Question 31

Are there any significant congestion hotspots in the county that could require building a new road? Please give reasons for your response.

The City of Durham Trust does not wish to comment specifically on traffic conditions in other parts of the county. However, we note the particular emphasis that paragraphs 4.92-3 place on the road network in and around Durham City, and the claims that the Council makes in section 3 that certain development options will "require" solutions to congestion that may entail new road building. We also note the subsequent linkages made with proposals for new road provision in paragraph 4.94 *et seq,* and will comment more specifically on these aspects in our responses to questions 32-4.

The primary issue in relation to Question 31 is the implied positive impact of building a new road on congestion. In some circumstances road capacity increases can increase congestion, for example by moving queues to places in the network that disrupt traffic flows more severely or by inducing more traffic which leads to an overall negative congestion impact, despite the increased capacity. In other circumstances new roads can reduce congestion, particularly where induced traffic effects are lower. Question 31 asks two related questions which need to be split: the first about the problems of congestion and the second about whether new road building would solve these problems . We therefore deal with these issues in succession.

We do not accept that congestion and delays in and around Durham City are on the scale implied in paragraph 4.92, nor that they have significant adverse economic impacts. The figures for congestion on local roads in England during the morning peak which are published on a quarterly basis by the Department for Transport as part of the National Statistics continue to show that the level of peak-hour congestion on the county council's A-road network is below both the national and regional averages. The average speed attained in County Durham in December 2015 was 32.6 mph, compared with 27.6 mph in the north-east region and 23.4 mph for England as a whole, and the average time taken to travel one mile was 1.84 minutes, compared with the average for the north east and for England of 2.18 and 2.56 minutes respectively.[1] County Durham's relatively favourable traffic conditions therefore give it a comparative economic advantage.

The Council has attempted to argue in the past that these averages are unrepresentative of local conditions on particularly heavily-trafficked A roads in the county, but since the statistics are weighted by traffic flow the reported averages are already to some extent corrected for traffic volumes. Modelling and real-time traffic surveys commissioned by the Council confirm that, even on roads within the built-up confines of Durham City, peak travel times are in fact very close to the county-wide averages recorded in the official statistics.

Consequently we do not accept that traffic congestion in and around Durham City is beyond that which could be managed within a well-designed transport strategy.

[1] Data accessed through https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/cgn02-flow-weighted-vehicle-speeds

Looking secondly at road building, the traffic modelling commissioned by the Council clearly demonstrates that the effects of the two city relief roads mentioned in paragraph 4.93 would be to increase the total volumes of traffic using the local network, with resultant additional congestion. Peripheral roads in Durham could be expected to induce substantial car travel as most of the network has spare capacity able to accommodate increases and peripheral roads can change the relative attractiveness of destinations by making car travel relatively more competitive than walking, cycling and public transport. Consequently we do not agree that the building of a new road would be either an appropriate or an effective means of addressing congestion on the road network in and around Durham City.