

Construction nears on major A303 upgrade in Somerset

Ahead of construction starting on the scheme between Sparkford and Ilchester in September, Highways England will be updating communities and users on the latest progress and plans.

A virtual exhibition will be held this week where residents along the route can find out more and put questions to the project team.

Hannah Sanderson, Programme Manager for Highways England, said:

The scheme is incredibly important for Somerset's future, vital to the A303 / A358 corridor, and is part of the biggest investment in our road network for a generation alongside the A303 Stonehenge tunnel project.

From a project perspective, it's exciting that we are now close to works starting in September, with the scheme supporting economic growth and facilitating a growth in jobs and housing by creating a free-flowing and reliable connection between the south east and south west.

It will also tackle a long-standing bottleneck, reduce journey times to the south-west and improve traffic flows in that area at peak times and during peak seasons.

While closures will be kept to a minimum, I'm sure local residents will have questions around the latest plans and traffic management, so we encourage everyone to join the virtual exhibition.

The virtual exhibition will run from midday to 8pm on Thursday 22 July and Friday 23 July, where people will be able to post questions on a live chat.

You'll be able to visit the virtual exhibition with a link that will be available from Thursday 22 July on our [A303 Sparkford to Ilchester web page](#).

Anyone unable to log in on the day can leave a comment on the exhibition or contact us by emailing A303SparkfordtoIlchesterDuallying@highwaysengland.co.uk or calling 0300 123 5000. The exhibition will remain live and be regularly updated throughout the scheme build.

Lee Nathan, Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) South West Regional Chairman, said:

Upgrading the single carriageway sections of this important route is key to supporting the south west economy, particularly as the

only alternative route via the M4 and M5 into the south west is already heavily congested.

FSB believes that more investment should be directed to improving key links on the A road network across the UK as a way of supporting our local regional economies.

As a result, we are wholeheartedly in support of this new scheme.

On an average day the road carries 23,500 vehicles, but numbers increase significantly in the summer, particularly at weekends, making journeys unreliable and unpredictable.

The upgrade, costing £130 to £160 million, is scheduled to be open to traffic in 2024 and further information events are planned in the future.

In the meantime, newsletters will be issued throughout the scheme and updates will be available at the [A303 Sparkford to Ilchester web page](#).

The upgrade aims to:

- improve the capacity of the road to reduce delays and queues that occur during peak hours and at key times of the year i.e. the height of summer
- support economic growth, facilitating growth in jobs and housing by providing a free-flowing and reliable connection between the south east and the south west
- make the road safer, by providing additional capacity and reducing driver stress. We'll make routes safer for pedestrians, cyclists, horse riders in the area
- protect the environment and look for opportunities to improve it, minimising any unnecessary impact of the scheme on the surrounding natural and historic environment and landscape
- work with local communities to reduce the impact of the road on a sense of community severance, and look for ways to improve local peoples' quality of life
- make journey times more reliable and resilient, by providing more capacity it will become easier to manage traffic when incidents occur

In September, work will commence with site clearance and earthworks, and preparing the ground for construction, with traffic management not planned until early next year and minimal disruption to 2021 holiday traffic, especially around half term.

Main construction work will get under way in 2022, with closures kept to a minimum throughout the scheme. For those wishing to remain informed, a text alert system will be launching next year.

Further along the A303 corridor, archaeological fieldwork and preliminary work is due to start later this year on Highways England's transformational Amesbury to Berwick Down scheme past Stonehenge, with the five-year main construction phase expected to start by late 2022, early 2023.

In the meantime, we've been progressing the procurement process for the main works contract for the A303 Stonehenge scheme, and a preferred bidder is expected to be announced in early 2022.

General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.