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Douglas Alexander
Secretary of State for Transport
Department for Transport
Great Minster House
76 Marsham Street
London
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Dear Mr Alexander

Status of non-approved schemes within the Regional Funding Allocation lists

I am writing with reference to the lists of schemes approved for funding through the Regional Funding Allocations which you announced on 6 July 2006. The lists broadly accept the region's advice, and includes schemes which do not yet have approval.

Road Block is extremely concerned that for the first time the Department has created a programme which includes schemes that have either not been consulted on, appraised or received approval, or all three. We believe these lists undermines the credibility of the NATA appraisal process, and corrodes trust in the decision making process. Including non-approved scheme in these regional programmes is putting funding considerations above evidence based decision making. In other words it is putting the cart before the horse.

We seek urgent clarification of the status of non-approved road schemes included in the RFA programmes.

Road Block is concerned that inclusion in the RFA lists will elevate the status of the schemes, and will create confusion amongst local and regional decision makers. It will also cause blight of people's properties.

Already local authorities are claiming their non-approved schemes have been granted approval, for instance at Lancaster, where the Heysham to M6 Link was **not approved**, yet was included in the RFA lists, the local authority immediately issued a press release claiming approval had been granted.

In the words of one local resident at Lancaster, "*The result of this is that people in the district now believe that a major hurdle has been overcome, the council has the money and the only outstanding matter is planning permission. This really does impact on the community, people believe that the battle is over, their worries turn to fears, some will want to sell up and leave, property prices in the vicinity of the road will fall*".

The South Bristol Ring Road is another very good example. This scheme was included in the South West region's advice, and was accepted by yourself in your announcement. However this scheme has only just emerged out of a completely unaffordable programme of roadbuilding suggested by WS Atkins in its draft Greater Bristol Strategic Transport Study in October 2005. The scheme has never been consulted on, the local authorities concerned are not involved in promoting the scheme, there has been no appraisal, and the scheme is nowhere near approval. In the meantime the inclusion of the scheme is blighting the lives of local residents, and casting a shadow over the environment of South Bristol.

Decisions on the appraisal for the Heysham to M6 Link and the Brownhills Bypass are also still awaited, yet the schemes were also included in the RFA lists. Road Block believes the Lancaster scheme's appraisal is seriously questionable, as outlined in the report by Alan James which was submitted to your Department earlier this year. The Brownhills scheme is unbuildable as the local planning authorities will not grant their consent for the neighbouring authority to build on their Green Belt land.

Other non-approved schemes that are of grave concern are Westbury (where there are substantial outstanding objections from the Statutory Environmental Bodies and the scheme has already been rejected for funding in 2003) and Kingskerswell Bypass in Devon, which has not had any appraisal and is extremely environmentally controversial. There are concerns also about the SEMMS road and the Norwich Northern Distributor Road (where there are serious environmental concerns and the Department has not seen any appraisal for the scheme).

Road Block believes putting non-approved, non-appraised schemes into regional funding lists undermines confidence in the Department's commitment to public

consultation, the NATA appraisal processes, or the importance of consideration of environmental impacts. It also demonstrates how easily prepared the Department is accept scheme promoter's (whether Highways Agency, local authority or regional bodies) own assessment's of the benefits of schemes, without requiring evidence for these assertions.

The impacts of the inclusion of non-approved schemes in these funding lists are very serious, especially on the lives of local residents. Road Block seeks clarification of the status of these schemes as soon as possible.

I look forward to your reply.

Yours sincerely

Rebecca Lush
Coordinator, Road Block

CC

Charlotte Dixon, Steve Gooding, Steve Berry and Tim Barrow at DfT
David Owen and Andrew Scurry at HM Treasury
Jill Goldsmith, National Audit Office
Alistair Carmichael MP
Chris Grayling MP
Stephen Joseph, Transport 2000