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Rural England
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NEWS RELEASE

NO CASE FOR 5 TRAFFIC LANES NORTHBOUND AND AND 5 SOUTHBOUND IN M6 CORRIDOR, SAYS CPRE

Highways Agency ‘conceptual’ plans unveiled last week for an entirely new parallel motorway for alongside the M6 were unwanted and there was no proven case for five running lanes of traffic says the Vice Chairman and transport spokesperson for the Campaign to Protect Rural England¹ (CPRE) Cheshire Branch. The separate motorway option would have maximum environmental, social and health impacts of the three options² for more highway capacity being canvassed, she said.

Lillian Burns branded the M6 Expressway proposal a “Los Angeles-scale of highway infrastructure” because she said “it would effectively involve 14 lanes of highway³ passing through the County of Cheshire and impacting hugely on its landscape of small field systems, ancient woodlands, waterways, ecology, rural tranquillity and wildlife, not to mention creating an even greater severance effect than that already presented by the existing motorway. It would create a dangerous precedent for parallel motorways elsewhere and because it would be entirely or partially a commercial enterprise, paid for by tolls, it would be in the interests of its proponents to generate as much business as possible. But more traffic movements means more air, noise and light pollution and more polluting run-offs and flood plain problems to handle”

Outlining the proposal she said: “At the northern end of the M6 Expressway, (around junction 19), there would be a mighty complex of roads – almost certainly including a toll booth area - stretching over many hectares to the immediate west of Knutsford. Tabley Estate and the setting of Grade One Listed Tabley Hall would be seriously compromised. There would also be other land-hungry access points to the Expressway - also probably involving toll booth areas - in South Cheshire and North Staffordshire.

continued ...

“Meanwhile existing M6 junctions 18 (Middlewich), 17 (Sandbach) and 16 (Crewe/ Nantwich) would have to be re-built. The scale of new infrastructure involved – which would include new bridges, viaducts and underpasses - would be huge”. And, she added, an alternative proposal to widen the motorway by parallel means - building alongside the existing motorway – would be little better in terms of impacts and would still involve a scale of land take which was unacceptable.

She pointed out that although the North West Regional Assembly (NWRA) accepted the recommendation of the West Midlands to North West Conurbation Multi-Modal (MIDMAN) Study that the motorway should be widened to four lanes in each direction, it had not accepted the recommendation for it to be widened by parallel means. “The NWRA listened to environmental arguments and told the government they wanted widening to be achieved in the least environmentally destructive manner”, she said. She also pointed to the fact that the MIDMAN Study, which reported in 2002, had examined the idea of an M6 motorway with five running lanes in each direction, projecting 30 years ahead, and had rejected it because the traffic flows did not stack up. “An Expressway with two running lanes in each direction is equivalent in terms of capacity to the five-lane M6 which was modelled and thoroughly examined”, she explained, “and MIDMAN could not make an adequate case for it”.

Lillian Burns was speaking after attending the Highways Agency stakeholder event held at the Chimney House Hotel, Sandbach on Friday where the Highways Agency estimated that all three options they were consulting on would cost in the region of £2 billion.

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NOTES TO EDITORS

- ¹ CPRE – Campaign to Protect Rural England – is a charity which exists to promote the beauty, tranquillity and diversity of rural England by encouraging the sustainable use of land and other natural resources in town and country. For more information, please see the CPRE national website at www.cpre.org.uk and CPRE Cheshire Branch website at www.cprecheshire.org.uk.
- ² The Highways Agency are seeking opinions on the option of an entirely separate two-lane tolled motorway mirroring the M6 from junctions 11a to 19 or on adding an extra lane northbound and southbound to the existing M6 by building in one of two ways – parallel widening (effectively constructing another motorway alongside) or symmetrical widening (adding another lane either side).
- ³ The existing M6 motorway comprises six running lanes plus two hard shoulders (a total of eight) and the proposed expressway would comprise four running lanes plus two hard shoulders (ie. six lanes in total).

