



Department for **Transport**

From Mike Penning MP, Parliamentary
Under Secretary of State

Rt Hon Nick Herbert MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
London SW1P 4DR

Tel: 020 7944 3084
Fax: 020 7944 4521
E-Mail: mike.penning@dft.gsi.gov.uk

Web site: www.dft.gov.uk

Our Ref: MC/48766

Dear Nick

16 AUG 2012

Thank you for your letter of 24 July, enclosing correspondence from your constituent, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] about ideas to improve the traffic flow.

This Government recognises the importance of transport infrastructure to support the economy, and we have already announced increased levels of Government funding to deliver improvements targeted at supporting economic growth.

Following the Government's 2010 Comprehensive Spending Review, the Department for Transport published in October 2010 details of its investment decisions for major road projects on the strategic road network. *Investment in Highways Transport Schemes* set out proposals for the delivery of 14 major road schemes before 2015, and a further 18 proposals to be developed in preparation for future spending review periods.

The Chancellor's Autumn Statement on 29 November 2011 identified two current Highways Agency major road schemes which will see their delivery accelerated, and a further six schemes which will be brought forward for delivery in this spending review period. These schemes were all selected because they are able to be accelerated to start construction and make significant progress in the next three years, and will therefore make the earliest possible contribution to stimulating economic growth.

At present, the Department currently has no plans to develop proposals to improve the A24, the A27 at Arundel or the A11 as [REDACTED] suggests. However, in preparing for future investment decisions, the Department will be considering the current and future forecast performance of the strategic road network, to identify and prioritise the scale of identified problems. It will also work with regional and local stakeholders, for instance local highway authorities, to ensure it considers their views on the transport problems they face, and the range of potential options for addressing them.

The points [REDACTED] raised about speed limits, are for the relevant local authorities to deal with. Local authorities set speed limits that offer the best balance between issues of safety, environment and the economy. A speed limit is a maximum speed which may be driven in ideal circumstances. The speed limit will be the same on both sides of the carriageway as there are road safety concerns relating to vehicles travelling in opposite directions being able to travel at different speeds.

Driving is a skill that develops over time and even a good driver needs to feel confident that vehicles travelling in the opposite direction are likely to be travelling at the same speeds. This is particularly relevant where vehicles interact, such as sharp bends or turnings where vehicles cross each other's path. The only roads on which speed limits may be different are dual carriageways and motorways where vehicles are separated by a physical barrier. All changes of speed limit are required by law to be clearly signed by way of speed limit signs on both sides of the carriageway. For roads subject to the national speed limit; single and dual carriageways, this means the national speed limit applies, a sign to which [REDACTED] refers.

There are no plans to introduce an 80mph speed limit on dual carriageways but [REDACTED] may be interested to know that the Department is carrying out work to assess the potential economic, safety and environmental impacts of trialling 80mph speed limits on motorways where variable limits are currently in place. This work is on-going and no final decisions have yet been taken about which stretches of motorway would be included in any proposed trial or under what conditions an 80mph limit would be applied. We plan to bring forward detailed proposals and start consultation later in the year as part of the broader work on a roads strategy.

[REDACTED] suggested abolishing the tolls at the Dartford Crossing. The tolls at the Crossing were replaced with a charge in 2003 after studies told us that traffic could be up to 17 per cent higher than 2003 levels if charges were removed. The current congestion levels are because the Crossing simply cannot cope with the volume of traffic that wants to use it during much of the day. Recent studies into the operation of the Crossing have made clear that the current toll plaza acts as a traffic management device, and controls the rate of flow of traffic into the tunnels, helping to mitigate the risks to excess congestion.



MIKE PENNING