

A303 Stonehenge

Amesbury to Berwick Down

The case for the scheme



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About this document

Highways England has prepared a number of documents to explain the A303/A358 Corridor improvement programme and the schemes within it.

This document summarises the need for improvement on the section of the A303 between Amesbury and Berwick Down near Stonehenge. More detailed information about the scheme is available in our consultation booklet and on our website www.highways.gov.uk/a303stonehenge

For a high-level overview of the entire Corridor improvement programme please see *Creating an Expressway to the South West: The case for the A303/A358 Corridor*.

About Highways England

Our role is to operate, maintain and modernise the strategic road network to ensure that road users have safe and reliable journeys and that businesses have the effective road links they need to prosper.

The strategic road network is a vital national asset which connects regional communities and supports economic growth. It carries a third of all traffic by mileage and two thirds of all heavy goods traffic.



The A303 Corridor

The A303 is the most direct strategic route between the South West and the South East. This makes the route vital for the economy of the South West region.

But there is a problem. Several sections of the route are single carriageway, causing congestion, delays and an increased risk of accidents.

One of these is between Amesbury and Berwick Down, where the A303 runs through the Stonehenge, Avebury and Associated Sites World Heritage Site (WHS), passing just 165 metres from the stones themselves.

For a region which depends heavily on tourism, this is bad. The South West is already under-performing economically, compared with the UK average, and the road is spoiling the setting of Stonehenge, one of the UK's most iconic landmarks.

In 2014, the Government announced funding to start transforming the A303 into a modern-day Expressway to the South West.

Expressways are a new idea for England's roads. They will be strategic A-roads that are as reliable and safe as motorways, where 'mile-a-minute' journey times are the norm.

This investment also gives us a once in a generation chance to enhance the setting of Stonehenge and guarantee its preservation for future generations.



Amesbury to Berwick Down

The section of A303 needing improvement between Amesbury and Berwick Down is about 7.5 miles (12 kilometres) long, starting east of Countess roundabout at Amesbury and ending where the road becomes dual carriageway again to the west of Winterbourne Stoke.

The Countess roundabout and single carriageway are the first major bottlenecks that drivers meet heading towards the South West on the A303 from London and the South East.

Traffic congestion here is particularly bad, especially at weekends and in summer.

The A303 cuts the WHS in two, bringing traffic within sight and sound of Stonehenge, a treasured national monument which has huge archaeological significance. Traffic affects visitors' enjoyment as well as the setting of many other heritage features in the site, not just Stonehenge.

Previous proposals to improve this section of A303 have failed to progress, but the need for improvement continues to have extensive national, regional and local support.

Improving this section of road has been included in the 2014 *National Infrastructure Plan* and the 2015-20 *Road Investment Strategy*, and has been identified as one of the country's top 40 nationally significant infrastructure projects.

The case for the scheme

As part of an Expressway, the A303 Stonehenge scheme needs to help unlock economic growth in the South West by transforming journey reliability, increasing safety and improving connectivity with neighbouring regions, while protecting or enhancing the environment.

To do this, we have set four broad objectives:

1. Transport: to create a high quality reliable route between the South East and the South West that meets the future needs of traffic

