

## **Group Against Motorway Expansion (GAME)**

### **A THIRD OPTION FOR THE M6 CORRIDOR BETWEEN BIRMINGHAM AND THE NORTHWEST**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

GAME is a coalition of people drawn from communities in Staffordshire who are concerned by schemes to increase capacity of the road transport network by widening the existing M6 or building an M6 Expressway.

We seek to set out realistic and viable alternatives to any major expansion of the present road network, and not simply to oppose all and any new roadbuilding schemes. We are not NIMBYs, but people who feel that traditional approaches to solving traffic problems are now redundant and damaging. In particular, the reality of accelerating global warming must cause everyone to rethink conventional attitudes to economic development.

At a local level, any such scheme is bound to impact adversely on people living near the M6, who already have to endure high levels of noise and pollution. Valuable farmland and wildlife habitats will be lost forever, and many towns, villages and hamlets will suffer irreparable damage.

Moreover, in global terms, building extra roads generates more traffic, and hence more carbon emissions. This is an established fact, accepted by the Department for Transport and others. Therefore, it is stating the obvious to say that expanding the motorway network is not a sustainable solution. What is the point of improved access to a port in southeast England if that facility is inundated by rising sea levels due to global warming?

The need for extra road capacity can seem compelling to many users of the M6, and to businesses along the M6 corridor, which have come to depend on this motorway as their single transport link with other parts of the country. However, we argue that building extra motorway lanes, or even a completely new tolled expressway, is too costly, in economic, social and environmental terms, whether viewed at a local level or from a global perspective, both in the short and long term.

The Third Option that we are putting forward seeks to avoid the disadvantages of the two roadbuilding schemes mooted by the government. As Tony Blair says in the Foreword to *Securing the Future*, the Government's Sustainable Development Strategy, published in March 2005:

*Make the wrong choices now and future generations will live with a changed climate, depleted resources and without the green space and biodiversity that contribute both to our standard of living and our quality of life.*

## **OVERVIEW**

The Third Option is an integrated approach that incorporates a range of strategies. Many of these were considered in the MidMan Report a few years ago. We feel that the arguments for implementing these are now stronger than ever, and every effort should be made to do so. This could become part of the wider government Sustainable Development Strategy, *Securing the Future*, and initiatives to deliver this should incorporate a ‘hearts and minds’ campaign to raise general awareness of the issues.

According to the government, the earliest opening date for either of its proposed schemes is 2017. So neither scheme does anything to address congestion over the next 10 years. In fact, such a huge roadbuilding project can only exacerbate congestion during the construction period. Hence, the measures we propose are divided into those that can help to tackle congestion in the short term, and steps in the medium and long term that seek to change attitudes to transport and reduce the need to travel. We must strive to encourage people to use other forms of transport

## **SHORT-TERM MEASURES**

These are aimed at increasing the perceived capacity of the existing M6 (and other motorways) in the immediate future. They are designed to keep the traffic flowing at a constant relatively high speed and to avoid holdups, blockages and bunching.

The main causes of holdups, blockages and bunching are:

- accidents (either caused by human or vehicle failure);
- lane holdups (caused by slow or overtaking vehicles);
- merging of motorways;
- excessive volume of traffic at ‘peak’ periods;
- frequent road repairs.

### Solutions:

Measures to improve standards of motorway driving, including an additional compulsory motorway driving proficiency test and health/eyesight test (the current eyesight test is insufficient), as part of a more stringent overall driving test.

Harsher fines for drivers/owners convicted of avoidable vehicle failure, and more spot checks.

More severe penalties for poor or dangerous driving.

Stricter and lower maximum speed limits combined with relatively high minimum speed limits (this latter measure to be helped by the introduction of engine size/gross loaded weight ratio limits).

Restrictions on HGVs using the centre lane on busy stretches, and on HGVs overtaking within, say, 2 miles of junctions.

Increase in number of speed cameras and number and perceived relevance of ‘speed signs’. This may well entail the removal of ‘advisory’ status and the upgrading of all to ‘mandatory’ status. This would have to be accompanied by public service broadcasts and other suitable publicity to explain the relevance and importance of driver compliance.

The improvement of signs at motorway merging points so as to avoid the need to slow down to read direction signs.

A review of the motorway repair and maintenance strategies to minimize disruption.

Promotion of 'flexitime' in companies and other organizations to extend the working day and hence 'flatten' peak travel periods.

Besides these motorway traffic management techniques there are many others in use (or being tested) both here and abroad (such as road pricing and variable lane use).

These 'minor' alterations should sufficiently enlarge the perceived motorway capacity until the longer-term traffic-cutting measures (see below) begin to take effect.

### **MEDIUM- AND LONG-TERM MEASURES**

These are designed to reduce the overall need to transport goods and people, particularly by road. We have built a society in which travel is no longer regarded as a luxury but as a necessity, and we are rapidly destroying much of the remaining infrastructure that enables people to live without a car.

#### Solutions:

The obvious starting point is to redirect capital investment away from roadbuilding into the rail network, and into promoting light rail, trams, and buses, and making these safe, reliable, convenient and attractive modes of transport.

Encourage 'working from home', intranet communities, teleconferencing facilities, etc. by means of improved tax incentives, for example.

Commuters need to be coaxed out of their cars, thus reducing rush-hour pressure points, with greater use of fiscal means to reduce car use.

Promote the health benefits of walking and cycling as methods of travel, in accord with the Government's 'Choosing Health' white paper.

Compulsory Green Travel Plans for companies, including incentives to encourage greener travel options.

Introduce a national road pricing scheme as soon as possible, so that the road network can be fairly and effectively managed, with monies raised going in part to provide the above alternatives.

All developments must be rigorously assessed by local authorities for their impact on the transport system, particularly in terms of the demands for commuting, shopping, leisure, schools, medical services, etc., and a cap placed on the overall 'carbon footprint' to encourage integration of facilities to reduce the need to travel.

Local and national government should draw up plans to 'localize' the production of goods and services. This could involve incentives to retailers to stock local produce, perhaps by a variable VAT rate, or an 'inverse air miles' loyalty card scheme.

Of all the above measures, we regard the localization of goods and services to be of paramount importance, and one that is preferable, in the long term, to continued and costly expansion of transport infrastructure.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

We feel that the massive expansion of the motorway network, as proposed in plans to widen the M6 or build a new tolled expressway, can never be a sustainable solution. Such a scheme does nothing to solve congestion in the short term, and in the long term will lead to significant increases in carbon emissions, other pollutants, noise levels, and general degradation of the local and global environment.

Prime minister Tony Blair is not alone in recognizing the overriding importance of combatting global warming. All the main political parties now accept the urgency of dealing with the problem of carbon emissions. We argue that within a few years, such proposals as these, which will considerably increase the UK's carbon emissions, will be regarded as a 'white elephant', without any rational basis, and will, rightly, be abandoned.

Instead of this traditional and outmoded policy of building extra capacity, we present a third option. We concede that such an option requires a raft of inducements, incentives and policy changes, in diverse areas of our lives. It is challenging, and requires vision and commitment to implement. But such an option can, we believe, become part of a sea change in attitudes that will mark a shift toward more sustainable economic development. Failure to make such changes will lead to dire consequences: climate change knows no boundaries.

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**On behalf of GAME**  
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