

**Improving journeys to the South West
The case for the A303/A358 corridor**

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About this booklet

Highways England has prepared a number of documents to explain the A303/A358 corridor improvement programme and the schemes within it.

This document gives a high-level overview of the entire A303/A358 corridor, setting out the need for improvement.

For a summary of the need for improvements as they relate to specific schemes, please see the documents for individual schemes.

More detailed information about each scheme will become available at www.roads.highways.gov.uk/regions/south-west as they develop.

About Highways England

Our role is to operate, maintain and modernise the strategic road network to ensure that road users have safe and reliable journeys and that businesses have the effective road links they need to prosper.

The strategic road network is a vital national asset which connects regional communities and supports economic growth. It carries a third of all traffic by mileage and two thirds of all heavy goods traffic.



The A303/A358 corridor

The A303 and A358 link the M3 and M5 to create one of the most direct strategic routes between the south west and the south east. This makes them vital for the economy of the south west.

Millions of people – from local communities and regional businesses to holiday-lovers – use this corridor of roads every year to get around, do business, enjoy the region’s scenery, and experience national treasures like Stonehenge.

But there is a problem. Around 35 miles of the corridor is single carriageway, causing congestion, delays and an increased risk of accidents.

It is preventing businesses from reaching their potential, hampering quality of life in communities nearby and adding to the perception that the south west is a hard place to get to. For a region which depends so heavily on tourism, that is bad.

The south west economy is under-performing, compared to the rest of the UK. Local councils and business leaders agree that upgrading the rest of the corridor to dual carriageway will help connect the south west better to neighbouring regions, unlocking its potential for growth and supporting plans for more homes and jobs.

Without improvement, the performance of the corridor will deteriorate, congestion and delays will increase and road access will be an ever bigger barrier to growth and prosperity.

“The south west peninsula needs a step-change in its connectivity to unlock its potential for economic prosperity.

“We need resilient, reliable infrastructure with increased capacity... to help us bring about the physical and economic regeneration of the south west and improve the local economy and increase our contribution to UK plc.”

Steve Hindley Chairman
Heart of the South West Local
Enterprise Partnership

A high quality route to the South West

In 2014, the Government announced £2 billion to start transforming the corridor into a continuous high quality dual carriageway to the South West. The long term aim is to create a safe and reliable road where ‘mile-a-minute’ travel is the norm.

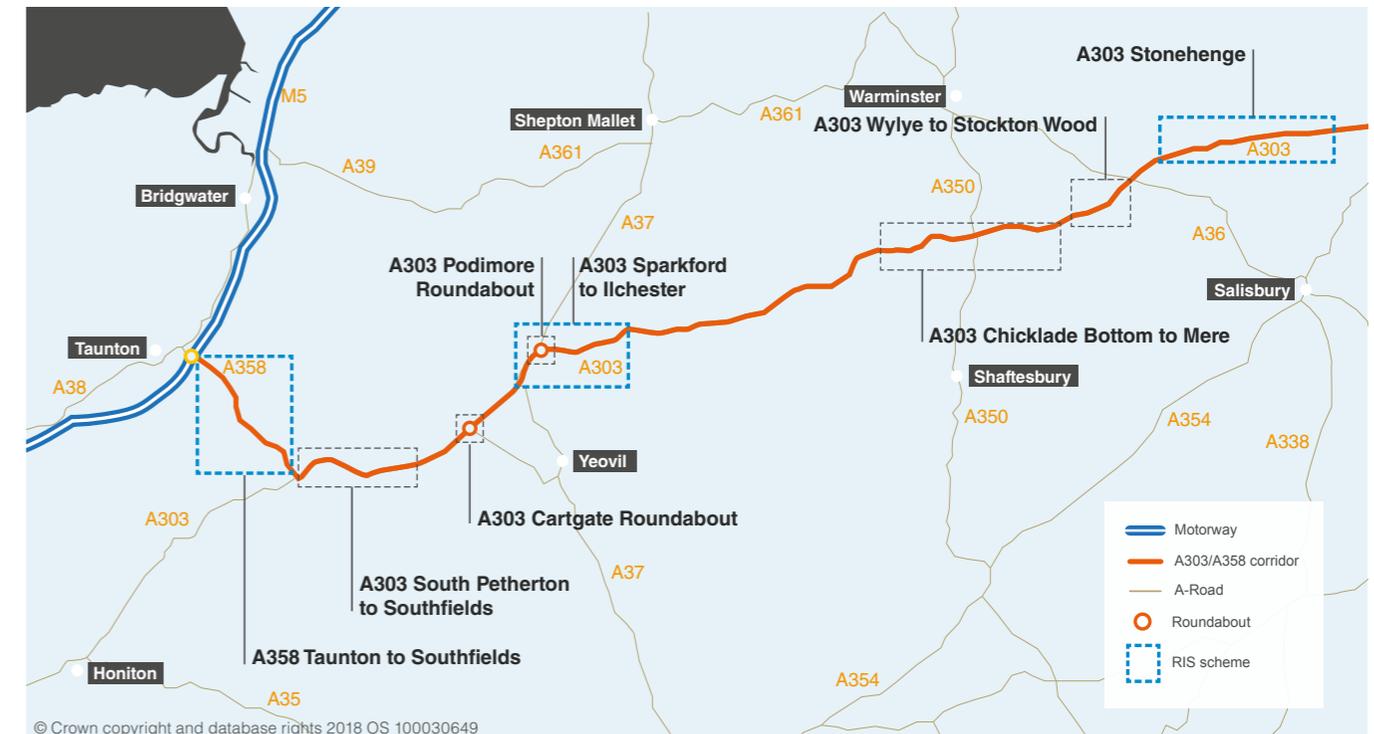
This would make the corridor as reliable and safe as a motorway.

