

M60 Junction 18 Simister Island Interchange Project

Frequently Asked Questions

This document is intended to provide answers to some of the questions you may have about the project. Please refer to the consultation brochure for more information. If you still have questions, details of how to get in touch with the team can be found in this document and in the consultation brochure.

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The Project

What is Highways England proposing to do at junction 18 of the M60?

We've developed two options which we are proposing to improve the junction. Both options create additional capacity and will improve congestion at the junction and will facilitate smoother flows of traffic along the M60, M62 and M66 in the scheme area. You can find out more about these options in our consultation brochure. We'll also be converting the hard shoulder into a permanent traffic lane between M60 junctions 17 and 18, creating a 5 lane 'all lane running' motorway in both directions

Why are you planning to improve Simister Island Interchange?

Simister Island is one of the busiest motorway junctions in the north-west used by around 90,000 vehicles each day. The junction struggles with such high volumes of traffic above what it was designed for, and as a result suffers from congestion and poor journey time reliability. This impacts people's journeys into and around Greater Manchester and restricts economic growth due to the unsuitable motorway connections and delays to goods travelling around the county.

What work have you done to date?

Options identification

We have shortlisted two options that performed the best against the project objectives, these are the "Northern Loop" and "Inner Links".

The options have been shortlisted following a thorough option identification process. We started with five options, which we looked at against the scheme objectives and assessed other factors such as value for money. After these assessments, the options were reduced to two. We then refined both options further, producing the Northern Loop and the Inner Links options.

More information on the option identification process and discounted options is presented in the consultation brochure.

Environment

We have also begun to assess the potential environmental impacts of the scheme, as well as the benefits and impacts of the two options. More information on the findings of these early assessments is presented in the consultation brochure.

Measures to reduce negative impacts, such as landscaping, tree planting and noise barriers, will be identified. We will undertake more detailed surveys and assessments based on national guidance as the scheme progresses.

Stakeholder engagement

We recognise the need for early engagement and have been in touch with key stakeholders, such as local authorities, Transport for Greater Manchester and Greater Manchester Local Enterprise Partnership. We have also been in touch with Simister Village Residents' Association and will engage with key stakeholders and community groups through the consultation period.

Traffic Modelling

We have used traffic models to forecast future changes in traffic flows and conditions at the junction. Data from the models have been used to inform the option designs and to assess the impact of the scheme on traffic flows, journey times and the economy. These models have been developed in accordance with national guidance using observed traffic count data, journey time data and mobile phone trip pattern data.

What other options were considered and why were these discounted?

Out of the initial five options, two were discounted outright because when compared to the others, they were:

- not as effective at improving journey times or congestion at the junction
- likely to have a more significant environmental impact
- more expensive, without offering as many benefits

One option (Option E) was incorporated into both remaining options, which were then refined to become Northern Loop and Inner Links.

A more detailed description of the discounted options and the reasons they were discounted, and how the remaining options were refined can be found in the consultation brochure.

Public consultation

What is the purpose of this consultation?

We've developed two options to improve Simister Island Interchange. Both options will improve journeys through the junction, but we want to hear your views on each option. We also want to know about any insight or concerns road users or local communities have about the proposals or the existing junction.

Why are you holding this consultation during a pandemic? Couldn't you postpone it?

Given the need for improvements at the Simister Island Interchange and our commitment to the Government, we want to avoid any delay in delivering this upgrade. We have carefully considered the risks of consulting at this time and how best to mitigate these. We are confident that our approach to consultation, including online and telephone consultation events, still follows best practice. Our aim is still to provide the local community and stakeholders with a meaningful opportunity to influence the scheme.

More information on the consultation process can be found in our "Approach to Public Consultation" document available on our scheme webpage.

Why aren't you holding public events and how can I speak to the project team?

Due to the restrictions in place as part of the government's response to the Covid-19 pandemic, we will not be holding face-to-face public consultation events as we would normally. Government guidance currently encourages people to stay at home where possible and practice social distancing when outside of the home, in order to control the spread of the virus. In line with this advice and to avoid any risk, it is not possible for us to hold public events. We are instead providing alternative ways for people to get in touch with us and make an informed response to the consultation.

