



Our ref:  
Your ref:

Via email

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30 June 2023

Dear Cllr Gilbert,

**Our response - Designation of B1008 as a Diversionary Route for A120**

Thank you for your letter dated Wednesday 24 May 2023 as a follow-up to our stakeholder meeting held back in October 2022. At that meeting we discussed our planned works on the A120 between Stansted and Braintree and our designated diversion route.

We appreciate you taking the time to write to us following the completion of our works on the A120. I have read through your concerns regarding using an alternative diversion route for future A120 works. I put forward your concerns to the A120 Project Team, and we have set out our answers to each of your concerns, highlighted in blue below.

1. In the absence of further correspondence and the completion of the upgrade work we assume a decision was made not to change the arrangements and the B1008 diversion remained in place.

Although we continued to use the B1008 as our designated diversion route we did switch over to use the B1256 for the part of the works it was possible as you had requested.

2. Now the upgrade has been made, the Parish Council believes it is a good time to review what actually happened during the period of the works. We wish to do this because we remain of the view that the B1008 was not the most appropriate diversionary route in the first place (it should have been the B1256), that it remains unsuitable, and that before the current diversionary route process is activated again an appropriate redesignation should be affected. In his city and county councillor roles Mike supports the requests we have made in this letter and the need for change.

We will continue to liaise with Essex Highways to determine what is the most viable and appropriate road to use as a designated diversion route during any future planned A120 works. Essex Highways have a major role in approving use of any local roads as a diversion route for our works. Any decision made goes through extensive review of the diversion and its impact on traffic and surrounding communities and always requires local authority approval.

A point to note that the B1256 is not suitable where we have works east of Felsted, but may be suitable for works West of Felsted.

3. In reviewing what actually occurred, it would be useful if you could share your recorded data with us. Therefore, for the periods the B1008 was being signposted as the diversionary route, please can you confirm the projected and actual volumes (and types, especially HGVs) of traffic using the B1008 and the B1256. In your letter you indicated that “our traffic data shows that on an average weeknight there are approximately 1500 cars and 150 HGVs travelling on this section of the A120”. It would be interesting to understand how the cumulative total of traffic assumed to have been taking diversions to avoid the closures matched your original volume assumptions. This would also mean having your data for the volumes (and types) for B1008 and B1256 prior to the works so that we have baselines to which can be added additional traffic caused by the closures to calculate any net increases.

Together, these data should provide an indication of whether:

- a) overall volumes actually reduced during the works (as some drivers may have chosen to either avoid the area altogether or making night-time journeys):
- b) the B1008 was used as the intended diversionary route, or if the B1256 was adopted by drivers notwithstanding signage instructing use of the B1008.

Also, any increased volumes during the period of the works will have aggravated the condition of road surfaces. We already have issues with potholes and sunken drain covers so these issues can only have been made worse by extra traffic. We assume your routine inspections will have identified actions now necessary because of the additional vehicles and it would be useful if you could share these data as it will help us lobby ECC Highways for extra and/or more frequent maintenance work on the affected roads.

Unfortunately, we are unable to provide data showing how many vehicles used alternative routes as we do not carry out traffic counts on our diversion routes.

4. In your letter you also stated: “We have an internal mapping tool where we can raise any historic issues with previous projects. We will get the B1008 diversion issue added on there”. Can you confirm that your mapping tool was updated and share with us how the issue was articulated? For example, does it just contain information that we (and potentially others) complained about the use of the B1008, or has it been amended to now include quantitative data recorded during the works period showing the nature and scale of the issues?

All stakeholder issues and complaints are received by our customer correspondence team as a first point of contact for National Highways and shared with the Project team to review and provide a response. All local issues raised by our customers are saved on both our CRM system and our stakeholder mapping tool. The stakeholder mapping tool is reviewed regularly before we carry out any planned works on our network, to ensure we understand historical issues of the area and how to address them ahead of planned works. Both our CRM and Stakeholder Mapping Tool is updated regularly as

part of our repository systems.

