

Improving the environment A556 Knutsford to Bowdon

Introduction

The A556 is a major trunk road between North Cheshire and South Manchester. The section of the A556 under consideration is between the M6 junction 19 near Tabley/Knutsford and the M56 junction 7 near Bowdon.

To the northern end of the A556 are the communities of Altrincham, Bowdon and Hale. Rostherne Mere is situated to the northeast end of the route, close to the existing trunk road. It is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), a National Nature Reserve and a wetland of international importance.

At the southern end, close to the town of Knutsford, is Tatton Park (a National Trust property), which hosts over 70 events annually, including the Royal Horticultural Society Flower Show.

Existing situation

The section of the A556 between the M56 junction 7 and the M6 junction 19 is 6.5km (4 miles) long and is currently mainly single 4-lane carriageway with sections of dual 2-lane carriageway.

Along the A556, numerous properties and field entrances have direct access onto the trunk road. As well as the two motorway junctions, there are also two other major junctions that connect local roads to the A556. These are the Bucklow Hill junction, and Mere junction. Both junctions are controlled by traffic lights and have restricted turning movements.

The A556 currently carries approximately 50,000 vehicles per day with HGVs contributing approximately 18% of this figure. There were 200 accidents in the period 1998 to 2005, including 5 fatalities and 39 serious injuries.

At present the road is heavily congested for long periods of the day.

Background history

In 2003 the Secretary of State cancelled plans for a new Motorway link, the A556(M), having been convinced that it was not environmentally acceptable in open countryside. At the same time he also cancelled an alternative proposal to improve the M6 junction 20, bypassing the A556, as studies indicated it would not operate effectively. (See Rejected Route/Options).

Instead, the Highways Agency was asked to look at alternative proposals involving local communities in our work. This was reflected in the A556 Route Management Strategy (RMS) published in February 2005. We concluded that the route needed to be upgraded to a dual carriageway largely on the line of the existing road. A short bypass was needed, at the request of the local community around Mere to prevent local environmental damage. We have made a convincing case that these proposals are a priority for the Northwest Region and would like to set out the scheme options we are considering. This moves us on from the concept of a route to actual schemes that could be constructed.

Scheme proposals

The two route options proposed (Route A and Route B) have resulted from a study of the local area. The two routes are shown on the proposals maps.

