



PRESS RELEASE

Replacement of the A379 Bridge Road bridges could cause chaos on our roads.

The Civic Society has two major concerns regarding the replacement of the bridges, over which thousands of vehicles pass every day, and which are critical pieces of infrastructure for Exeter and nearby communities.

We were very disappointed to learn from the County Council's recent consultation that they do not intend to take this opportunity to make any improvements to wider travel, especially for pedestrians, cyclists and canal borne vessels. The replacement bridges will instead be an almost like for like replacement which will not improve active travel, or support the flow of vehicles on the critical and busy A379, which is also the major alternative to the M5 when there is an incident between junctions 29 to 31 at Peamore.

The estimate for the scheme is set at £42million against a government budget of £50million, so why are they not being more ambitious? We were pleased to see that Steve Race MP is critical of the lack of ambition to make improvements, as are many others.

But we are also concerned about the expected chaos the works will create over the two year period of construction because the County Council proposes that during this period there will only be one lane of traffic in each direction through the construction zone. We believe this will cause chaos for local traffic on a daily basis at peak travel. Traffic will back-up onto the Matford roundabout and Sannerville Way from the Dawlish and Exminster direction, and the A379 from the Matford Hotel in the mornings, and probably cause tailbacks on Topsham Road at Countess Wear roundabout in the evenings.

And of course, when the motorway is closed we already know about the chaos across the city when there are two lanes available on Bridge Road, and we can imagine the extra chaos if there is only one lane available – gridlock! When the motorway is closed it seems that local people avoid Bridge Road and head towards Exe Bridges, causing gridlock across the city centre.

We deserve better, and we deserve improvements for active travellers along the canal and Bridge Road.

We have written to Steve Race MP imploring him to investigate the possibility of maintaining two lanes of traffic throughout the construction period by constructing an additional two lanes alongside the existing bridges and then removing one of the existing bridges upon completion. It will be more expensive so we have asked Steve to talk to ministers. Below is the text of our letter to him, and attached is our response to the County Council's consultation.

We hope you will publish our concerns.

Keith Lewis, Chairman

Additional information:

We copied our Steve Race letter to:

Julian Brazil, Leader of Devon County Council; Donna Manson, Chief Executive, Devon County Council; Phil Bialyk, Leader of Exeter City Council; Bindu Arjoon, Chief Executive, Exeter City Council; David Reed MP; Martin Wrigley MP;

We have had replies from MPs David Reed and Martin Wrigley, and given all others an opportunity to respond to the letter and our intended press release. David Reed is supportive of an improved scheme.

Martin Wrigley said *'Whilst the bridges are not in my constituency, this work will impact many who live in my constituency. It would be a waste and a great frustration to have this work done without improvements. If there is an opportunity to have the footpath run underneath the road, alongside the water, this would improve cycle and pedestrian safety and possibly remove a set of traffic lights – bringing benefit to all.'*

Our letter to Steve Race MP.

Dear Steve

Replacement of the A379 Bridges, Exeter.

Whilst Exeter Civic Society has not been involved in the development of the scheme to replace the bridges, we have received feedback from the Friends of Exeter Ship Canal and Heritage Harbour (FESCHH) about what they believed was good progress for plans to create a greater air draft under replacement bridges. The recent consultation now says that is not being considered which is disappointing. I know you hold the same view.

We have sent a letter of concern to the County Council's Transport Planning team which I attach, including an objection to using this government funding to undertake off-site cycling improvements. In our opinion, the County Council's justifications for the choice of options fall well short.

But I am mainly writing to you about a major concern we have for traffic management during the construction of the replacement bridges.

The council propose that, during the construction period of two years, only a single lane each way will be available for traffic to flow on what is now a dual carriageway. This is wholly unacceptable. It will cause traffic chaos across Exeter and beyond during peak times, especially as the A379 is used as the alternative route when the M5 is closed between junctions 30 and 31 when there is an accident or incident. This happens regularly,

almost monthly, and often several times during the summer holiday period when the M5 is heavily used by tourists unfamiliar with the highway. I wonder what Highways England thinks of the proposal to operate just one lane as a relief road when the motorway is closed?

When the motorway is closed most motorway traffic will use the A379, with local traffic then likely to use the only other river Exe crossing at Exe Bridges, passing through the centre and causing congestion that then affects most main roads in the city centre. This will have a negative impact on people's lives.

A temporary road was discussed with the Inland Waterways Association IWA and FESCHH during investigations but this has now been dropped.

The County Council is of course limited to a ceiling of £50m for the scheme, so a temporary road may well take the scheme over that budget. If a temporary two lane road does not make financial sense, I wonder whether the scheme should be completely rethought, but that may result in costs exceeding £50m. So, I am writing to you to ask whether you can discuss the possibility of more funding at ministerial level for this essential project to help deliver a solution that maintains two-way traffic in both directions during the construction period, and raises the levels of the bridges to support active travel for this essential infrastructure.

One option for a scheme that will achieve both of the above is to build a new two lane road either to the north or south of the existing bridges (this could be on columns rather than ground bearing to help the flow of various waterways in the vicinity) and that upon completion one of the existing bridges and dual carriageway is removed.

I hope you can intervene to consider this alternative approach and instigate discussions with Highways England, Ministers, DCC, and ECC as the prospective Highway Authority after unitary status is established, and who will ultimately deliver this scheme as the Highway Authority.

Yours sincerely

K Lewis

Keith Lewis.
Chairman.

Cc. Julian Brazil, Leader of Devon County Council
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