
**Relieving Traffic Congestion
in and around Hereford:**

Why East is Best

A proposal for discussion

October 2010

Relieving Traffic Congestion in and around Hereford: Why East is Best

Summary

This paper proposes a new approach to the vexed issue of a Hereford by-pass. This involves three elements:

- A link road between the A49 and the A465
- A second major road bridge across the River Wye at Rotherwas, with a connecting road up to the Ledbury Road but not across the Lugg Meadows;
and
- A short connecting road between the A49 North of the city to the Worcester Road.

The present paper analyses the respective merits of this option vs. a Western by-pass, and proposes an innovative approach to funding. It is thus a small but important part of an overall transport plan for the county.

Its conclusion is that the proposed approach:

- Is far less expensive and more achievable than the Western by-pass
- Could be implemented more quickly, within a 4-5 year period
- Can be more easily managed, in discrete phases
- Addresses huge needs in both the county and Hereford City
- Delivers better reduction in traffic congestion, more cost-effectively
- Removes the need for more housing simply to fund the road, allowing more organic and flexible city development
- Preserves a high proportion of any developer contributions for use on new housing estates and in the city itself
- Is better for businesses at Rotherwas, and uses the existing Rotherwas link road to good effect;
and
- Retains other options as to future road development.

Key Goals

Before engaging with the arguments, it may be helpful to review the key goals that all sides are seeking to achieve. These include, in no particular order:

1. **TRAFFIC RELIEF:** The chosen scheme should relieve traffic congestion within the city of Hereford, with all its attendant health and commercial benefits
2. **RESPONSIVE HOUSING:** New housing should be responsive to local needs, not created in order to fund or justify a road. This is also a principle of planning regulation
3. **FUNDING FLEXIBILITY:** Flexibility should be retained as to the various different potential funding options, including Section 106 moneys, the Community Infrastructure Levy, Council Tax, and even perhaps hypothecated local taxes. Developer contributions should as far as possible be retained for local use, either on a related housing estate or on other local/civic projects of known desirability
4. **PRACTICABILITY:** The chosen scheme should be practicable, i.e. stand a very high chance of achieving its stated objective
5. **FAIRNESS:** The costs of any scheme should be shared fairly and equitably, in so far as they fall on local people.

These goals are uncontroversial. But we can use them as criteria to evaluate the pros and cons of the different options.

The Western By-Pass

The idea of a by-pass for Hereford has been a cause célèbre in the county for over four decades, and has long been a goal for Herefordshire Council. A consultation was launched on West vs. East routes in early 2010, and a proposal made to go via a Western route over the summer of 2010.

The Western route would include a link between the A465 and the A49, a new bridge at Breinton, a road along the Western perimeter of Whitecross and Three Elms to the Roman Road, and then a further link to the A49 continuing east to the Worcester Road. It is estimated by Amey to take 15 years to complete, and to cost in the region of £110 million—others have estimated it at £130 million. The road would be mainly funded by developer contributions from a large amount of new housing—3,500 homes in total—along its route.

The proposed Western by-pass has met with a huge amount of local controversy. Its advocates argue that it is the only option available, on the grounds that the Lugg Meadows are protected under environmental law and so inviolable to development; that the new road would take huge pressure off the A465 at the difficult Belmont roundabout; and that it would relieve traffic pressure on the Western part of the city. It is also claimed that there is no possibility of de-trunking the A49 inside Hereford itself without a functioning by-pass to and from the A49 around the city.

Yet if we evaluate the Western by-pass against our Key Goals, it should be apparent that it falls foul of almost all of them.