You can speak to a member of the project team during one of our telephone consultation events by calling **141 0117 2444 061** during the following dates and times:

- Tuesday 30 June 11am – 7pm
- Tuesday 7 July 11am – 7pm
- Saturday 11 July 11am – 7pm
- Tuesday 14 July 11am – 7pm
- Saturday 18 July 11am – 7pm
- Tuesday 21 July 11am – 7pm

Phone line costs standard rates.

Please note dialing 141 in front of the consultation phone number helps us to ensure compliance with the General Data Protection Regulations. This will not charge you any additional fees.

We'll also be holding online question and answer sessions, you can find more information about this on our webpage.

How can I respond?

You can respond online by completing the consultation response form at:

www.highwaysengland.co.uk/M60-j18-simister-island

You can also respond by completing a paper copy of the consultation response form and return it using the freepost address: Freepost M60 J18 SIMISTER ISLAND.

Simply put the completed response form in an envelope with the freepost address written on the front and put it in your local post box. There is no need to use a stamp.

All responses must be received by **11:59pm on Monday 17 August 2020**.

Responses received after this date may not be considered. Because of the potential impact on Royal Mail's services due to the coronavirus, we recommend responding via our online form where possible.

What information is available about the scheme during the consultation process?

The consultation brochure provides a detailed overview the scheme and the consultation process. The brochure also includes a summary of the benefits and potential impacts of the scheme. The brochure is available on the scheme webpage.

You can find out more information about the project on our webpage, including our Approach to Public Consultation document.

I haven't received a brochure, how do I get one?

We have delivered our public consultation brochure to homes and businesses within the project area.

If you have not received a brochure you can request one by contacting the project team by phone or email:

Phone: **0300 123 5000**

Email: M60J18SimisterIslandInterchange@highwaysengland.co.uk

Are consultation documents available in alternative languages and formats?

Yes. If you require a copy in a different language or format, such as larger font, please contact the team on the details below and we will help you.

Email: M60J18SimisterIslandinterchange@highwaysengland.co.uk

Phone: **0300 123 5000**

What has changed about the consultation in response to the Covid-19 outbreak?

Due to the restrictions in place as part of the government's response to the Covid-19 pandemic, we will not be holding face-to-face public consultation events as we would normally. Government guidance currently encourages people to practice social distancing (i.e. to stay at home and away from others) in order to control the spread of the virus. In line with this advice and to avoid any risk, it is not possible for us to hold public events. We are instead providing alternative ways for people to get in touch with us and make an informed response to the consultation.

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We'll also be holding online question and answer sessions, you can find more information about this on our webpage.

How will my feedback influence the designs?

The feedback and comments you provide will help us to understand the local area better as well as any potential impacts and community concerns.

All responses received during the public consultation will be recorded and analysed. Detailed analysis will allow us to understand the issues and concerns raised by all our stakeholders and how these can be addressed.

Where it is possible to do so, we will use your feedback to develop the scheme design or to identify ways to address concerns about the impacts of the scheme.

How will responses be analysed?

Responses will be analysed independently. Each response received during the public consultation will be recorded and analysed. The content of each response will be categorised and broken down by sentiment and into themes, helping us understand your comments and why you have made them. Where it is possible to do so, we will use your feedback to help influence the scheme design or to help identify ways to address concerns about the impacts of the scheme.

We will summarise our findings in our consultation report and summary which will explain the analysis and how it could influence our proposals.

Will the results of the public consultation be published?

All responses will be analysed then summarised within a consultation report. The consultation report will be published and made available in a digital format on our webpage. Paper copies will also be available upon request via the contact details provided.

Benefits of the scheme

How will this improve traffic flow?

The scheme aims to create extra capacity at Simister Island Interchange, easing the flow through it, reducing the likelihood of tailbacks and queues and shortening journey times by up to 25%.

