

# Busting the Mythbusters!

UNESCO said that "...the benefits of a 2.9km tunnel to the centre of the Stonehenge World Heritage Site cannot be offset against the damage it would cause to other parts of the Site."



A 'mythbusting' item has been published by English Heritage as part of a joint press release on behalf of English Heritage, National Trust and Historic England. We reproduce these 'mythbusters' with our responses beneath.

**PLEASE NOTE 6 August 2020:** *Since publishing the link to English Heritage's page above their mythbusters item has been removed. We have pasted the original copy below.*

- **English Heritage says: The proposed tunnel won't run under Stonehenge.** The current proposals are for a 2.9km tunnel to run about 600m to the south of the current A303 surface road. The stability of the stones will not be affected at all.

*The Alliance says: The Stones stand within c.10 sq.mls of a c.5.4km-wide UNESCO World Heritage Site (WHS). UNESCO has advised the Government to seek alternative road solutions to avoid damaging the WHS. Geotechnical survey work is*

*incomplete: ground stability may be an issue.*

- **English Heritage says: A tunnel won't remove the stones from sight.** Removing the busy and noisy road means that there will be more opportunities for people to get out of their cars and explore the world heritage landscape that has for years been severed by the road.

*The Alliance says: Several generations of motorists and passengers value the view of the Stone monument from the A303: this would be lost. Most visitors would have to pay to see the Stones. Footpaths and byways would be fenced. Much of the WHS is private land.*

- **English Heritage says: There is no evidence that the proposed tunnel will damage the Mesolithic site of Blick Mead.** The proposed tunnel and any infrastructure needed to improve the Countess roundabout are well away from the site (Blick Mead is 700m away from the roundabout). Highways England is aware of the water table issues and will be assessing any potential impact on the site.

*The Alliance Says: The extent of Blick Mead is unknown and needs further investigation. A massive flyover would pass alongside and possibly over part of the site; it would also impact on a Grade I Listed house, its Registered park, and a Conservation Area. Water table issues are still uncertain.*

- **English Heritage says: It's not a 'done deal'.** There's still work to be done on the tunnel proposals, and the scheme is likely to change, on the basis of feedback from the current consultation process. Later this year, Highways England will make their application for a Development Consent Order (DCO) – a special type of planning permission for nationally significant infrastructure projects.

*The Alliance says: The Government is committed to a short tunnel in the WHS. The consultation process assumes that the scheme is a 'done deal' since objections to it will apparently not be considered. Consultation is being undertaken without full information available. [In the event the Examining Authority recommended against the scheme].*

- **English Heritage says: Doing nothing isn't an option.** The A303 past Stonehenge regularly carries 24,000 vehicles, nearly twice as much traffic as it was designed for, and on a summer weekend that figure leaps to 29,000. The result is severe congestion which compromises the WHS. It also causes delays, affecting local communities, commuters and visitors to Wiltshire. With around 120,000 new jobs and 100,000 new homes expected across the South West by 2021, and even greater growth after that, the A303 will get busier still.

*The Alliance says: Doing nothing would be better than trashing a WHS. But measures could be taken now to stop rat running and reduce congestion. There is far worse regular congestion in towns and cities in the South West. Road widening induces more traffic, placing strain on adjoining roads. New technology may revolutionise transport over the next 20–30 years, making road widening unnecessary.*

**Highways England's consultation runs until 6th April.** Details of the scheme can be seen [here](#). The consultation booklet [here](#) and the official consultation response form [here](#).

**Check out our website, [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) for more about the scheme. We have made some [initial non technical suggestions here](#) for responding to the consultation. We will publish a fuller response after we have had time to study the documentation.**

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# Stonehenge and the A303: Westminster speaks

Stonehenge and the A303 have been raised twice in Westminster recently. Of greatest concern was a debate on *Road Routes to the South West* in Westminster Hall on 1st March ([Hansard Col. 261WHff](#)) giving an opportunity for local MPs to promote predictable local interests. MPs demanded reassurance and action on the Government's proposed expressway to the West Country, notwithstanding the intermittent nature of traffic congestion, unequal allocation of funds, ambitions for a second railway to the South West and the likelihood of moving traffic pinch points elsewhere. Upgrading the A303 was largely seen as more important than proper protection of landscape and heritage.

