# Decision postponed: Opposition to Stonehenge road scheme surges

## Thank you for your superb support! It is putting the Transport Secretary under pressure.

Secretary of State for Transport Grant Shapps has twice extended the deadline for a decision on the £1.7billion project, and now has until 13 November to reach a final verdict.

A massive surge in numbers has boosted opposition to the Stonehenge A303 road expansion scheme. The Stonehenge Alliance petition that you have signed has soared past 100,000 signatures in recent weeks, more than double the tally when the petition was first presented to Downing Street in February. The surge in opposition follows stunning revelations about the Stonehenge landscape, with the discovery of huge pits marking an ancient circle many times larger, and older, than the famous stones themselves.

Voices from around the world are being raised as never before in opposition to Highways England's scheme to gouge a four-lane dual carriageway into the Stonehenge World Heritage Site. People from more than 100 countries have now signed the petition.

Professional archaeologists and historians add yet more weight to the arguments against the road scheme. Historian and film-maker Professor Michael Wood says, in a video published by Stonehenge Alliance:

> *"The Plan was always wrong. But now, in Summer 2020, every calculation on which the plan was made is now out of date.*

*There’s still time to reconsider, and we should”.*

*[“There's still time to reconsider. And we should."]*

*"History is what links us, the community of the living with our ancestors. It's about making us who we are." Historian, broadcaster and author Michael Wood defends Stonehenge landscape with a passion. "There's still time to reconsider. And we should."Speak up, sign our petition and tell your MP why the road and tunnel are wrong. If you're an overseas objector, please write to our prime minister. Full details on this link.http://stonehengealliance.org.uk/act-now/write-to-your-mp/@Maya Vision International Drone footage courtesy Geoff Aitken*

*Posted by Stonehenge Alliance on Tuesday, 4 August 2020*

The recent finds show once again that there is so much more to the Stonehenge landscape than the eye alone can see.

Few know more about what’s at stake to the archaeological environment of Stonehenge than Professor Vince Gaffney, whose team made the astonishing discoveries at Durrington Walls. The professor of landscape archaeology argues that the road tunnel would be such an act of monstrous vandalism that it would be hard to justify to generations to come.

*Stonehenge road tunnel: "An act of monstrous vandalism"*

*Few know more about what's at stake to the archaeological environment of Stonehenge than Vince Gaffney, whose team made the astonishing discoveries at Durrington Walls last month. The professor of landscape archaeology argues that the road tunnel would be such an act of monstrous vandalism that it would be hard to justify to generations to come.SIGN THE*

*PETITION*
*http://stonehengealliance.org.uk/our-campaign/petition/*

*Posted by Stonehenge Alliance on Wednesday, 15 July 2020*

This alone is reason for Grant Shapps to reject the road scheme, even before he factors in its enormous cost to save 8 minutes journey time. The Stonehenge tunnel and road project ploughing across the prehistoric landscape are likely to amount to little more than a shameful huge white elephant. The UK government and its agencies have a duty to protect the World Heritage Site as a whole.

**TAKE ACTION** ⇒ Not all MPs understand the issues. If you would like to send our briefing to your MP, you will find it here.

**FOLLOW US** ⇒ on Facebook , Twitter and Instagram to keep up with our news.

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# Grotesque act of desecration by British Government – but is it a done deal?

Rishi Sunak made much in his Budget statement on Wednesday 11 March about "getting things done". His announcement of funding to upgrade the A303 past Stonehenge horrified all those who hold this landscape dear. What exactly does this mean for the World Heritage Site?



*"Nowhere else in Britain do the demands of the present and the claims of the past rub up against each other more insistently than amidst the Stonehenge landscape."* Tom Holland

Tom Holland, our President, eloquently describes the proposal for widening the road through Stonehenge WHS as:

> *"a scheme that constitutes the most grotesque act of desecration ever contemplated by a British government: the driving of a great gash of concrete and tarmac through our most significant, our most sacred prehistoric landscape."*

**All is not lost yet**

While the omens don't look promising, the road has yet to be given the official go-ahead.  For that to happen Secretary of State for Transport Grant Shapps has to consider the recommendations of the Inspectors who presided over last year's Examination of the scheme and come to a reasoned justification for proceeding with the project.

We don't yet know what the Inspectors have said, but they surely cannot have been complimentary about the economic case

for the road which is astonishingly weak. It would cost far more to build than it would ever recoup in economic benefit and that's before you factor in the huge risk of tunnelling in unreliable phosphatic chalk, which could send costs skywards.