1. **TRAFFIC RELIEF—DEBATABLE:** The relief to traffic offered by the by-pass will be partial. Belmont residents will benefit from a better link from the A465 to the A49, but this is also a feature of the current proposal. Southbound through traffic on the A49 will be routed via the bypass, and existing residents of Whitecross and Three Elms will benefit from the new bridge when traveling South. But against this the main effect will be huge added traffic on the key routes into the city from the new housing. The 15 year development schedule would make it far harder to respond to evolving traffic patterns during the interim period
2. **RESPONSIVE HOUSING—GOAL MISSED:** it is well understood that a major reason for locating so much housing in the West is to fund or justify the road. This reverses what should be the order of priority
3. **FUNDING FLEXIBILITY—GOAL MISSED:** the Western by-pass is closely tied to 3,500 new homes in Holmer, Three Elms and Whitecross, and a large proportion of developer contributions will be used for the road. The result is likely to be under-planned and under-resourced new estates, with inadequate infrastructure. This has been the general pattern in Hereford for 50 years.
4. **PRACTICABILITY—DOUBTFUL:** the 15 year building schedule covers four council elections, and a future administration might decide to cancel the road for any of the reasons noted. There will likely be a serious legal challenge as well, since the proposed by-pass runs through open countryside, near several large farms and estates. A large part of any value in the road is not fully realized until the 15th year, when the link is made between A49 and A49. In the meantime, there will be a huge debt overhang, since developers in Three Elms and Whitecross will likely not wish to release contributions until their housing is built and serviced by the road
5. **FAIRNESS—GOAL MISSED:** the Western by-pass offers a clear benefit to non-city residents, in the faster journey times and lack of stress from having to travel through the city. But city residents in the West will

have to put up with the social impact from several new housing estates, which are certain to create more inner city traffic and to impose additional strain on road and other public infrastructure. They will benefit relatively little from the by-pass, as has already been argued.

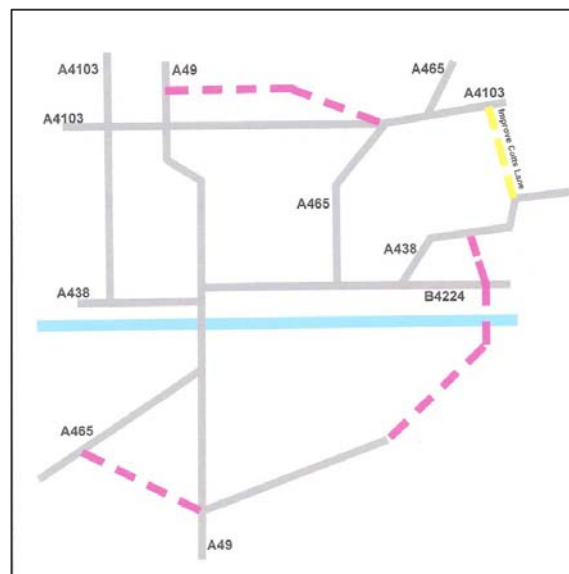
Thus unless the developer contributions are very carefully structured, there is a risk that many existing rural residents and businesses will benefit from a new by-pass while making no contribution to it at all. The effect of this would be to reinforce a large and inequitable net transfer of value from the city to the countryside.

It is important not to place too much emphasis on the word "by-pass". What is sought here is a workable solution to some of the crippling congestion problems of the county and the city. The evidence is that the Western route will not deliver this.

An Eastern River Crossing

The Eastern river crossing has three elements:

- A. A link road back between the A49 and the A465
- B. A second major road bridge across the River Wye at Rotherwas, with a connecting road up to the Ledbury Road but not across the Lugg Meadows; and
- C. A short connecting road between the A49 North of the city to the Worcester Road.



Item A is shared between the Western by-pass and the proposed Eastern crossing, and is therefore neutral as between the two alternatives.

Item C is designed to take pressure off the highly congested A49/Roman Road roundabout, and direct Worcester traffic through to the Worcester. This too is shared between the two approaches, and therefore neutral for present purposes.

As Item B makes clear, this is not—and is not intended to be—a city by-pass in the straightforward sense. There is no intention here to cross the Lugg meadows. Instead, through traffic to Worcester and the M5 would travel on the Ledbury road and cross up to the Worcester road via Bartestree or Whitestone Business Park. The objection is often made to an Eastern route that it cannot cross the Lugg meadows; but the present approach does not even try to do so.

The cost of this option is estimated to be c. £30 million, plus £20 million for the A465-A49 link. This makes it £60-£80 million cheaper than the Western by-pass.

In contrast to the Western by-pass, this approach meets all the Key Goals set out above.

