

THE STONEHENGE ALLIANCE

From the Chairman, George McDonic, MBE, BL, DIPLTP, FRTPI, DPA, FFB
c/o 1 The Old Smithy, Alton Priors, Marlborough,
Wiltshire SN8 4JX

The Rt. Hon. Theresa May, MP
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London SW1A 2AA

21 October 2016

Dear Prime Minister,

Stonehenge and the A303

I write on behalf of the Stonehenge Alliance of non-governmental organizations and individuals, which encourages enhancement of the World Heritage Site (WHS) and its setting and maintains a watch over major development proposals that would impact adversely on them.

You will, I am sure, be aware of the Government's proposal to widen the A303 to include a 2.9km (1.8mile) twin-bored tunnel under part of the WHS which is some 5.4km across. I wrote earlier to Prime Minister David Cameron, explaining our concerns about the project and received an answer from Highways England, advising me that the 2.9km tunnel remains their 'working assumption'. I have replied to Highways England's Project Director Andrew Alcorn and have so far received no response. I attach copies of this correspondence, for your information.

I would like to bring three key issues to your attention.

1. Potential damage to the WHS and the possibility of loss of WH status

1.1. A 2.9km tunnel, with twin portals in deep cuttings, 1.6km of new surface level dual carriageway within the WHS and two grade separated junctions on its boundaries would, physically and visually, severely compromise the Stonehenge archaeological landscape and its setting. Such damage would conflict with the Government's commitments under the World Heritage Convention.

1.2. Media reports of UNESCO's support for the 2.9km tunnel are incorrect. The support of Historic England and the National Trust for a 2.9km tunnel disregards World Heritage Convention obligations, planning policy, Government guidance, and the advice and guidance of UNESCO's World Heritage Committee and the International Council on Monuments and Sites.

2. Reasons advanced to justify widening the A303 at Stonehenge

2.1. The decision to widen the A303 at Stonehenge appears to have been a political initiative announced prior to the 2015 General Election. A303 widening was demanded and is supported by (unelected) Local Enterprise Partnerships in the South West without substantive data to support the claim that it would enhance the economy by reducing journey times. The scheme is also supported by residents suffering problems with rat running at times when there is congestion on the A303. These apparent justifications for road widening at Stonehenge need further examination.

3. *The A303 at Stonehenge: some critical facts*

3.1. Latest available Department for Transport Average Annual Daily Flow (AADF) traffic figures (2015) past Stonehenge are now lower than in 2004. Then, an earlier Stonehenge tunnel scheme, brought forward on heritage grounds, was stated by the Highways Agency not to be justified on road transport grounds. The AADF figures also indicate no significant change in long distance traffic on this stretch of the A303.

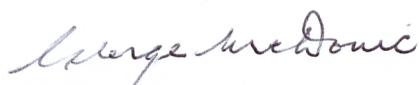
3.2. Congestion on the A303 at Stonehenge is mainly on Fridays and Sundays as weekenders and high-peak summer holidaymakers travel to and from the South West. This is not regular transport activity by long-distance hauliers and other businesses. Congestion maps on the Internet indicate lengthier and more frequent congestion in other parts of the country than that experienced at Stonehenge. This suggests that dealing with congestion elsewhere would make better use of public resources. Measures to discourage rat running could be implemented now to ameliorate local impacts, perhaps by Highways England in the absence of Local Authority funding.

3.3. In the short to medium term, smart measures to discourage road use at busy times and improve traffic flow at Stonehenge, already under consideration elsewhere, would be a far more economical and practical way of solving part-time traffic flow problems than a scheme that would inevitably, and quite quickly, induce more traffic and congestion.

3.4. A303 road widening at Stonehenge with a tunnel long enough to meet the Government's World Heritage Convention obligations would exceed the current budget of £864 million to £1,321 million for road widening between Amesbury and Berwick Down. A short tunnel (2.9km) would jeopardise the WHS designation.

In view of the Government's credibility in heritage protection, lack of proven transport need and the enormous financial cost, we hope that you will consider whether the money allocated for the A303 tunnelling scheme might not be more effectively spent elsewhere at this time. Should road widening still be considered, we hope that adequate resources will be found to ensure that there is no further damage to the landscape and setting of the Stonehenge WHS.

Yours sincerely,



George McDonic, Chairman, the Stonehenge Alliance

The Stonehenge Alliance is supported by: Ancient Sacred Landscape Network;
Campaign for Better Transport; Campaign to Protect Rural England; Friends of the Earth;
and Rescue: The British Archaeological Trust.

cc. to Philip Hammond, MP, Chancellor of the Exchequer
The Rt. Hon, Karen Bradley, MP, Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport
The Rt. Hon. Chris Grayling, MP, Secretary of State for Transport
Jeremy Corbyn, MP, Leader of the Opposition
Tom Watson, MP, Deputy Leader of the Opposition and Minister for Culture, Media and Sport
Tracey Crouch, MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Sport, Tourism and Heritage
Andrew Jones, MP, Under Secretary of State for Transport
Andy McDonald, MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Transport
Baroness Jones of Moulsecoomb
John Glen, MP for Salisbury
Dr. Isabelle Anatole-Gabriel, UNESCO World Heritage Centre
Susan Denyer, Secretary, ICOMOS-UK