

THE CITY OF DURHAM TRUST

Question 34

Are measures required to address the congestion on the A167 from Nevilles Cross to Sniperley Roundabout? Please give reasons for your response.

- a. There are no measures required*
- b. Yes. A Western Relief Road; or*
- c. Yes. An alternative proposal (please specify).*

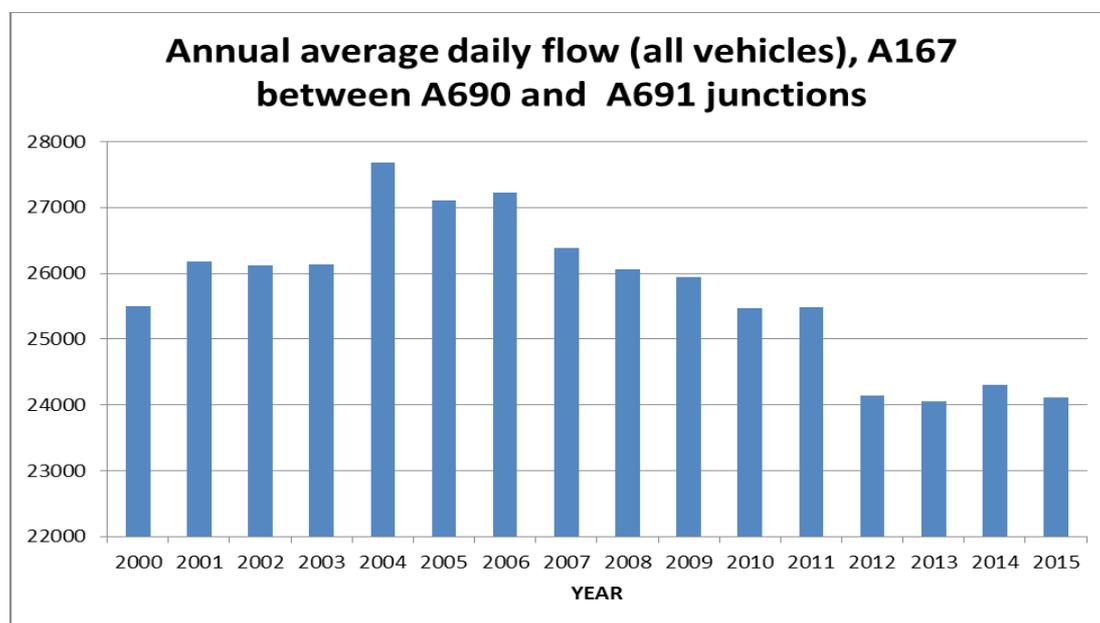
Our answer is (a) – no measures are required.

The Council's unsupported assertions that the A167 is the most congested part of the transport network in both the am and pm peaks and that this is a barrier to the creation of further jobs fly in the face of the actual evidence. The cover of the consultation document shows the Atom Bank, a recent entry to the banking sector which is creating new jobs at Aykley Heads, close to the A167, and there has been a succession of planning applications during the County Plan formulation period for retail developments at the Arnison Centre, again near the A167. These applications have generally included retail job creation among the reasons for seeking approval. Likewise there have been recent housing, office, and industrial developments to the immediate west of the A167, reached via the A690. These developments have evidently not been deterred by traffic conditions at the Nevilles Cross junction.

If, as paragraph 4.101 avers, proposed further housing allocations in proximity to the A167 would "require" either a western relief road or other significant [but unspecified] highway improvements to the A167, then in terms of the Council's adopted LTP3 such development would not be considered sustainable and would be contrary to the policy stated in paragraph A.5.1, that "it is more preferable that new development is located to minimise the need for new road construction."

So far as traffic levels on the A167 are concerned, the Council has consistently disregarded the objective evidence provided by the official series of road traffic volumes produced by the Department for Transport and updated annually. The annual average daily flow figures for all vehicles using the section of the A167 between Nevilles Cross and Sniperley Roundabout for the period from 2000 to 2015 are shown in the graph below:

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The DfT traffic count statistics demonstrate that traffic levels on this section of the A167 peaked in 2004 – well before the onset of the recession – and then fell further from 2007 to 2011. From 2012 onwards volumes have been relatively stable, at around 87% of the 2004 level. Over the period from 2000 to 2015, traffic volumes for the whole of England grew by 8.5%, and this significant divergence in trends clearly calls into question the Council’s claim in paragraph 4.101 that future congestion on the A167 will increase in line with predicted national traffic growth.

It is not disputed that there is some self-regulating peak hour congestion at the A167’s junctions with the A690 and the A691 – a loss of capacity is inevitable when major roads intersect at the same level. Also many people adjust their journey schedules and routes to suit the level of capacity available so changing capacity may have very little influence on congestion. Much of this local congestion occurs during school term times, and arises directly from the fact that the city’s main non-denominational secondary school provision has been consolidated on a site on the edge of the city with limited scheduled bus services. More effective school travel planning measures could potentially mitigate at least some of the term-time congestion attributable to school traffic.

Secondly, however, the Council continues to overstate the actual scale and extent of the peak delays on this section of the A167 and at the junctions. Modelling undertaken on its behalf during the preparation of previous versions of the county plan (using underlying traffic count data gathered when A167 volumes were significantly higher than at present, and incorporating generous growth factors) predicted peak period junction delays in 2021 at the A690/A167 and A691/A167 junctions of no more than 1-2 minutes, with slightly longer delays at the Toll House Road junction in the morning peak only.¹ More recent work for the County Council compared modelled and actual times for a 5.9 km journey in both directions between the Potterhouse Lane

¹ Jacobs, *Durham County Council: Durham local plan option appraisal, Vol 2* (2013), pp 126-7

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roundabout and Nevilles Cross junction, routed via the A167 through Nevilles Cross to Lowes Barn, down Lowes Barn bank, then looping along the A690 to terminate back at Nevilles Cross. The observed journeys were undertaken between 8am and 9am on 2 July 2013, i.e. during school term time. The average of the actual and modelled times was 29.52 mph, a remarkably high speed in view of the number of junctions to be negotiated.²

Finally, rather than eliminating the underlying conflicts between north-south and east-west traffic on the western side the city, a relief road would simply transfer a proportion of these underlying conflicting movements from Nevilles Cross and Sniperley to existing and new junctions further west, creating additional pinch-points in the network. In addition, the modelling commissioned by the Council clearly shows that a Western Relief Road would itself generate additional road traffic, thus increasing total flows in and around the city.³ The term “flow” is used advisedly: highway engineers have long understood that road traffic, like water, finds its own level. Without active intervention on the part of the Council to manage the total volume of vehicular journeys made on the local road network, any peak capacity that was freed up at Nevilles Cross and Sniperley would inevitably attract other journeys via these junctions.

In summary, therefore, the Issues and Options document shows that the Council is continuing to exaggerate both the scale of congestion on the A167 and the potential relief that could be achieved by building a further by-pass to the west of the city. By persisting in its disregard of the actual evidence in order to maintain its unsubstantiated assertion that the A167 and other local roads are disproportionately congested, the Council is not serving the interests of the city and the county, and is probably directly discouraging some of the inward investment it seeks to promote.

² AECOM, *A167 western relief road modelling report* (2014) tables 2-4.

³ Jacobs, *Durham County Council: Durham local development framework option appraisal* (2012), para 5.5.1, page 56.