

A3 Trunk Road Improvements – Hindhead Site Visit 24th July 2008

“All good things come to those who wait” is probably the most pertinent expression that can be applied to the long awaited Hindhead Improvement on the busy A3 Highways Agency Trunk Road through Surrey and Hampshire; when the final dual carriageway link is completed in 2011. Subject of many consultations (Red and Yellow routes) and public inquiries resulted in agreement to the construction of a by-pass running through part of Hindhead Common and then tunnelling under the most environmentally sensitive section.

Southern Branch members were recently privileged to be hosted by the Highways Agency and their Constructing Engineers, Balfour Beatty Civil Engineering Limited to have an insight of the project and a tour of the site covering the entire 6.5 kms including construction of the 1.8 km, twin bore tunnels.

Welcomed by Paul Arnold, Highways Agency Project Director and Paul Hoyland, Contract Director for Balfour Beatty, members were given an overview and an update of the progress of work to date which is on schedule before being divided into two groups and transported around the site to see this at first hand

Starting at the North Portals we were able to view the excavation of the twin bores which are being dug using face excavators loading onto extendable conveyors for extraction of the spoil. Work is being undertaken 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and has already reached approximately 400 metres into the hillside. Massive ‘air conditioning’ chutes maintain a safe atmosphere for the work force. Soil conditions, logistics, environmental considerations and costs make this the preferred option against using tunnel boring machines. At least one bore is scheduled for completion by the Spring of 2009 to allow the transfer of surplus spoil from the south to the north end of the site. All excavated soil is to be used within the project boundaries to avoid offsite exportation.



Moving southwards through the site we were able to view the new Hazel Grove junction under construction. This will enable vehicles to connect with the new A3 from the existing Portsmouth Road on its western side of Hazel Grove which will lead back to the A287 which is currently accessed from the Hindhead crossroads. This will then remove all trunk road traffic from the village centre.



Excavation from the southern tunnel bores is proceeding at a more leisurely pace with work only taking place during the day time in consideration for the local residences (directly in one case) overlooking the site. Nevertheless orderly activity was evident and we were able to see close at hand the activities within the tunnel entrance. It was also noticeable the massive amount of earth shifting that was taking place to provide an even gradient to the finished product, even at this early stage of work. Following a photo opportunity, it was back in the vehicles to move towards the southern end of the project to the Hammer Lane junction via the Canadian Memorial Underpass where the construction meets up with the existing A3 dual carriageway at the Surrey/Hampshire border.

For those of you familiar with the Hammer Lane junction it can only be described as now unrecognisable! ‘Second Hand Rose’ is still there, somewhere.... The Hammer lane will pass under the new road on completion.

After the tour, which lasted just over an hour, we returned to the site offices for a de-briefing and Q and A session. From the comments by both Paul’s, the pride in being associated with probably the most complex and high profile project ever undertaken in the South East since the M25. On completion Hindhead will be the longest road tunnel in the UK. Safety is top priority and, without being complacent, we were informed that the site had just completed half a million working hours without an injury which allowing for the extent of

the site, its complexities and the high number of the workforce is impressive. Public relations also features high on the agenda and through this effective means of communication, most of the local population are behind the scheme and are eagerly awaiting completion. You can't please all the people all the time but the records show a very low level of community dissatisfaction with the operations.

Like any project, costs are increasing and a recent report published reveals that this project is not exempt. A massive investment and one hopes that any detraction caused by higher costs will be eliminated when we can celebrate British engineering and ingenuity at its best on completion.

A few more photographs of the visit :-



Work at the South Portal – Northbound bore



Site levelling on Southern Tunnel Approach



Members suited and booted



North Portals Approach route

Our thanks go to Paul Arnold, Paul Hoyland, Ian Whyte and all their colleagues for making this visit possible. We hope we can come back later to view the progress.