

From the Rt Hon Greg Clark MP



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

7 February 2018

Jesse Norman MP
Minister for Roads, Local Transport & Devolution
Department for Transport
Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
London SW1P 4DR

[And by email to: RISFuture.consultation@dft.gsi.gov.uk]

Dear Jesse,

Response to Consultation on Highways England's Initial Report

As you will be aware, the dualling of the A21 between Tonbridge and Pembury is complete. It is for tens of thousands of our constituents a daily reminder of how a relatively simple change can significantly improve one's life: reducing congestion, improving safety and increasing capacity. Travelling from Tunbridge Wells to Tonbridge often took an hour as traffic backed up into both towns – now it takes ten minutes, or twenty on the safe and popular cycle route (NMU). There is no doubt this will unlock significant growth in Tunbridge Wells, Tonbridge and the surrounding areas and we are grateful to the Government for recognising its strategic importance.

However, just three miles further down from Pembury lies Kippings Cross, where the A21 returns to single carriageway until Lamberhurst. This remains a congested bottleneck.

At Lamberhurst, the road returns to dual carriageway thanks to a bypass completed in 2005, which saw journey times improve, the accident rate halve and an improvement in air quality and noise. This stretch, however, runs for only 1.6 miles, after which the road once again returns to single carriageway.

A little over two miles further south, motorists are once again presented with hope: the sight of dual carriageway. But this is dashed when they discover this one mile stretch has been closed off, with the redundant carriageway almost mocking them as they sit queuing for the Flimwell crossroads.

Thereafter the road continues to Hastings as congested single-carriageway, invariably making for a tortuous trip. Indeed the rush hour or public holidays can see journey times from Tunbridge Wells to Hastings almost double on the twenty-five mile stretch, which takes an hour even in good conditions. This is quite simply absurd for what is a trunk road.

Delays, though, are one thing, fatalities quite another. The next village on from Flimwell is Hurst Green. In November 2017, a report by the Road Safety Foundation cited the A21 from Hurst Green to Hastings as the highest risk road on England's Strategic Road Network, with the place most likely to be killed on an A-Road being the A21 junction at Coopers Corner. This is sobering and should be

cause alone for an upgrade to be approved but there is a practical impact on others too – the March 2017 South Coast Central Route Strategy recognised this stating, “The lack of viable alternative routes also means this corridor has limited resilience to disruption.” Accidents sadly can and do grind to a halt one of the country’s most important roads.

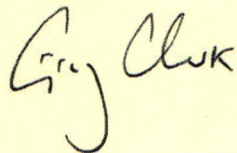
Our ambition is to see a modern dual carriageway which befits the main link between the M25 and south coast. For decades schemes have been designed, approved and scrapped. Sometimes as a whole, more often for separate sections. But they have all demonstrated that the need is clear. We have every confidence the case for dualling the A21 from top to toe satisfies the five key aims of RIS2 as well as the four goals in the Transport Investment Strategy.

One of our particular strengths is that all the MPs and local authorities along the route, as well as the LEP, Transport for South East and other key stakeholders, are absolutely united in recognising the benefits of this scheme and are determined to see it come to fruition.

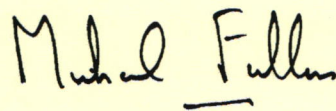
Ten years ago the A21 Reference Group was formed to bring together all the business, economic and political representatives down the route. Both we and the Group, of which we are part, would like to see the dualling of the A21 included in RIS2 and would warmly welcome sight of the Department and Highways England’s evidence and assessment about the road’s performance, its potential for upgrade, and associated analysis so we might have an opportunity to further feed in local knowledge prior to the conclusion of the RIS2 research phase.

With best wishes,

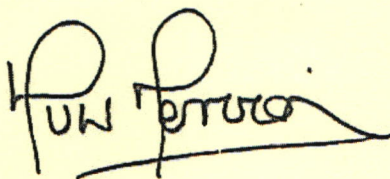
Yours sincerely,



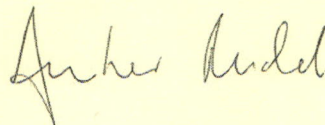
The Rt Hon Greg Clark MP
MP for Tunbridge Wells



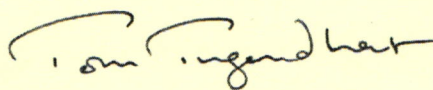
The Rt Hon Sir Michael Fallon MP
MP for Sevenoaks



Huw Merriman MP
MP for Bexhill & Battle



The Rt Hon Amber Rudd MP
MP for Hastings & Rye



Tom Tugendhat MBE MP
MP for Tonbridge & Malling