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Description of conceptual M6 Expressway route as it affects Cheshire, drawn up by CPRE Cheshire Branch, from Highways Agency plans revealed in January 2006.

North Staffordshire/ Cheshire border area

Where the M6 Expressway passes through a newly-formed M6/ M6 Expressway junction 14a north of the A51 in North Staffordshire, it is shown in the conceptual plan as occupying the space where the M6 is now, with a new M6 northbound lane running to the west of it and an M6 southbound lane running to the east. This arrangement continues - impacting on Beechcliff Wood to the west and Trentham Park to the east – through to a re-built and much enlarged junction 15 at Hanchurch. At junction 15 the M6E moves to the west side of the M6 and remains there for the rest of its length up to and including its northern end at a point beyond junction 19 in North Cheshire.

North of the A53, to the south east of Stoke-on-Trent, the Expressway moves away from the M6 to sweep around Keele service station. At the three counties point of Madeley where Staffordshire, Shropshire and Cheshire come together, the M6 crosses over the A525 and A531 and is on a viaduct. The plan is to build another viaduct a few metres away from the existing one on the side of Madeley village to carry the Expressway across Madeley Heath. (This is also the plan for dealing with parallel widening here). This proposal would impinge on Waltons Wood. Then, shortly to the north, the M6E moves off-line to create a massive new junction 15a east of Wrinehill and west of Scot Hay and Alsager Bank. This would sit between Waltons Wood to the south and Craddocks Moss to the north, south of where it would have to run beneath the B5500 Nantwich Road and Barthomley Road (involving more bridge construction, including a footbridge between the two). Then, on the approach to M6 junction 16 and the A500 that runs beneath it, the Expressway would impact on Domvilles Wood to the west.

The Cheshire border runs north-south between M6 junction 16 and Madeley and would be a little to the west of the M6E over this stretch, if the alignment of the new motorway can be kept immediately adjacent to the M6, but at junction 16 the border turns west-east and the remainder of the Expressway route would be entirely in Cheshire.

South Cheshire to Mid-Cheshire

The M6 Expressway is shown on the Highways Agency's conceptual plan as passing over the western side of a re-built M6 junction 16 (Crewe and Nantwich)) and to the east side of the B5078 - Radnor Green Road. (Note: Connections between the M6 Expressway and the recently de-trunked A500 - now the responsibility of Cheshire County Council – would not be made here but via slip roads to and from the new junctions 15a and 16a).

A little to the north, the M6 Expressway would have to pass under an offshoot lane from Radnor Green Road and then under Radnor Green Road itself (as the M6 does). It would then bridge over Butterton Lane and through Moss Farm, obliterating part of Nursery Lane which would be partially re-aligned to cross the M6E and the M6 at a more southerly point than it does now. Immediately to the north of this new bridge, the M6E would pass between two sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) – Oakhanger Moss to the west and White Moss to the east of the M6 – and cut through Oakhanger Farm. It would then proceed along the eastern side of another SSSI, Bibby's Moss.

At this point the M6E starts to separate from the M6 to make space for new M6 junction 16A and its accompanying necessary new slip roads, due east of Haslington and due west of Alsager on the south side of Wheelock Heath. A footbridge near here between Green Bank Farm and Castle Farm would need to be extended to carry over the M6E as well as the M6 and, similarly, Dunnocksfold Road to the north of there would also have to be carried over on a bridge. The M6E then passes over a watercourse in a flood plain that feeds Hassal Pond and impinges on Hassall grassland to the west. It would then pass beneath Alsager Road and have to bridge over Roughwood Lane immediately to the west of Hassall Green and the Trent and Mersey Canal and its footpath in quick succession.

