

Better roads

The government is currently consulting on a network of A roads that have strategic importance, to supplement the national network of motorways and trunk roads. These strategic A roads will continue to be local roads under the control of the local Highways Authority – a County or Unitary Council. They will be able to bid for substantial funds for major improvement schemes for these roads. I have been a keen advocate of such an approach. The Transport Secretary has secured extra money for later in this Parliament to provide assistance with these works.

The government has set out in its Consultation document a suggested map of routes that could be included. These tend to be large A roads where there has already been some substantial upgrades and improvements, dual carriageways and recently de trunked routes. The main aim is to choose roads with substantial current road usage, that link substantial settlements. They also need to consider the role of busy routes where they act to take some local journey pressure off an adjacent national highway. I would also trust they will consider roads that may not currently have very high usage, but given likely growth in development will be hitting those levels within the planning period of this initiative.

You might like to look at what is being proposed for your local area and to make some observations to your Council. Councils also need to consider what improvements they would wish to propose once some local roads are designated. Some will need extra capacity by dualling, some better junctions to improve safety and flows, some will need bypasses round settlements and bottlenecks.

On Friday I spent time with Wokingham Borough Council, one of the two local Highways Authorities in my constituency, discussing their response to the Consultation. They too welcome the general approach. The government has set out an indicative map of routes, but is open to persuasion to add or delete roads from the draft. In my area they have proposed designating the A 329M/A3290 Bracknell to Reading route, the A 33 Reading to Basingstoke road, and the A4 into Reading from the east, a relatively recently de trunked road. I have suggested adding the A 327 and the A 329 to these routes, where some major improvement works are already underway with the Winnersh, Arborfield and Shinfield by passes. Wokingham Borough is considering the case for a B road, the Earley peripheral, as well. Anyone with thoughts on this locally should write in to the Council and copy me in to the submission at Parliament.