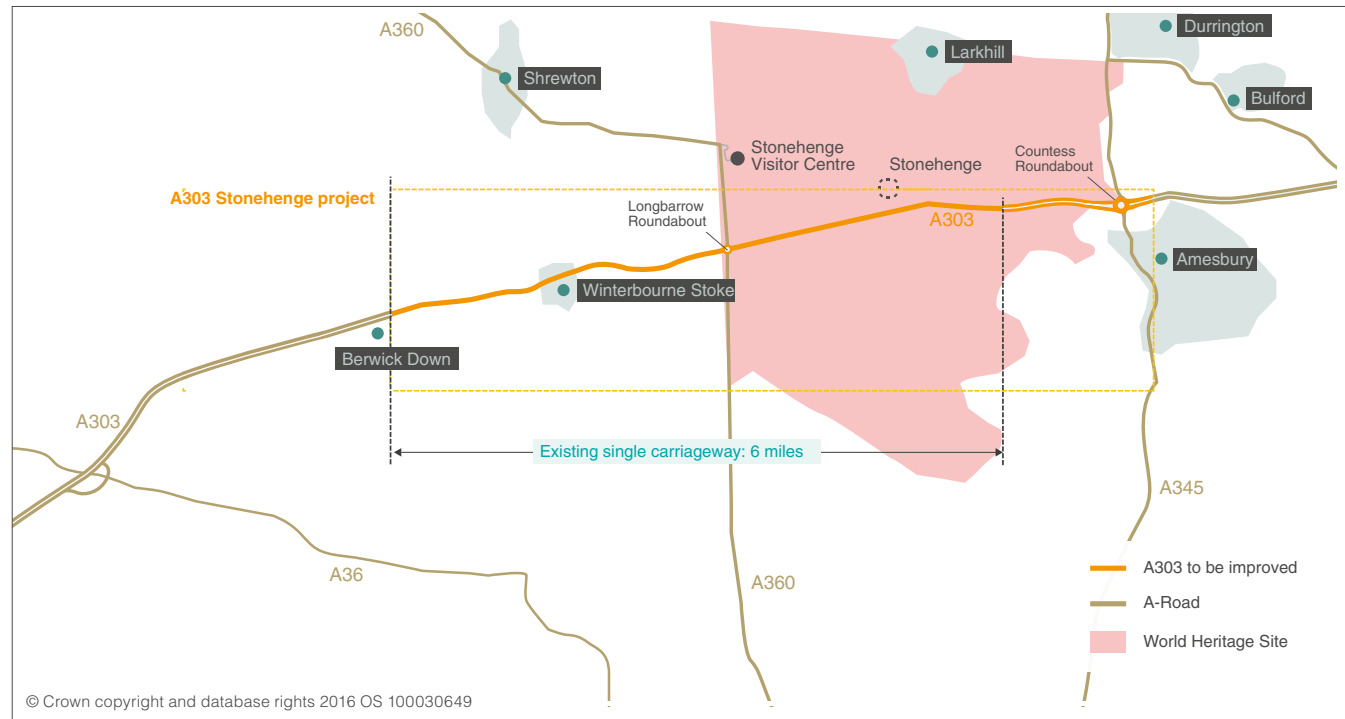
2. Economic growth: to enable growth in jobs and housing by providing a free flowing and reliable connection between the South East and the South West

3. Cultural heritage: to help conserve and enhance the WHS and make it easier to reach and explore

4. Environment and community: to improve biodiversity and provide a positive legacy for nearby communities

The next few pages explain how we would meet the objectives and the opportunities that improving this section of road would bring.

Map of the area



Objective 1: Transport

The A303 between Amesbury and Berwick Down carries twice as much traffic as it was designed for, and its capacity is even more stretched in the summer tourist season. The result is severe congestion and delays that affect local communities as well as long distance travellers.

The problems start at Amesbury's Countess roundabout where the A303 meets the A345 and enters the WHS. The road narrows to a single carriageway as it approaches Stonehenge.

After passing the historic stones, motorists reach Longbarrow roundabout, another restriction where they meet traffic heading north-south on the A360 Devizes to Salisbury road, before going through Winterbourne Stoke village, part of which is a conservation area.

Traffic jams are frequent and many drivers are tempted on to local roads to avoid them. This causes stress and inconvenience for people living nearby too, because many local roads are just not suitable for heavy traffic and lorries.

Where footpaths and pavements exist, they can be narrow. The extra traffic makes everyday local journeys take longer and means more noise and fumes.

The single carriageway section of the A303 between Amesbury and Berwick Down experiences more accidents where someone is hurt than is the average for this type of road. Between 2010 and 2014, four people died and 11 other accidents resulted in serious injuries.

A dual carriageway with improved junctions would make journeys quicker, safer and more reliable for everyone.

