

Progress Report Nov 1999 to May 2000

The A35 Communities Initiative Report was submitted to the SWRPC by the required deadline of 1 Nov. We attended an initial public meeting at Exeter in December at which the SWRPC Public Enquiry chairman outlined the enquiry process. We learnt that our report was one of 55,000 submitted, the largest single topic of concern being housing. Our report was not included in the initial list of topics for scrutiny in the transport section but following discussion with GOSW staff Oliver Letwin wrote a further letter of recommendation for the consideration of the panel before they made their final selection. In the event it turned out that our paper was not selected for the enquiry. In view of the topics that were finally chosen it is not surprising that we were not included and the original advice given to us by Lord Whitty probably shows that his understanding of the responsibilities of the Regional Planning Process was flawed. Nevertheless our joust at the SWRPC has not been all loss to us as the deadline imposed a very useful discipline upon the production of the report.

Further meetings were held with Devon County Council in December (to parallel the meeting with Dorset CC took place in October) and then in the new year with Connect Road services followed by one with the Highways Agency which Connect attended.

Highway Agency meeting Both Highways Agency and Connect Road operators studied the report in great depth and have taken the traffic figures very seriously. In particular the mix of through traffic and local traffic has caught their attention and was probably the single most persuasive influence that we have had on their future proposals. As a result the Agency is.... "shortly to let a commission to carry out a Route Management Strategy (RMS) of the A30/A35/A31 trunk road between junction 29 of the M5 Motorway and the end of the M27 to the west of Southampton. The strategy will establish the role of the route and how it operates at present, leading onto the future role and aims of the route and the production of prioritised solutions to identified problems. The strategy is currently expected to be completed by early next year and the process will include a considerable consultation exercise to which the A35CI will have the opportunity to contribute."

An example of trial RMS carried out on the A1 & A14 is available for inspection at www.highways.gov.uk and the pattern used for the Newcastle to Berwick-on-Tweed area could be a good pattern for the A30/A35/A31 section. Besides the A35CI input to this study it will be important for Parishes to participate actively with the RMS consultants, probably in late Autumn, to ensure their concerns are recognized.

It will be quite some time before alterations to the road are carried out in response to the new RMS. However the Highways Agency were keen to point out that they are not proposing to hold all further work until the new RMS is available. To this end recent works have been undertaken in Chideock, Morecombelake and Winterbourne Abbas. During the Financial year 2000/2001 there will be a study to look at the difficulties for all road users at Quarr crossroads and it is also hoped to improve signing and marking in Kilmington. It is stressed however that these short term improvements will have to be to present standards and a more imaginative approach will not be possible until RMS is agreed and introduced later.

County Council Matters Whilst the A35 is not technically a County Council problem there are many peripheral concerns that affect access to and use of the A35 that are County responsibilities. It is important that as many Parish Transport and Travel concerns as possible are acknowledged in County Plans. In 1998 the government announced that Local Transport Plans were to replace the old Transport Policies and Programmes (TPP) system. Devon County Council published a provisional Devon Travel &

Transport Plan "Devon on the Move" in July 1999, covering the period 2000 to 2005. A network of 28 local Areas was identified, covering the whole of the County. Each Local Area includes a market or coastal town and its surrounding Parishes. As this was the first of the new style plans it was not complete and specifically only included ten out of the 28 local area programmes. Axminster & Honiton Local Areas were not included.

The consultation Document for the 2001-2006 Devon on the Move Plan is now available to all Devon parishes and they have been asked to provide comments by 31 May. The Local Rural Area Objectives for Axminster (p. 118) and Honiton (p. 132) are very thin and Parishes are strongly urged to submit supplementary objectives that support A35CI policies. Examples are:

- Measures that will support A35 traffic calming to improve access from side roads in the Parish.
- Improvement of pedestrian and cycle links.
- Reduction of speeds through parishes through the 'Driving Speeds Down in Devon' initiative.
- Improve the efficient management of Heavy Goods Vehicles to reduce impact on the local environment
- Promote the development of safer routes to schools.

There are many other examples available in the local area objectives of large market towns in the document (pp. 117-150). It would help if individual Devon Parish responses could make as many recommendations as possible for inclusion in the Honiton & Axminster Local Area sections.

Dorset County Council is tasked to produce a similar Travel & Transport plan but is following a different pattern of Public consultation. Dorset Parishes are urged to lobby wherever possible to ensure their concerns are included in local area detail.