The Northern Loop option aims to achieve improved traffic flows and journey times by transferring one of the movements through the junction (M60 clockwise, eastbound to southbound) onto a new free-flow link. This leaves more capacity for the traffic using the roundabout.

The Inner Links option aims to achieve improved traffic flows and journey times by moving another of the movements through the junction (M66 to M60 westbound) onto a new link through the middle of the junction. This again provides more capacity for the movements that remain on the roundabout.

The improvements to journey times are better for the Northern Loop option than the Inner Links as it provides more free flow links and removes a movement completely from the roundabout.

For both options, we will also convert the hard shoulder into a permanent traffic lane between M60 junctions 17 and 18, providing 5 lanes in both directions. This will improve the flow of traffic joining and leaving the M60 at these two junctions as well as reducing the impact this traffic has on longer distance traffic along the M60/M62.

How will this benefit local communities, including residents and businesses?

Creating extra capacity at the junction and between junctions 17 and 18 will allow a smoother traffic flow along and between the M60, M62 and M66, and on routes into Manchester. This will reduce congestion and deliver shorter, more reliable journey times. This will support and enable economic growth in the area by improving connectivity and access for the local community and businesses to local facilities, employment opportunities and customers.

What will be the impact of not improving junction 18?

Volumes of traffic are expected to increase, especially as planned development, such as that associated with the Greater Manchester Spatial Framework (GMSF), is delivered. If no improvement is made at Simister Island Interchange congestion is likely to get worse. Queues at the junction are likely to lengthen, journey times will get longer and less reliable, and accident rates are expected to increase. All this will impact the local and regional economy.

Environment

How have you considered environmental impacts?

At Highways England we're ambitious about protecting and enhancing the environment. We work hard to make sure all activity on our roads is undertaken in line with environmental legislation and minimises impact on the environment as far as possible.

We have considered many potential environmental impacts as important factors when identifying our options for this project. More detail on our initial findings, and potential mitigation is presented in the benefits and effects table in the consultation brochure.

Further information will be available as the project progresses and more surveys and assessments have taken place.

How will this project impact noise levels in the area?

Our model suggests that both options are likely to cause minor, but not significant changes in noise inside and outside of Noise Important Areas. Where necessary, mitigation will be included in the design.

It is our policy to deploy low noise surfacing on all new and resurfaced roads. This may result in a decrease in noise for some areas where low noise surfacing is not already in place.

During construction there is likely to be some noise, but we will implement measures to minimise this where possible.

We will continue to carry out noise monitoring surveys and modelling as the project develops.

How will this project impact air quality in the area?

The work done so far suggests that neither the Northern Loop or The Inner Links option will cause a significant change in air quality. Based on the assessments completed to date, the scheme should not affect the UK's ability to achieve compliance with the EU Air Quality Directive in the shortest time scales possible.

More detailed air quality assessments will be undertaken as the preferred option is developed further.

How will this project impact on protected animal species?

We have completed a review of existing habitats to inform the next steps in reducing the impact of the scheme, and we're aware that there are protected species in the area including great crested newts, water voles, bats, breeding birds and reptiles.

Detailed surveys will be completed in the next stage of the scheme's development to assess the impact of the chosen option on both species and habitats and to design the mitigation required.

Will the project increase visual impacts for residents living close to the motorway?

If the Northern Loop is chosen, the loop will be visible from a small number of properties. Those using the local golf course, public footpaths and bridleways will also be able to see the loop.

Some residential properties and footpaths are likely to have views of the top of gantries and lighting columns and may notice the night time effects of lighting.

The use of LED lighting and other mitigation such as tree planting will minimise the impact.

Traffic

Will the road improvements generate more traffic?

Traffic is forecast to grow on the M60 and other parts of the motorway network in the surrounding area.

The main effect of the improvements will be the quicker flow of traffic through Simister Island and on the M60 between junction 17 and 18. Our assessment indicates that the proposed improvements will result in slightly more traffic using the motorway network in scheme location. The majority of this will be due to traffic using the motorway network over local roads, to take advantage of the quicker flowing network provided by the scheme.

