

# THE A303 STONEHENGE TUNNEL: THE BEST USE OF TAXPAYERS' MONEY?

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The South West of England has long suffered from poor transport infrastructure relative to the rest of England, with severe congestion on major roads and an often inadequate rail network. Compared to the rest of the country, government spending is low:

- After London and the East Midlands, the South West had the lowest spend on local and national roads at £138 per head in 2016-17.<sup>1</sup>
- After the North East and East Midlands, the South West had the lowest spend on railways at £136 per head in 2016-17.<sup>2</sup>

Highways England currently has eight major or improvement schemes in the South West, including the Stonehenge tunnel, currently under construction, due to be completed in 2023. These range from the installation of fuel price indicators to road widening and junction improvements. Out of 112 major improvement projects that Highways England is undertaking between 2015 and 2020, seven will be in the South West.<sup>3</sup>

The latest estimate for the Stonehenge tunnel suggests that the total cost will come to £1.6 billion, with a construction period of at least five years.<sup>4</sup>

If the Stonehenge tunnel was scrapped there are many planned road transport improvements that could be done more quickly in the south of England and South West, which would be of greater benefit to commuters across the region:

- M3 junction 9 improvements. Highways England announced in October 2017 that the junction improvements, designed to alleviate significant congestion near Winchester, would be delayed by two years. The most recent forecast cost of the project is up to £100 million.<sup>5</sup>
- M25 junctions 10-16 improvements. This section of the London orbital is particularly important for access to the south and South West of England, with both the M3 and M4 crossing these junctions. The most recent forecast cost of the project is up to £479 million.<sup>6</sup>
- M5 Bridgwater junction improvements. Though the cost of the scheme has not yet been finalised, the intention, to reduce congestion and improve economic development in the Sedgemoor district, is important to the region.<sup>7</sup> Highways England, in its most recent delivery plan update, pushed back the start of construction by another year to 2020-21.<sup>8</sup>

Additionally, the rail network could be improved, though likely at substantially greater cost than the proposed Stonehenge tunnel work:

- Great Western Main Line electrification. A multi-year, multi-billion pound project, the main purpose of the works is to electrify the line mostly for commuter services. The poor project management has garnered robust criticism from the National Audit Office. Nevertheless, consideration should be given to the electrification of the line down to Plymouth and Cornwall. Electrification could generate £100 million annually for the economy and the South West peninsula if the only region without electrification.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/country-and-regional-analysis-2017> (B tables, b.10)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/653395/Highways\\_England\\_Delivery\\_Plan\\_Update\\_Supplementary\\_Annex\\_2017-18\\_.pdf#page=6](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/653395/Highways_England_Delivery_Plan_Update_Supplementary_Annex_2017-18_.pdf#page=6)

<sup>4</sup> <http://roads.highways.gov.uk/projects/a303-stonehenge-amesbury-and-berwick-down/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://roads.highways.gov.uk/projects/m3-junction-9-improvements/>

<sup>6</sup> <http://roads.highways.gov.uk/projects/m25-junction-10-to-junction-16-smart-motorway/>

<sup>7</sup> <http://roads.highways.gov.uk/projects/m5-bridgewater-junction/>

<sup>8</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/653395/Highways\\_England\\_Delivery\\_Plan\\_Update\\_Supplementary\\_Annex\\_2017-18\\_.pdf#page=9](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/653395/Highways_England_Delivery_Plan_Update_Supplementary_Annex_2017-18_.pdf#page=9)

<sup>9</sup> [https://www.railmagazine.com/news/network/electrifying-routes-to-the-south-west-could-deliver-6-billion-to-region?utm\\_source=twitterfeed&utm\\_medium=twitter](https://www.railmagazine.com/news/network/electrifying-routes-to-the-south-west-could-deliver-6-billion-to-region?utm_source=twitterfeed&utm_medium=twitter)