

Questions to the Transport Secretary, House of Commons, April 1 2003

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The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Alistair Darling): We intend to introduce legislation to control streetworks, and the Highways Agency is also introducing measures to manage trunk road maintenance better. The House will wish to know that, as part of the trunk road noise reduction programme, I have today set for the first time a timetable for the removal of all concrete surfaces on the motorway and trunk road network. I am also giving the go-ahead to three major road improvements: the A14 Ellington to Fen Ditton improvement; the A57/A628 Mottram, Hollingworth and Tintwistle bypass; and the A45/A46 Tollbar End improvement. I have also asked the Highways Agency to take forward work on three schemes with a view to entry into the targeted programme of improvements: the A38 Derby junctions improvement; the M40/A46 Longbridge roundabout improvement; and the A55/A483 junction improvement at Chester. There is a statement in the Library on this matter.

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Mr. Tom Levitt (High Peak): The Secretary of State's announcement about the A57/A628 Tintwistle and Mottram bypass will be greeted with delight in Tintwistle and Glossop in the High Peak—and, indeed, in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (James Purnell)—not least because this road was taken out of the Government programme by the Conservatives as long ago as 1994. Will the Secretary of State please give us an indication of the timetable that he is considering, so that we may know when this road will become a reality?

Mr. Darling: My hon. Friend is right; it is a great pity that this project was taken out of the planned road improvements programme some years ago. It is likely that work will start in 2006. Planning work now has to start, and the necessary plans have to be drawn up with a view to entering into contracts. I visited the area last week, and it was perfectly obvious to me that the level of congestion in those small towns was completely unacceptable. I am very glad that many of the environmental agencies recognise that, notwithstanding the fact that this is an area of some sensitivity, a bypass round those three towns is absolutely essential. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his welcome.

Mr. Chope: Will the Secretary of State confirm that the money that will be raised from the stealth tax on the Dartford crossing is more or less all that will be spent on the new road improvements?

Mr. Darling: What I can say to the hon. Gentleman is that my announcement today is infinitely better than anything that he could ever have announced. As my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Mr. Levitt) pointed out, some of the proposals to which we are giving the go-ahead were stopped by the last Conservative Government. Resurfacing concrete roads will take time because it would be impossible, and highly undesirable, to shut entire lengths of the motorway network for resurfacing, so the work must be phased in and done in an orderly way.

The big difference between our parties is that this Government have the money and commitment to improve our road network while the Conservative party is committed to a 20 per cent. spending reduction. The transport budget would undoubtedly suffer greatly from those cuts—we have only to look at what the Conservatives did to the transport system when they were in office. We are now putting right some of their mistakes...