How have you considered potential change in traffic levels due to Covid-19?

At the current time there is considerable uncertainty regarding the medium to long term impact of Covid-19 on traffic flows. Whilst Highways England and the Department for Transport are monitoring the current situation across the road network and undertaking future scenario planning, the traffic assessment work done on this scheme pre-dates the Covid-19 pandemic. In subsequent stages of scheme development changes in traffic levels due to Covid-19 will be considered.

Safety

What impact will this project have on safety?

Ensuring safety for customers is the most important consideration for us as we continue to develop the designs. The proposals will create a better flow of traffic and reduce queuing at the junction and back onto the M60, reducing the likelihood of incidents.

Are smart motorways with all lane running safe?

Please note: the M60 J18 Simister Island Interchange Scheme is not a continuation of the Smart Motorways project but will be using element of a smart motorway to ensure the capacity and safety of the Junction 18 improvement.

Evidence shows that smart motorways are as safe as traditional motorways, with CCTV, live traffic information on electronic signs and traffic sensors all helping to maintain safety levels. These features are not present on many high-speed roads and they all help to reduce the risk of incidents on smart motorways.

We use a variety of techniques to spot breakdowns, including CCTV and sensors in the road which automatically detect changes in the flow of traffic.

We also work closely with the emergency services to manage incidents, providing support on the ground with our traffic officers and from our regional control centres. Smart motorway technology means we're able to use red X's on overhead signs to close any lane to allow emergency vehicles to get through.

We're also aware of the recent Department for Transport stocktake of smart motorways and will consider these recommendations when we develop the options further.

Related projects

How is the project considering other projects in the area?

We are taking account of all the local developments we are aware of as we continue to develop the scheme. This will help us design a robust solution to current and future congestion problems. This includes other Highways England projects such as Manchester North West Quadrant, and those developed externally such as the Greater Manchester Spatial Framework. We will continue to work with Local Authorities and other relevant bodies to ensure we are kept up to date with plans as they develop.

Why didn't the Manchester Smart Motorways project convert the hard shoulder into a new lane between junctions 17 and 18 of the M60? Why now?

At the time the Manchester Smart Motorways project was being developed, capacity was not an issue along this section of road and we therefore did not introduce all lane running.

Our traffic modelling shows that improvements to junction 18 will provide much higher benefits if we also introduce all lane running between junctions 17 and 18 of the M60. All lane running in this location will make it safer and easier for drivers joining or leaving the M60 between junctions 17 and 18 and reduce the delays currently caused by merging traffic from these junctions.

We've therefore designed this scheme to include all lane running, however we understand the importance of proceeding with caution around any potential impacts on air quality in this location.

Residents and road users were subject to years of roadworks and disruption because of Manchester smart motorways. Why are you now planning to subject them to several years more?

We understand the frustration that is caused by roadworks and we recognise that in this regard there is never a good time to carry out these sorts of major projects. However, both the Manchester smart motorways and Simister Island Interchange projects are vital to providing the much-needed upgrades the M60 requires.

The smart motorway scheme was developed by the former Highways Agency during previous funding cycles. In December 2014 the Government published the first Roads Investment Strategy which included an instruction for us to start developing a project to improve Simister Island Interchange during the second roads period (2020-2025). At this time, the smart motorway scheme was already in construction.

We do not intend to start work on this project until 2024, meaning at least a 6-year gap between the two projects to provide some respite for road users and residents. We will work hard to minimise the disruption caused by the project and follow industry best practice for any disruptive work activities.

We'll also work closely with local authorities, key stakeholders and other Highways England projects to ensure we minimise the disruption of our traffic management and motorway closures on road users.

Next steps

When will a decision be made and by who?

During summer 2020, all responses will be analysed then summarised within the consultation report. At the end of summer, the consultation report will be published.

Where possible, and alongside continued surveys and assessments, we will use your feedback to develop the designs and help identify ways to address concerns about the impacts of the scheme.

We will announce our preferred option in winter 2020/21 to take forward to the next stage of design development.