Then there is the no small matter of international opposition from UNESCO which, as much as Highways England and the Department for Digital, Culture Media and Sport try to spin it, hasn't gone away. Grant Shapps will, in part, have to consider whether his Government really wants to risk international condemnation by ploughing ahead regardless. **How will his decision square with the Government's international treaty obligations?**




*Speeding the traffic onto the next traffic jam: only three out of eight bottlenecks along the A303 are funded.*

A large Government majority might negate any problems on the home front but our reputation abroad is another matter.

For a Government that wants to make Britain Great again, destroying one of your most iconic landscapes that helps define what it means to be British, seems an odd way forward.

While we hope that sense might prevail, we are also preparing for the worst.  There is still much left to fight for and we

hope you will remain with us until we can secure the future of this precious World Heritage Site for future generations.

**In the media**

The desecration of Stonehenge shames this government article by Tom Holland in UnHerd, 12 March 2020

Stonehenge A303 tunnel given go ahead by chancellor BBC News, 11 March 2020

Chancellor announces £27bn for road building in budget The Guardian, 11 March 2020

Go-ahead of A303 tunnel scheme near Stonehenge met with mixed reviews Salisbury Journal, 12 March 2020

BBC News South TV, 12 March 2020

Stonehenge Alliance press release – 13 March 2020

**TAKE ACTION!**

Our petition is still open and will continue to gather signatures whilst there is still hope of defeating this road scheme through Stonehenge World Heritage Site. Can you help us make sure the petition reaches its potential? If you have already signed the petition could you share it in a blog, newsletter or magazine you edit or contribute to? Or share it on your Facebook page?

# An urgent request – write to the Chancellor!

**DEAR SUPPORTER – AN URGENT REQUEST!**

Highways England's A303 Stonehenge tunnel scheme is at a critical stage. A decision on whether to approve it is due by 2 April, but funding for the scheme could be announced in the Budget on 11 March. **We would like to swamp the new Chancellor of the Exchequer with letters from around the country and abroad to show the strength of feeling against it.**

**Please write in your own words to:**

The Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP, Chancellor of the Exchequer
Email: public.enquiries@hmtreasury.gsi.gov.uk
cc: transportsecretary@dft.gov.uk and your local MP (find your UK MP here)

**Subject: A303 Stonehenge**

Dear Chancellor,

I would like to strongly urge you not to approve funding for the high risk and highly damaging A303 Stonehenge scheme:

- **It is poor value for money and high risk**. Highways England estimates only 21 pence of benefit for each £1 invested, if the highly dodgy heritage survey is discounted. Cost overruns are likely due to tunnelling through poor quality chalk and unpredictable groundwater conditions.
- **UNESCO opposes the scheme which would irreparably damage The World Heritage Site** and which the UK Government has pledged to protect for future generations.
- **The scheme would increase carbon emissions** at a time when the Government needs to show international

leadership on climate change ahead of COP26 in Glasgow.

- **Please add any other concerns or expand on the above.**

Yours sincerely,
**Your full name**
**Your home address**

**If you have time please also email the Prime Minister, Boris Johnson.**

**For more ideas on what to write** see our recent letter to Transport Secretary, Grant Shapps

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT AT THIS CRUCIAL MOMENT IN OUR CAMPAIGN**

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# Decision on Stonehenge Tunnel with Minister



A303 Amesbury bypass and Countess Roundabout construction in 1968 on the eastern boundary of the Stonehenge World Heritage Site.

**The future of the Stonehenge Tunnel scheme planned to gouge its way through the World Heritage Site hangs in the balance.**

The Examining Authority sent its report and recommendations on the scheme to the Secretary of State for Transport last month for a decision on or around 2nd April.  That decision is further complicated by financial strictures. The Prime Minister has asked each Government department to sacrifice some "sacred cows" in time for the Chancellor's budget announcement in March. We have learnt that Chancellor Sajid Javid believes the Stonehenge Tunnel scheme represents poor value for money. Secretary of State for Transport Grant Shapps, however, is enamoured of 'extraordinary infrastructure' and appears to be in favour of the scheme.

**Stonehenge Alliance** sent an open letter to Grant Shapps asking him to axe the A303 Stonehenge Expressway Scheme.

**Tom Holland,** Stonehenge Alliance President, asks a leading question: “How can a Conservative government even contemplate the desecration of our most precious prehistoric landscape? The Stonehenge tunnel, if it goes ahead, will shame our country!”