5. Elsewhere in your previous letter you said “[w]e sympathise with the residents who live along the diversion route, but unfortunately, we have no other options other than to divert traffic for us to keep the A120 up to standards”, which is fair enough, although of course our argument is that it should not be the B1008. You went on to say that “[w]e have measures in place such as extra signage to remind drivers to take extra care throughout the diversions and we will monitor this for the duration of the scheme”. Can you confirm what the monitoring involved and what you were able to learn from the process. How were you able to establish that drivers were (or, as likely, were not) following the diversion signs?

We placed extra road signage on the network which helped to divert traffic to designated diversion routes and provide traffic advice. In addition, we had the Carnell safety camera van stationed at designated hot spots to manage traffic speed.

Unfortunately, we have not been able to establish whether drivers were following the diversion signs.

6. You confirmed that for the duration of the works you would be “deploying mobile safety camera vans and introducing temporary signing to remind drivers of the speed limit and that they’re in residential areas”. Can you confirm that camera vans were deployed and share with us the data from their monitoring activities. Are you able to indicate how many drivers were summoned for speeding as a result of data collected during the deployment period, and where (by the speed limit in force) the infractions took place. This will help to establish where drivers are most likely to be found speeding along the route. Of course, we will have to make assumptions about who would have been caught anyway had the upgrade works not been taking place, but nevertheless the data should be helpful. We know already that speeding is an issue on our roads, so your data from the camera vans may also help to validate our concerns in that respect.

If your data is robust it should help to either:

- a) make the case that the B1008 diversion does not actually work, even when it is heavily signposted, and that drivers (and their satnav systems) are going to find the shortest route, and the one thing we can all agree is it is not the B1008; or
- b) show that all the A120’s expected traffic followed the diversion (which seems extremely unlikely).

Yes, a mobile safety camera van was used to mitigate against drivers speeding on the diversion route during our A120 closures. This van is not used for enforcement but is very effective as a deterrent. The van was on site one night a week and any data recorded will not be an accurate traffic count of the amount of vehicles that used the diversion route

7. If your information reflects what we believe to have been the case (that many drivers

ignored the B1008 and used the B1256 as their preferred diversion), we would welcome your backing as we campaign for what seems to be an obvious and sensible redesignation to reflect what happens in practice. Our view is that the B1256 is more appropriate, it being considerably shorter in distance, having a higher standard in terms of both road surface and width, and has the advantage of being a sparsely populated route, not passing through two villages like the B1008. We hope that you will support us – can you confirm you would?

As reiterated above, for works east of Felsted, the B1256 is not a suitable diversion route as HGV traffic cannot go through Rayne for safety reasons.

8. On a more general aspect, when in your letter you said “we strive to inform our customers at least 2 weeks prior to any planned works taking place”, that sort of missed the point we were trying to make. We believe all parties would benefit from Parish Council awareness and/or involvement at a much earlier stage, typically months rather than weeks. This would help not only the actual project structure and implementation from your side (by having access to our local knowledge, information, and insights), but as importantly, it will help us manage expectations on the ground. Simply implementing things which impact our community with potentially less than two weeks’ notice improves no one’s credibility. In future, we ask for much earlier notification of possible projects so that we can work together for their success.

We understand and acknowledge your points here around the timings of engagement. We often do endeavour to give our stakeholders as much notice as possible for all our schemes but clearly this was not the case for this project. We sincerely apologise for the short notice on this occasion and fully take your comments on board.

Since last October we have fully engaged with our stakeholder on other A120 works. We have met with key stakeholders and local businesses well in advance of our works as lessons were learnt from last October’s short notice on the A120 Braintree to Stansted works.

We hope that this answers all your questions and concerns but if you need anything else, please do not hesitate to contact me again.

Yours sincerely

DLaycock

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Operations East