

Road schemes not easing congestion environmentalists say

Road schemes aimed at easing traffic congestion have resulted in 'rat-runs' around British towns and allowed motorists to speed, an analysis of Highways Agency projects has shown.

By [David Millward](#), Transport Editor

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Around £1 billion a year is being spent on road schemes which are not working, the Campaign for Better Transport said.

The Agency not only relied on inaccurate forecasts of future traffic patterns but also underestimated the impact on air quality, noise and greenhouse gas emissions, the Campaign claimed.

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It examined four recent schemes: the A6 Great Glen Bypass in Leicestershire; the A650 Bingley Relief Road, West Yorkshire; the A11 Roundham Heath to Attleborough in Norfolk and the A27 Polegate Bypass in East Sussex.

Based on an inspection of the Highways Agency's own evaluation of the schemes, the Campaign said the projects failed to ease traffic congestion.

Instead it found the traffic increased significantly on all the roads, triggering demands for yet more bypasses.

Residents complained that far from relieving villages, new problems had been created by drivers taking shortcuts. Where traffic had fallen, cars were now driving too fast, they said.

A businessman in Polegate said: "As a resident the bypass has been an improvement.. But as a local businessman, it's been a disaster."

Meanwhile a resident in Great Glen complained the situation had worsened since the implementation of the scheme with no parking and traffic going too fast. "It is not a village more like a small town. There isn't any community spirit anymore."

On the A11 scheme, the journey time savings were only achieved as a result of traffic breaking the speed limit.

A spokesman for the Campaign for Better Transport said: "The Agency's forecasts underestimate the effect on traffic, air quality, noise and greenhouse gas emissions.

"They also fail to predict the economic impact and whether schemes will be good value Until the Highways Agency makes some major changes, spending on new roads will remain a very expensive gamble."

Norman Baker, the Liberal Democrats' transport spokesman, said: "It is clear the Government continues to overestimate the benefits of road schemes while putting obstacles in the way of rail and tram schemes.

"The Department for Transport appears stuck in the 1980s, with money spent on roads seen as investment and

money spent on rail seen as subsidy.

"We need fundamental change in the way the Government appraises transport schemes, taking much more account of the environmental impact and removing the biases that work in favour of road."

The Highways Agency defended its schemes. "The schemes focused on by Campaign for Better Transport do provide value for money and have improved safety, reduced congestion and made journey times more reliable for road users - as well as improving the local environment for many residents," a spokesman said.

"To ensure decisions are made using the most robust information, we use the latest data and traffic modelling methods available to us. However we are not complacent and we are constantly working to improve our assessment of all the aspects that feed into scheme appraisals."

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