** Transport strategy ought to concentrate on efficiency. For reasons of good husbandry of resources and planetary stability we should be travelling less and we should be moving goods less. But for those trips we do have to make we should look for maximum efficiency. Any engineer looking at a transport problem as a system from a fundamental level, would never come up with the idea that everybody should be travelling around in individual boxes with individual engines, or that most of the freight that is delivered should be delivered even over very long distance by individual machines, instead of being packaged together in trains.
- 5.6.16 The fact that this is the way transport works everywhere and especially in this country, is not because a free market has evolved such a system, which might be thought to be a proof of

⁶ Quite apart from the disgraceful fact that the megashed development will be clearly visible from the WHS

economic efficiency, but because road transport is effectively and unfairly subsidised. There are many studies⁷ that highlight the externalisation of costs on the road systems of the developed world and they all identify a very significant level of effective subsidy (in the UK for example the level of externalisation of costs of motor traffic is up to three times the total taxation on the activity).

- 5.6.17 We can see one aspect of the subsidisation of car transport in the provision of car parking, particularly in major town centres. I do not have any knowledge of the figures for Salisbury, but in my home town of Winchester, which has many similarities, this subsidy is enormous. The land used for off-street car parking⁸ in central Winchester, if it were sold, for example, for housing, would realise probably of the order of £150M. The parking budget in Winchester, by the time it has paid for administration and maintenance costs returns something like £100,000 per annum. Even in these low interest times one could get a return of £5M per annum on these assets if one put the money in the Post Office. This is subsidy and it is regressive (it benefits the better-off car owner, but not the car-less public transport user).
- 5.6.18 Apart from the resource costs (or the revenue forgone on resources) there are other costs imposed by car traffic on the residents of a town like Salisbury – health costs (noise, pollution etc.), safety costs (intimidation, actual aggression and accident harm to cyclists and pedestrians), house value reductions and general quality of life costs resulting from an otherwise delightful urban environment made ugly. The supposed beneficiaries of the traffic (shops and offices, for example) effectively externalise these costs of their activity and their benefit comes from trips with ends either in public car parking or at their own premises. There is no logical reason, therefore, why this externalisation should not be remedied by some sort of imposing of business and shop parking. Supermarkets are a prime example – their true transport costs are hugely externalised.
- 5.6.19 The key to funding transport alternatives lies in moving this subsidy from the unfair and inefficient access modes to the fair and efficient ones. To get from the vicious circle of poor public transport leading to poor take-up, leading to higher fares and poorer services and so on, to the virtuous circle in the opposite direction, it is essential to move subsidy from the inefficient road users towards the most potentially efficient. This stick and carrot approach is perfectly feasible and reasonable.
- 5.6.20 There are many reasonable (and legally allowable) ways of clawing back the externalisation of costs of the motoring economy:
- Realistic charges for parking that reflect the direct resource costs of town-centre car parks. Increased parking revenue pays for additional public transport support. As parking prices rise, at some level there will be reduced take-up (if the stick is matched to the carrot of better public transport this will come about through modal transfer) and less parking space will be required. Released parking space releases capital asset for investment in public transport.
 - Imposing the car parking of major traffic attractors, especially supermarkets, reflecting the externalisation of their costs on the network and society.

⁷ For example the Blueprint studies headed by Prof. David Pearce. This point is also well made in the most intelligent transport study I have seen - one carried out for York (see www.roadpricing.greenisp.org/GettingAroundpl.htm) - it should be required reading for all transport planners.

⁸ And on-street parking has a resource value too – I would willingly pay many thousands to own the piece of road outside my terraced house, that is currently occupied by parked cars.

- Road pricing. This is difficult to do at the moment – the specific London system does not really map to anything in South Wiltshire though York (of a similar cultural character to Salisbury, though significantly bigger) has proposed a scheme something on the London model.
 - ❖ The technology of wide-area GPS-based systems has been available for many years, but requires national roll-out and lacks political will. Eventually, however, this is the obvious approach, since it permits geographically-differential charging in relation to the harm done by the traffic (congested areas or environmentally sensitive areas charge more).
 - ❖ Given that Wiltshire could agree to the DfT's desire to de-trunk the A36, I believe it could get itself powers to impose gateway tolling on the A36, in order to reduce through traffic, or at the very least prevent it expanding to fill the space made available by radial traffic reduction measures.