In places like the south west, which relies heavily

on the connectivity provided by the strategic road network to other parts of the UK, the benefits for jobs, tourism and the economy will be significant.

A programme of 8 improvement schemes has been identified to make this vision a reality, including upgrading all the remaining sections of single carriageway to dual carriageway. Figure 1 shows where they all are. For a description of each scheme please see page 9.

Figure 1: Schemes needed to create a continuous dual carriageway



The story so far

Although upgrading the corridor is essential, there are complex issues which have been stumbling blocks in the past.

The natural and historic landscape is among the most prized in the UK. As well as historic buildings, beautiful vistas and valuable habitats, the corridor passes through the Stonehenge, Avebury and Associated Sites World Heritage Site (WHS), the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and close to the Blackdown Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

The need to improve this strategic route is compelling. In recent years local councils and business leaders have joined forces and continue to campaign for an upgrade to boost inward investment, accessibility and jobs.

Table 1 explains the 8 schemes in the improvement programme in a bit more detail. The first 3 of these schemes are already being developed. These are:

1. A303 Stonehenge: Amesbury to Berwick Down
2. A303 Sparkford to Ilchester
3. A358 Taunton to Southfields



Table 1: Current status of the schemes

A303 Stonehenge

Scheme to upgrade around 8 miles (12.8 km) of the A303 between Amesbury and Berwick Down past Stonehenge and north of the village of Winterbourne Stoke, including a tunnel of at least 1.8 mile (2.9km).

A303 Chicklade Bottom to Mere

Scheme to upgrade around 7.5 miles (12km) of single carriageway to dual carriageway. Expected to be included in a future road investment period.

A303 Podimore Roundabout

Junction improvement. Expected to be included in a future road investment period.

A303 South Petherton to Southfields

Scheme to upgrade around 6.2 miles (10km) of single carriageway to dual carriageway. Expected to be included in a future road investment period.

A358 Taunton to Southfields

Scheme to create a dual carriageway link of around 10 miles (16km) between the A303 and the M5 near Taunton.

A303 Cartgate Roundabout

Junction improvement. Expected to be included in a future road investment period.

A303 Wylve to Stockton Wood

Scheme to upgrade around 2.5 miles (4 km) of single carriageway to dual carriageway. Expected to be included in a future road investment period.

A303 Sparkford to Ilchester

Scheme to upgrade around 3.1 miles (5km) of single carriageway by connecting the existing dualled sections with a new dual carriageway.