1. **TRAFFIC RELIEF—GOAL MET:** The Eastern river crossing will relieve pressure on the Edgar Street roundabout, by routing Eastbound traffic from the A49 and A465 via Rotherwas. It will do the same for the A49 intersection with the Roman Road, and at the Belmont roundabout. But its main effect will be to ease pressure on the Eastern part of the

city, especially around the Hospital and the railway station. Against this, there may be some added traffic on the cut-through roads across Aylestone Hill

2. **RESPONSIVE HOUSING—GOAL MET:** It appears that the bridge can be funded with minimal housing needed to sustain organic city development
3. **FUNDING FLEXIBILITY—GOAL MET:** Very little money from developer contributions from local housing need be used for the road. A new financing approach is proposed below which allows all of contributions from new housing in Bullinghope to be used for the new estate, with a substantial sum left over for civic amenities. Some £10-15m could be used to fund a higher education campus and/or renovation of Shire Hall in the city centre, for example
4. **PRACTICABILITY—HIGH:** The Eastern approach could be built in phases, or simultaneously within four years—the life of a single council. Its different elements would be useable as soon as completed. The land for the river crossing is already owned by the council, reducing opposition and the need for CPOs
5. **FAIRNESS—GOAL MET:** The Eastern approach is a fair one. The suggested funding package blends contributions from existing residents, new residents and local businesses. The Eastern part of the city benefits from better Southern access to offset any traffic crossing via the new bridge. Northbound traffic benefits from the new river crossing and access to the Worcester road. Southbound traffic benefits from the link road between the A49 and the Worcester Road. The city as a whole benefits from less pressure on the Edgar Street roundabout. The West of the city can grow without undue new strain on services or infrastructure.

Funding

An indicative funding schedule is included below, based on a cost of £28-30 million, at the lower end of expectations.

HEREFORDSHIRE INFRASTRUCTURE FUNDING

01/10/2010

Assumptions

Cost of bridge and link roads 28,000,000

		Avg PA payment	Roof tax	Total	PA
Existing houses	50,000	120		6,000,000	6,000,000
New houses	2,000		2000	4,000,000	1,000,000
Businesses	1,000	500		500,000	500,000
Total					7,500,000

Calculation

	Years			
	1	2	3	4
Council tax	6,000,000	6,000,000	6,000,000	6,000,000
Roof tax	1,000,000	1,000,000	1,000,000	1,000,000
Business levy	500,000	500,000	500,000	500,000
Total	7,500,000	7,500,000	7,500,000	7,500,000
Cum total		15,000,000	22,500,000	30,000,000

This model is for illustrative purposes only. In particular, it does not include the possibility of using debt finance to ameliorate or smooth the funding streams above and reduce their effect in any given year. Nor does it include sources such as Tax Increment Financing, which could potentially raise £1,200 p.a. on 2,000 houses, or £2,400,000 p.a., more than double the Roof Tax above.

What the model highlights is that the lower cost of the Eastern approach allows for more creative funding solutions, which absorb less money from developer contributions, and which allow risk and reward to be more fairly distributed across different beneficiaries: existing residents in the city and

county, new residents and businesses.

Developer contributions are likely to total £17,000-£20,000 per house. Thus even if we assume that the cost of the A465-A49 link entirely absorbed all the developer contributions from a housing development in that area, it would still be true that the contributions from proposed housing in Lower Bullingham (1,000 homes) would be untouched by this approach.

These would total £17-£20 million. Assume £5 million of that goes into local amenities and estate infrastructure and planning. That would leave £12-£15 million to be spent on projects in and around the city. There are obvious potential beneficiaries in the mediaeval centre, as well as new projects such as a higher education campus.

Conclusion

The proposed Eastern approach is clearly superior to the proposed Western by-pass, on neutral and common-sense criteria. It offers significant relief from congestion at significantly lower cost. It can be funded without any specific requirement for new housing, which can be allocated to meet local needs. It is more manageable, quicker to implement and fairer.

The Council's Options paper of September 2010 recognises that the Eastern route is preferable for traffic purposes, and notes that "many of the overcapacity junctions being on the East side of the City ... the Eastern Relief Road has the greatest improvement in these areas."

But, crucially, the present approach is £60-£80 million less expensive than a Western by-pass, without loss of quality. Less money spent means quicker build time; more control over the project; less drain on funding from developer contributions; and more money retained for other purposes.

Much more work remains to be done, of course. But while every option will attract some criticism, there is good reason to think that overall the Eastern route would be widely welcomed locally, both within the City and outside it.

APPENDIX 1: WESTERN BYPASS CORRIDOR