Fast facts

- This section of the A303 was designed for about 13,000 vehicles a day but carries closer to 24,000
- Traffic in August can peak at 29,000
- Average speeds can drop to less than 8mph in summer, turning a 10 minute journey into an hour
- Traffic through Shrewton can rise by 60% in the summer

Objective 2: Economic growth

The A303 plays a key role for people getting to the South West, but economic productivity and wages here are lagging behind. By comparison, business productivity along much of the other main route to the South West, the M4/M5 corridor, is notably better.

Even tourism, where the South West outperforms much of the UK, is affected. Traffic disruption and delays limit growth in the tourism economy by making holiday destinations harder to get to.

Many businesses report that the current unreliability of journey times on the A303 route is affecting them. The section between Amesbury and Berwick Down is one of the worst. When traffic is heavy, a journey which should be ten minutes can take as long as an hour.

Accidents and extreme weather events can close the road entirely and the lack of suitable alternative routes creates huge problems for travellers and businesses.

Local councils and business leaders believe that an Expressway route including improvements to the A303 between Amesbury and Berwick Down would help create jobs and boost productivity for the whole region.

A dual carriageway with improved junctions would improve access, helping attract business, boost tourism and create jobs.

Fast facts

- Productivity across the South West is 24% below the national average
- Of the 18 million UK people who visit the South West in a year, 85% come by car
- Almost two thirds of visitors say they think twice about using a road again if they've had a bad journey in the past
- Near Stonehenge fewer than 65% of journeys are on time for most of the day

Tourism spending



Based on 12 months to December 2015 Source: Visit Britain, GB Tourism Survey Quarterly Regional Summary, 2015

Objective 3: Cultural heritage

Stonehenge is an iconic symbol of the UK's heritage, famous around the world. The landscape around it is important too. The concentration of outstanding prehistoric monuments and sites is unique.

The A303 cuts the World Heritage Site (WHS) in half, passing just 165m from Stonehenge and through an ancient ceremonial pathway called The Avenue. It also makes many other interesting and important sites hard to reach on foot.

The road spoils the setting of Stonehenge, not to mention many other scheduled monuments including some of the largest and best preserved prehistoric burial mounds in the country.

The Government wants to preserve the value of the WHS for future generations and has tried to develop a solution for the A303 at Stonehenge on a number of previous occasions.

It has now committed money to remove much of the existing road from the WHS. This is a once in a generation opportunity to reconnect Stonehenge with its associated monuments and sites, and improve the experience for millions of visitors.

Removing the existing road from the WHS past Stonehenge would improve its setting and enhance the outstanding prehistoric landscape for future generations.

Fast facts

- In 2014 Stonehenge attracted 1.3 million visitors, making it the most visited paid-for attraction in the South West
- The 2,600 hectares around it contain more than 350 historic features, making it one of the richest concentrations of early prehistoric monuments in the world

Objective 4: Environment and community

The A303 between Amesbury and Berwick Down has a big impact on the nearby built and natural environment.

The volume of traffic through Winterbourne Stoke effectively cuts the village in two. Safety markings, signs and street lighting are damaging the character of the village, much of which is a conservation area.

Congestion causes air and noise pollution and the road is a barrier for villagers trying to get to local facilities on foot. Rat-running causes similar problems in communities away from the A303 like Shrewton, Durrington, Bulford and Larkhill, where, in some places, the absence of footpaths makes the problem worse.

A new redirected and free-flowing dual carriageway would improve life in Winterbourne Stoke and eliminate rat-running in other villages.

Redirecting the A303 would also encourage visitors to stay longer, explore more of the World Heritage Site (WHS) and spend more money in local communities. Removing the road past Stonehenge would also significantly improve the environment within the WHS, by reconnecting a substantial area of landscape, opening up footpaths and allowing habitats and wildlife to spread.

Eliminating congestion and removing the road from the WHS would enhance the environment and reconnect communities alongside and nearby.