Six ways we can make the corridor better

We want to unlock economic growth in the south west by transforming journey reliability, increasing safety and improving connectivity with neighbouring regions, while protecting or enhancing the environment. To do this, we have set six broad objectives:

Connectivity: to transform links with the rest of the UK and boost economic growth

Support economic growth: to help boost jobs and new homes in key locations, including tourism

Safety: to reduce the number of injuries

Environment: to avoid unacceptable impacts and enhance the environment and community life

Capacity: to reduce delays and queues at peak times and holidays through greater road capacity

Resilience: to reduce incidents and lessen the impact of accidents



Objective 1: Connectivity

The A303 is part of England's strategic road network. It runs west from junction 8 of the M3 near Basingstoke. When it reaches Ilminster, it connects with the A358 to provide an important link to the M5 at Taunton.

As well as carrying long distance east-west traffic, the corridor is criss-crossed by roads serving major destinations to the north and south.

This means it plays a crucial role in linking the south west to its neighbouring regions. For instance, of the 18 million UK people who holiday here every year, 29% come from the south east and 85% come by car.

Congestion is making the south west feel like a hard place to get to. Poor connectivity is particularly bad news for a region which relies heavily on tourism but which otherwise struggles to perform as well as the rest of the UK.

An end-to-end dual carriageway with free flowing traffic will bring the region closer to the south east, London and the rest of the UK and improve people's opinions about getting to the south west. More reliable journeys will save time and money for businesses which will promote economic growth and encourage investment.

Fast facts

- In a survey of businesses, 77% said their site would be more viable as a business location if the route was an end-to-end dual carriageway

“Businesses need resilient and reliable infrastructure to encourage them to invest here. This road has long been a barrier to us achieving our productivity potential; and with this catalyst of investment we can achieve growth, improve the local economy, and deliver the benefits to the local community in terms of jobs and prosperity.”

Steve Hindley Chairman
Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership

Objective 2: Support economic growth

The corridor plays a key role for people getting to Wiltshire, Dorset, Somerset, Devon and Cornwall. But even though the population here is growing faster than the UK average, productivity and wages are lagging behind. By comparison business productivity along the other main route to the south west, the M4/M5 corridor, is notably better.

Even tourism, where the south west outperforms much of the UK, is affected. Road disruption and delays are barriers to growth in the tourism economy. When asked, almost two thirds of visitors say they would think twice about using a road again if they had a bad journey in the past.

Journey times are part of this. Many businesses report that the current unreliability of the corridor is having a negative impact on them.

It can be very hard to predict how long a journey will take. Near Andover and Sparkford fewer than 70% of journeys are on time for most of the day. At Stonehenge, even off peak, only around 65% of westbound journeys take the time they should.

Transforming links between the south east and the south west will unlock economic growth. Council and business leaders believe the completed corridor will create jobs and economic benefit for the whole region.

Fast facts

- The south west's productivity (as measured by Gross Value Added or GVA) is 24% below the national average
- At £4.5bn a year, the south west has the highest domestic tourism expenditure of any UK region
- Around 120,000 new jobs and 100,000 new homes are expected across the south west by 2021, with even greater growth after that

Objective 3: Safety

Although the corridor's overall accident rate is not that different to other similar major roads, there is a marked difference when it comes to the single carriageway sections. In these sections accident rates are above the national average for trunk roads.

Accidents which happen on the single carriageway are also more likely to result in someone being seriously hurt.

There were 430 personal injury accidents in the five years up to 2014 along the sections of road we're planning to improve. The A358 was worst overall with 90. However, the most serious accidents happened between South Pemberton and Southfields, and between Amesbury and Berwick Down. Eight people died on these two sections.

Lots of things make driving more hazardous on these sections, such as queues where speed limits change and the road reduces to single carriageway, crests and dips making it difficult to see to overtake, and having to negotiate vehicles turning in and out of local roads and entrances.

Providing a consistent, continuous dual carriageway with improved junctions will help reduce conflict points, the potential for accidents and driver stress.

Fast facts

- A 2013 impact study estimates that, together with the separately funded improvements to the A30, the corridor project could prevent an average of 30 personal injury accidents per year
- Upgrading older single carriageway A-roads into modern dual carriageway where the speed limit is greater than 40mph could reduce the number of personal injury accidents by two-thirds

“...we fully support the need to improve the A303 as this will not only improve the local infrastructure and improve accessibility but at the same time this much needed investment will also improve safety of the public.”