The blog below is a round up of issues surrounding the scheme written by **www.StonehengeNews**, published here with their permission.

## What are the issues surrounding the proposed Stonehenge Tunnel?

The Stonehenge tunnel is a proposed tunnel or sunken dual carriageway drawn up by Highways England to upgrade the A303 road, which currently passes within 165 meters of Stonehenge. Beginning with the closure of the A344 road, the Stonehenge tunnel would complete the removal of traffic from around the site by redirecting the A303 under Stonehenge. The project aims on one hand to improve the landscape around the monument, freeing tourists from traffic that detracts from the ancient wonder of the site and on the other improving the safety on the A303, resulting in smoother travel for anyone travelling to and from the south-west of England.




Still from video mock up by Highways England for public consultation in 2018. Location labels have been added by The Stonehenge Alliance.

The proposed tunnel already has a long history of both bureaucratic and archaeological issues. Way back in 1995 was the first time it was proposed to build a tunnel for the A303 underneath the World Heritage Site. However, it did not take long for plans to be criticised for seemingly disregarding the archaeological significance of the Wessex landscape. It was suggested that the tunnel approach would cut in to a prehistoric track way between Stonehenge and a nearby river, resulting in the loss of archaeological remains which would harmfully affect the authenticity of the site and more than cancel out the benefits of the proposed tunnel. After years of bureaucratic wrangling the proposal was finally accepted by the Government on 12 January 2017. Today, the tunnel remains mired in controversy and the arguments against it haven’t changed much since the idea’s inception in 1995. The main issues with the proposal seem to be its staunch opposition

from several parties, the complexity of the job and its price.

**Opposition**

The staunchest opposition to the tunnel is represented by the Stonehenge Alliance campaign group ‘a group of non-governmental organisations and individuals that seeks enhancements to the Stonehenge World Heritage Site’. This group includes environmentalists, archaeologists, residents and have recently repeated their belief that the proposed tunnel “would cause irreparable damage to the landscape”. They believe that the world heritage site of Stonehenge should be considered far wider than the barrow on which the stones stand:

*The whole site, extending to beyond the horizons around the famous stones themselves, is c. 5.4 km across. All of it makes up a “huge ancient complex” that holds many secrets yet to be discovered. Yet the proposal is for a 2.9km (1.8 mile) tunnel… would result in at least 1.6 km of above-ground 21st-century road engineering…*

*All archaeology in the construction zones would be destroyed and the A303 would become the largest ever human intervention in an area fashioned and revered by over a hundred generations of our ancestors.*

**Cost**

In 2018 Highways England proposed a cost of £1.6 billion and a planned start date in 2021 was indicated with the tunnel’s planned opening being in 2026. Unsurprisingly, this cost has created yet more opposition in both the commons and amongst the general public especially since the project was due to be privately funded, but now will be funded publicly since the government dismissed a ‘PFI financing model’ in the 2018 Budget.

**Complexity**

To protect the landscape, the plans are ambitiously complex. Not only is the job of sinking a dual carriageway a complex starting point but the project also proposes:

- Four “green bridges” for wildlife to cross the dual carriageway.
- Restoring areas of chalk grassland at Yarnbury Castle on Berwick Down through to the south of Parsonage Down national nature reserve.
- 100ha of new chalk grassland to promote biodiversity in the area.
- A viaduct at the River Till
- Moving the junction between the A303 and A360 600m west

Adding a bureaucratic layer to the complexity is the fact that all UK tier 1 contractors have refused to bid the job believing the current approach to be too complex with its shallow tunnel, complex geology, rabid opposition, and huge public scrutiny because of both the cost and the environmental concerns.

Of course, all these issues are interlinked. The complexity of the job is a demanded by the opposition to protect the natural beauty of the area, but the complexity pushes up the price and then the price creates yet more opposition. It seems to be a vicious cycle. When it comes to the initiation and completion of this project there doesn’t seem to be much light at the end of the tunnel.