Fast facts

- In the tourist season, traffic volumes through nearby villages leap by nearly 50% in Larkhill, over 60% in Shrewton and some 20% in Bulford
- Footpaths can be non-existent on some local roads

Get involved

The A303 Stonehenge project is one of the first three schemes to get underway, and construction is anticipated to start on site by March 2020. The other two are:

1. A303 Sparkford to Ilchester
2. A358 Taunton to Southfields

All three schemes are classed as nationally significant infrastructure projects (NSIPs). This means they require a development consent order (DCO) under the Planning Act 2008 before construction can start.

As part of the planning process, we will be consulting our customers and local communities.

This will give you the chance to express your views on proposals before we submit any applications for development consent. The timeline for the A303 Stonehenge project is shown below.

Contact us

Visit our webpages for information about the scheme and to find out when you can have your say, or call or email us to find out more.

- @ A303Stonehenge@highwaysengland.co.uk
- ☎ 0300 123 5000
- www www.highways.gov.uk/a303stonehenge

Timeline

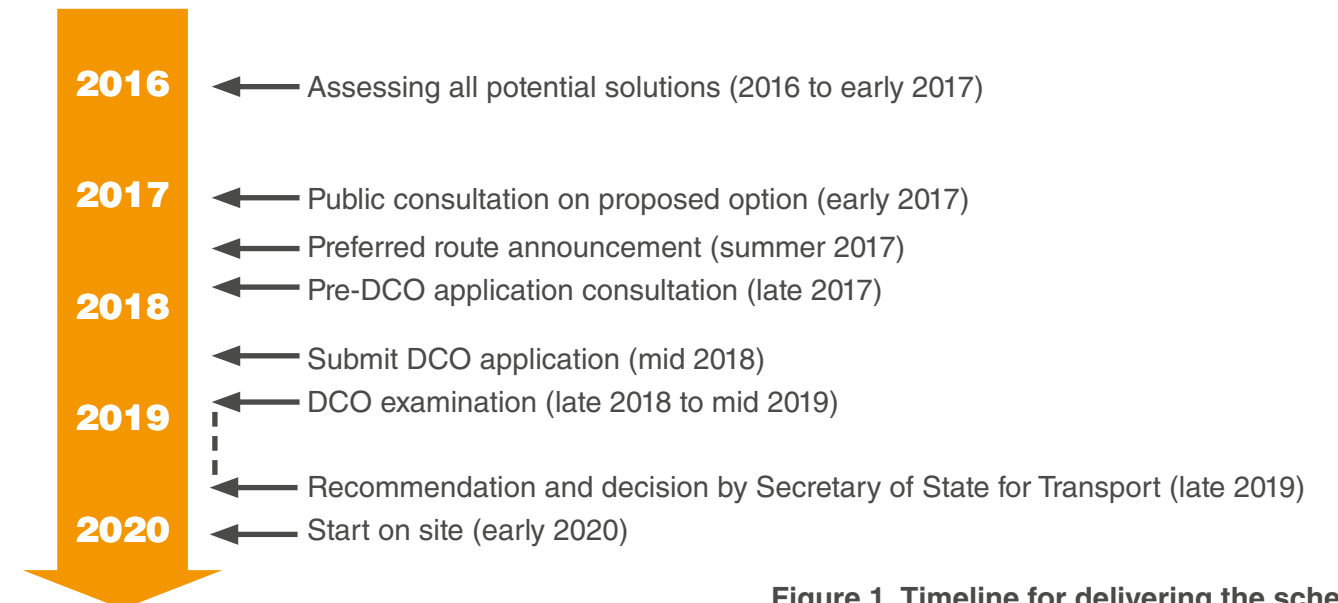


Figure 1. Timeline for delivering the scheme

If you need help accessing this or any other Highways England information, please call **0300 123 5000** and we will help you.

Contact us

Please see our website for details of any ongoing or planned consultation periods and how to make your views known at the appropriate time.

For comments outside formal consultation periods please write to us:

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