Lee Howell Chief Fire Officer
Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service

Objective 4: Environment

We try to reduce the impact of road schemes and enhance the environment where we can. For instance, our tunnel on the A3 at Hindhead in Surrey is an example where, as well as cutting peak journey times by 20 minutes, we restored the Devil's Punch Bowl, an area of outstanding natural beauty.

Sensitive road design and engineering can help us avoid the most unacceptable effects on the environment, and also transform some landscapes, habitats and communities for the better.

More free-flowing traffic will eliminate the need for motorists to divert onto side roads so that the effects of rat-running will be reduced in communities away from the road itself.

Bypassing villages like Winterbourne Stoke will allow severed communities to re-gain their heart.

There is also a once in a generation chance to enhance the setting of Stonehenge. The road here passes straight through the WHS and has a negative effect on a number of historic features with outstanding universal value, as well as the stones themselves. A recent cultural heritage valuation survey we carried out suggests that society places a high value on improving the setting of Stonehenge.

Fast facts

- Stonehenge is one of the top 10 paid-for visitor attractions in the UK, with 1.3 million visitors in 2014, 60% of whom were from overseas
- The WHS area surrounding Stonehenge totals 2,600 hectares and contains c350 prehistoric burial mounds

Objective 5: Capacity

On a normal day up to 24,000 vehicles use the single carriageway sections, which is almost twice as much as they were designed for. At weekends and in the summer the number of vehicles on this single carriageway averages 29,000.

This traffic is expected to increase as local councils along the length of the corridor seek to deliver economic growth and new development.

The worst hotspots for congestion and accidents are where the dual carriageway road narrows to one lane in either direction. Predicting arrival times is almost impossible. In the tourist season, a journey between London and Exeter can take an hour and 20 minutes longer than it does at other times.

It is bad news for local communities too. Many motorists try to dodge tailbacks by diverting to side roads creating rat-runs which affect the quality of life in nearby towns and villages.

Every day local journeys take longer, and more traffic means more noise and fumes in communities away from the road.

Upgrading the road will ease congestion and reduce the temptation for rat-running.

Fast facts

- At peak times, traffic through Shrewton is 60% more than at other times
- The highest traffic flows are found at the eastern extremity of the corridor, with flows varying between 35,000 and 50,000 vehicles per day

“We consciously decide not to travel on the A303 on a Friday, because it can involve so much wasted time. We also warn suppliers that it is not a good idea to make deliveries to us on a Friday. This does affect our business...”

Philip Coward Managing Director
Hill Brush Company Ltd, Mere

Objective 6: Resilience

Resilience is how well a road copes with difficult or unforeseen events, like severe weather or accidents. At the moment, even predictable events like an influx of tourists cause heavy congestion and delays on the corridor.

If collisions happen on a single carriageway section the road can be closed altogether. The lack of suitable alternative routes creates significant problems for travellers and businesses and has severe implications for access to the south west.

Reducing the number and the effect of accidents and incidents is one way of improving the corridor's resilience. An end-to-end dual carriageway on the corridor will help achieve this. It would also ease the growing pressure on the other strategic route to the south west, the M4/M5, by establishing a reliable alternative.

Fast facts

- In 2013, Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service recorded a collision on the A303 on average every six days

Get involved

In 2014 the Government announced its intention to improve these roads, to create a high quality link between London and the south east and the south west.

As part of this, 3 schemes are being developed:

1. A303 Stonehenge (Amesbury to Berwick Down)
2. A303 Sparkford to Ilchester
3. A358 Taunton to Southfields

These large schemes are classed as nationally significant infrastructure projects (NSIPs). This means they require a development consent order (DCO) under the Planning Act 2008 before construction can start.

As part of the planning process, we will be consulting our customers and local communities near the A303 and A358. This will give people the chance to express their views on the proposals before we submit our applications for development consent to allow construction to start.

Contact us

Visit our webpages for information about the schemes and to find out when you can have your say, or call or email us to find out more.

Website:

www.highways.gov.uk/A303-A358-corridor

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If you need help accessing this or any other Highways England information, please call **0300 123 5000** and we will help you.

Contact us

Please see our website - www.roads.highways.gov.uk/regions/south-west - for details of any ongoing or planned consultation periods and how to make your views known at the appropriate time.

For comments outside formal consultation periods please write to us:

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