Richard Burden, Labour Shadow Minister for Transport (and Westminster Forum chairman on 11 February, see *below*) proved more pertinent in addressing Roads Minister Andrew Jones:



*Shadow  
Minister of  
Transport,  
Richard  
Burden:  
concerns for*

*integrity of  
the  
archaeological  
site*

*“The status quo pleases no one and it is necessary that we find a solution to the A303 and to Stonehenge. . . . can the Minister confirm when he expects a costed and timetabled set of options for the road?*

*In the meantime, has he asked Highways England to evaluate short-term and medium-term options to improve traffic flow and alleviate congestion?*

*Also, can he satisfy concerns that the current front-runner—a 2.9 km tunnel—would protect the integrity of the archaeological site, as required by article 4 of the world heritage convention? And in the event that the Government cannot satisfy the objective of providing a fully costed and timetabled proposal by 2017, what would he do?” (Cols. 272–73WH)*

Roads Minister Andrew Jones, in response, said:



*Minister of  
Transport,  
Andrew Jones:  
not reneging  
on commitment  
to build a 1.8  
mile tunnel*

*“It is always appropriate to consider options broadly to ensure that the scheme is absolutely the right one, but there is no doubt whatsoever here; we are committed to delivering a 1.8-mile tunnel at Stonehenge. Our objective is to be able to stand at the stones and not see cars. The tunnel will transform the experience of that important part of our national heritage, and at the same time remove an environmental problem and a traffic problem. We should not, however, confuse the development consent order process requirement to show that different options have been exhausted with reneging upon our commitment. That commitment is strong, and we are working on it closely with environmental and heritage groups.*

*We intend to start the process with three major improvements as part of the A303-A30-A358-corridor package of commitments. The £2 billion budget, which is for only those commitments—it is not the overall budget for the south-west—will help to deliver much-needed resilience for the region. Part of that work has to address the iconic and historically important site of Stonehenge. . . . We will build a tunnel at least 1.8 miles in length, to preserve the world heritage site at Stonehenge. . . .*

*The scheme has strong support from the National Trust and English Heritage; I have met with them at the stones and discussed the issue with them. On timing, there will be a formal consultation on the scheme early next year. It will go through the development consent order process—part of the planning process—in 2018. We would expect to start works on the scheme in early 2020. We have to get that right, but I hope that that timing provides some comfort.” (Cols. 274–75WH)*

The Minister not only failed to confirm that the Government intends to protect the integrity of the World Heritage Site but also indicated its intention to press ahead with a scheme

that would only protect the view from Stonehenge and the interests of major local landowners and businesses. This brings seriously into question the credibility and status of the consultation process on options for widening the A303 at Stonehenge.

The subject of the A303 had been raised earlier, on 11 February, at a Westminster Energy, Environment and Transport Forum seminar entitled *Priorities for the road network in England – investment, innovation and regional development*.

The seminar was chaired by Shadow Transport Minister Richard Burden, MP and Baroness Kramer, House of Lords Liberal Democrat Principal Spokesperson on the Treasury and former Transport Minister.

Speakers included representatives of the Department for Transport, Highways England, the RAC, the Local Government Association, the Freight Transport Association, Transport Focus, and engineers Arup. Notable points of interest were areas of innovation and so-called 'smart transport', already proving effective in reducing congestion on motorways and air pollution and set to reduce them further in the future. Integrated transport in Greater Manchester provided an illuminating case study.

It is pleasing to note that Richard Burden in his questions addressed to Andrew Jones on 1 March, above, reflected many of our own concerns expressed by a representative of RESCUE present at the seminar, in a short [article](#) appended to the seminar transcript .