

M4 King Street Lane – Bridge Concrete Repairs

I have received the enclosed response from Highways England about the M4 King Street Lane – Bridge Concrete Repairs.

I have stressed the importance of this route to a local traffic system under great pressure and asked them to think again about how they can minimise disruption.

Our ref: MPD 21542169

Rt Hon Sir John Redwood MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Nicola Bell
Regional Director, South East
Highways England
Bridge House
1 Walnut Tree Close
Guildford
GU1 4LZ

23 January 2020

Dear John Redwood,

M4 King Street Lane – Bridge Concrete Repairs

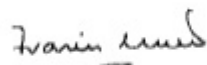
Thank you for your letter of 10 January regarding our bridge works on the B3030 King Street Lane.

Due to the extent and location of repairs required, fixed scaffolding will be installed under one half of the bridge whilst the other half will remain open. This will enable us to keep one lane of King Street open with traffic controlled by 24/7 temporary traffic lights during the daytime throughout the duration of our works. We will need a few full overnight closures of King Street to install and remove the traffic management and to switch the scaffolding from one side of the bridge to the other. A local diversion for these closures has been approved by Wokingham Borough Council.

As the works are likely to generate noise, we have carefully programmed activities to be carried out during daylight hours to avoid disturbing local residents in the evenings.

We appreciate the volume of traffic in this busy location and have been working closely with Wokingham Borough Council to best plan our works accordingly, including liaison with traffic signal specialists to discuss phasing of the traffic lights during peak hours. This will hopefully mean that disruption is kept to a minimum.

Yours sincerely

pp 

Nicola Bell
Regional Director, South East

West Forest Sinfonia

I had the pleasure of attending the West Forest Sinfonia concert at Reading University Great Hall yesterday.

Philip Ellis the Conductor gave an excellent talk telling us about the harmonic brilliance of Prokofiev, Tchaikovsky and Stravinsky who all figured in the programme.

The Orchestra performed the Cinderella Suite, the letter scene from Eugene Onegin and the Rite of Spring with huge skill. The audience was impressed by the performance and gave warm applause at the end.

I would like to thank the organisers, musicians and all involved in producing such a memorable concert.

Should the government cancel HS2?

I voted against HS2 when the decision in principle was made by Parliament. I did so because the business case for it was very weak. The forecasts of likely passenger numbers and revenues looked far too high. The negative impact on revenues and traveller numbers on the competing routes was not taken very seriously. The main argument that we need to get to Birmingham faster changed into an argument that we needed more capacity to get to Birmingham, which the figures did not seem to justify.

I was on the losing side, and accepted defeat with a good grace. I accepted thereafter government and Parliament wanted it to go ahead.

Now the government is holding a genuine review. The immediate cause is the massive escalation in projected costs compared with the figures Parliament used to make the original decision. There is also substantial delay in delivering HS2 in the north, which was meant to be the main reason for the scheme. This gives me the opportunity to make a case again for cancellation.

The business case has clearly got a lot worse, as the capital cost is so much bigger. There is no way that the nation can earn a decent return on such a huge investment, given the likely passenger numbers and fare revenue possible on this new railway and the impact on the competing railways. It points to more subsidy and more losses.

Today though I wish to engage with the political argument that this railway is a totem of commitment to the development of the north and to fairer capital spending around the country, and must not therefore be stopped.

The irony is that for the next few years if we continue there will be massive capital spending in London on remodelling a main station and in London and the Home Counties as money is spent on providing a tunnel out of the city to limit the environmental damage. HS2 to Birmingham will be yet another major investment project where most of the money is spent in London and the south east, yet it is a project that the people closest to in London and the south east vehemently oppose.

HS2 will do nothing to ease congestion in London and the Home counties or to make it easier for people to get to work from outer London or Buckinghamshire. So it will be a big investment in the south east that is not helping the south east.

Meanwhile northern commuters will be frustrated that their journeys are still made difficult by old trains and too little capacity. HS2 unites a lot of people in both north and south saying this is not the right project. We all want better trains, with more capacity into the cities. HS2 does not provide that in ways most people want. If we cancel we could have a big boost to northern rail spending in ways that do directly help, and still save money overall.

Berkshire Fire Authority tax

When I was asked at a meeting to support a 7.5% increase in Council Tax for the Fire Authority I said I needed to see the financial case and to see their budget. They did not have this available at the meeting but promised to send it to me.

They did not do so, so I reminded a senior person from the Authority a week ago on Friday. He confirmed the original exchanges and promised they would send me the details. They have still not done so.

They wanted the Berkshire MPs to support their case for a much higher than permitted Council Tax increase to government. I am unable to support a case they have not made to me, with no budget information about what they currently spend and what they need to spend extra money on.

Constitutional change?

I will soon be submitting some thoughts to the government on possible constitutional reform.

The last Parliament submitted our constitution to a battering, as an alliance of MPs from all the Opposition parties aided by a few Conservatives who subsequently left the party worked with the Speaker and the law courts to delay or prevent Brexit. In acting in this way they opposed the decision of the majority in the referendum which most of them had previously pledged to honour. The Labour and former Conservative ones also reneged on or redefined their promise to see Brexit through, made to win the 2017 election.

The main issues that arise include:

Fixed Term Parliament Act

This became a major problem, preventing a government from holding an early election to resolve the tensions Parliament could not sort out. The Act also showed it was eventually meaningless, as we held three elections in four years under a law designed to limit elections to once every five years.

It should be repealed, leaving the power to hold an election at any time up to 5 years in the hands of the majority in the Commons. The Commons needs to have this option, as it also has the option of expressing or withdrawing confidence in any given government.

Powers of the courts to settle political and Parliamentary issues

The decision of the Supreme Court to delay Brexit by nine months to require an Act of Parliament prior to sending a letter necessitated by the referendum result was unhelpful and very costly to the country.

The decision of the Supreme Court to prevent a prorogation of Parliament which was only slightly longer than the normal September recess was seen by many as a partisan decision as it was designed to allow those who wanted to stop Brexit more time to debate and vote on it.

These two decisions were damaging to our constitution. It is most important most people more of the time believe in the impartiality of the court system and believe the judgements are fair and reasonable. Major issues of constitutional significance need to be decided by Parliament so both sides can put their case and the decision is made by majority vote, reflecting the votes of the people in a previous election.

These decisions were seen by many Brexiteers as being decisions to delay or prevent Brexit, however good the legal reasoning. It would have been better if the Supreme court had said in both cases they were not matters for a court but matters for Parliament to resolve, or a for a General election to settle.

The respective roles of government, Parliament and courts in prerogative matters needs clarifying, with more protection of the courts by removing their competence in matters relating to how Parliament conducts its business or how government with Parliament undertakes its Treaty roles and international negotiations.