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**Stonehenge Tunnel Relevant Links:**

The Knotty Problem of the A303 and Stonehenge. Stonehenge News Blog

Stonehenge Alliance calls for A303 tunnel to be scrapped in open letter to government. Salisbury Journal

Ministers do battle over £2billion Stonehenge tunnel. Daily Mail

Treasury pushes for £2bn Stonehenge tunnel to be axed. Financial Times

Reuniting the Stonehenge landscape and improving your journey. English Highways

Stonehenge and the A303 Joint Response. English Heritage

Stonehenge A303 Road Improvement Scheme. Historic England

A group of non-governmental organisations and individuals that seeks enhancements to the Stonehenge World Heritage Site. The Stonehenge Alliance

Stonehenge tunnel 'at risk' due to funding uncertainty. Construction News

*Follow Stonehenge Blog on twitter @STONEHENGE*

# Fate of Stonehenge World Heritage Site in the balance!



Our transport team (L – R): Professor Phil Goodwin, Dr Simon Temple and Chris Todd from Campaign for Better Transport

**The Infrastructure Planning Inspectorate's Examination of the Development Consent Order application for widening the A303 through Stonehenge WHS has now closed.**

Since April, the Alliance's attention has been focused 100% on scrutinising documents, writing objections, commissioning specialists and co-ordinating our case against the road scheme. We worked alongside superb objecting colleagues hoping to defeat a shocking proposal that many thousands have objected to.

Throughout the examination period we unfortunately did not have the capacity to keep all our followers up to date with progress reports. Only those who could follow our brief commentary on social media were kept abreast of progress.



Highways England's Development Consent Order application documents displayed in the foyer of City Hall, Salisbury.

Despite our request for it, Examination hearings were not live streamed. The Planning Inspectorate published daily recordings several days after the hearings, and there is no visual means of finding a clip.

As a result the Interested Parties and thousands of objectors could not follow events in real time. They could only grapple with the labyrinthine documentation in the Inspectorate's burgeoning library or attend in person in Salisbury. Thus, the highly complex Examination process involving one of the world's most famous prehistoric landscapes under threat of major permanent damage could not be properly scrutinised by the rest of the world.

We are very grateful for the many generous donations from our supporters without whose help we would have been unable to pay for specialist and legal advice.

**What happens next?**



Examining Authority listen to objections and rebuttals in the City Hall, Salisbury.

Over the next 3 months the Examining Authority will write up their findings and make a recommendation to the Secretary of State for Transport who will have a further 3 months in which to make a decision – around March 2020 at the latest.

We believe our case and that of other objectors is compelling. If the wrong decision is made, we may consider issuing a legal challenge.

Our public statement is reproduced below with a link to a summary of our case.

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**PRESS STATEMENT** by **THE STONEHENGE ALLIANCE*** 2 October 2019

**Fate of Stonehenge World Heritage Site in the balance!**

The formal examination of the A303 Stonehenge Scheme ends today. A panel of five Planning Inspectors, known as the Examining Authority, has held eleven public hearings on different aspects of the Scheme and accepted numerous written representations from objectors and supporters.[1] Over the next 3 months the panel will write up its findings and make a

recommendation to the Secretary of State for Transport who will have a further 3 months in which to make a final decision on the Scheme.

Leading experts in the archaeology of Stonehenge, supported by the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS-UK) and the Council for British Archaeology, brought evidence to the Examination to show that the Scheme would permanently damage Stonehenge's surrounding archaeological landscape. Specialists for the Stonehenge Alliance gave compelling reasons for rejecting the Scheme outright, covering such subjects as ecology, geology, transportation, value for money and climate change. [2]

The proposals for the A303 at Stonehenge would involve extensive road cuttings, gouged through the chalk to accommodate new dual carriageways. The twin portals of a c.3km road tunnel would be located well within the WHS. There would be massive junctions at the WHS boundaries. To the east, a flyover would descend over the renowned Mesolithic site of Blick Mead. To the west, a major interchange would be constructed close to one of the most important groups of upstanding prehistoric burials in the UK.

Historic England, English Heritage, Wiltshire Council and the National Trust continue to support Highways England's claim that the Scheme would help to protect the World Heritage Site (WHS) and its outstanding universal value (OUV) in opposition to UNESCO's World Heritage Committee which says the Scheme should not go ahead as it stands.

However well-designed, the devastating impact of the road engineering would scar this iconic landscape for ever.

Kate Fielden, Vice Chairman of Rescue, says:

> *"The A303 Scheme not only poses a severe threat to the WHS but also to our heritage generally in the UK, since those whose responsibility is to care for such places are prepared*

*to allow destruction of a World-famous landscape. We must hope that the Examining Authority will not recommend approval of the Scheme."*

**Notes**

[1] The documentation submitted to the Examination can be seen on the Infrastructure Planning Inspectorate's website here.

[2] For a summary of the different aspects of the Stonehenge Alliance's case against the A303 Scheme, please see here.

*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