North of the canal, the M6E would pass beneath Betchton Road and cross another watercourse before passing by Stainerhouse Lane Meadows to the West of Dean Hill and then under the A5333 Newcastle Road, which would require yet another new bridge to carry the new motorway. North of there the M6E is shown as passing through Sandbach services before passing under Manor Road, immediately to the east of Sandbach Primary School and then under Church Lane. The M6E then moves further away from the M6 as it passes through the Arclid Valley – a flood plain – and, to the north of there, M6 junction 17 (Sandbach) would be re-built to include two large roundabouts – one connecting to the A5022 and the A534 on the Congleton side and another on the Sandbach town side.

Description of conceptual HA M6 E route as it affects Cheshire, drawn up by CPRE Cheshire Branch, contd

Mid-Cheshire to North Cheshire

North of the remodded junction 17, the M6E would move back closer to the M6 again, cross Small Brook and pass beneath Brindley Lane and then Ward's Lane at Bradwall Green. The (electrified) and recently up-graded Crewe-Manchester part of the West Coast Main Railway Line would have to be supported on a bridge whilst the Expressway is constructed beneath it and immediately north of there the M6E would cross Sanderson's Brook.

The M6E, like the M6, would have to pass beneath Brereton Lane and then Broad Lane at Sproston before crossing the River Croco whilst moving a bit more distant from the M6 in order to accommodate a remodelled and much bigger junction 18 (Middlewich/ Holmes Chapel). This would have a two-roundabout arrangement connecting to the A54 at either side, similar to the new junction 17. (NB According to the Provisional Cheshire Local Transport Plan for 2006-2011, an Air Quality Management Area is about to be declared near this junction by Vale Royal Borough Council).

North of M6 junction 17 the two motorways are still shown slightly distant from each other as the M6E passes close to Sproston Wood and over the River Dane, a flood plain, before coming back close together again. The M6E would then pass under Byley Lane, under Middlewich Road, under Oak Tree Lane and under King's Lane.

As the M6E moves northwards into Allostock, it passes under the B5082 Northwich Road before coming to Shakerley Mere on both sides, a notable local feature of significant proportion.

Beyond Shakerley Mere, the M6E would pass under the B5081 Middlewich Road and then under Hulme Hall Lane and a new north-south road is shown as connecting the two a little to the west on the M6E. Next, the Expressway would pass over Bradshaw Brook and under Hulme Lane to the west of Swan Green and Lower Peover. A footbridge would need to be extended across the M6E in this vicinity before it crosses over the Peover Eye, through the east side of Plumley Moor and then under Plumley Moor Road. There is then another footbridge to be constructed over and another brook to be forged before the M6E begins to move away from the M6 prior to it arriving at the Chester-Manchester railway line. The railway line would have to be supported on a bridge over it.

The two motorways are shown as continuing to separate as the Expressway passes through Blackhill Farm Meadows and under Sudlow Lane. The M6E then sweeps widely to the west of Knutsford Services, impinging significantly on Tabley Park and Gardens – the home to the Cheshire Show. The M6E then continues distant from the M6 as it passes under the A5033 Northwich Road and arrives at a massively re-constructed junction 19 (Knutsford/ Altrincham) which constitutes an enormous intersection with roundabouts and slip roads and which catches into it Tabley Hill Lane. The northern extremity of the M6E is shown as reaching just beyond the junction, passing near to or over Tabley Brook to a point north Old Hall Lane.

Footnote

Toll booth areas are not depicted on the Highways Agency's conceptual plan but, unless satellite or other technology progresses sufficiently to do without them, (unlikely within the timescale), they would need to be positioned at the southern-most end of the M6 Expressway (where it would meet the northern end of the Birmingham M6 Toll Road), at the northern-most end (at junction 19 to the west of Knutsford) and at the other access points. (Note: New junctions are illustrated as being at M6 junction 14A in North Staffordshire, M6 junction 15A near the Cheshire-North Staffs border and M6 junction 16A in South Cheshire to the west of Alsager).