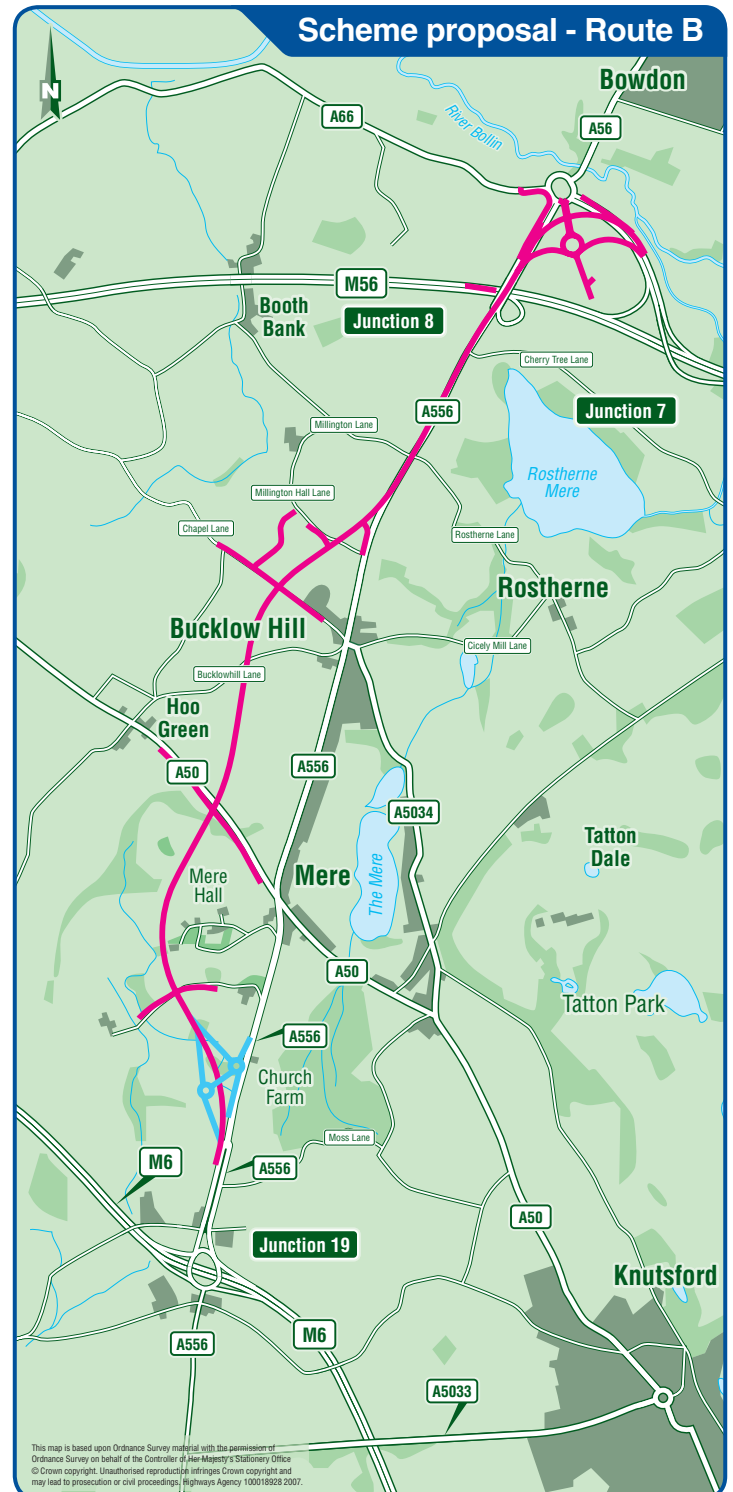
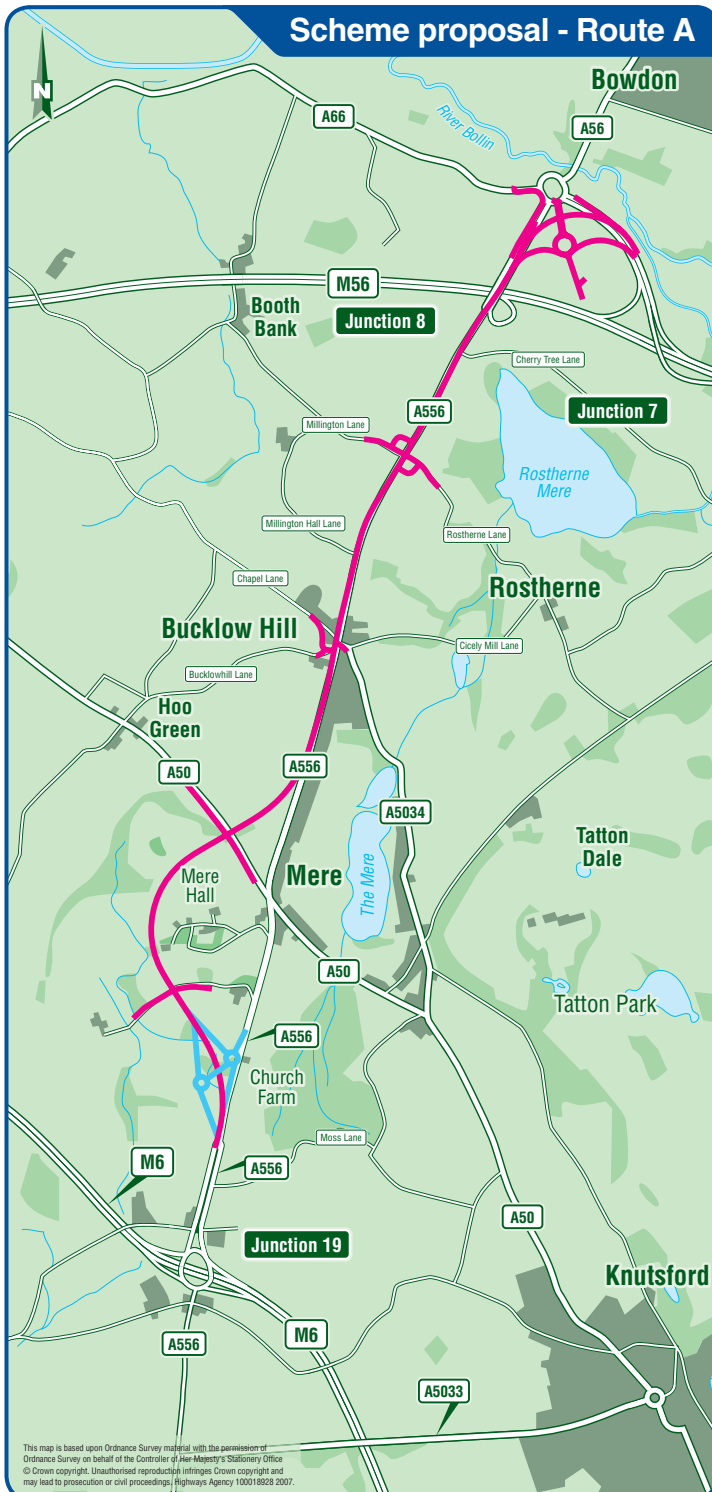
Route A

This option proposes to convert the existing A556 to a dual carriageway largely on the line of the existing road but with a short bypass around the

Mere Junction. The proposed route will turn west at Church Farm to bypass Mere, with the route being constructed mainly in a cutting which will help to screen it from surrounding properties and reduce the effect of road traffic noise. The route passes to the west of Mere Hall before turning back to the east to rejoin the A556 before Bucklow Hill. It will then follow the line of the existing A556 to Bowdon Roundabout.

Route B

This route will, as with Route A, turn west at Church Farm to bypass Mere to the west of Mere Hall then head in a northerly direction to cross the A50. The route will then run parallel to the A556 and bypass Bucklow Hill to the west before re-joining the existing A556 just beyond Millington Hall Lane. From this point, the route again follows the A556 to Bowdon roundabout. The majority of this section will be constructed in a cutting for environmental reasons.

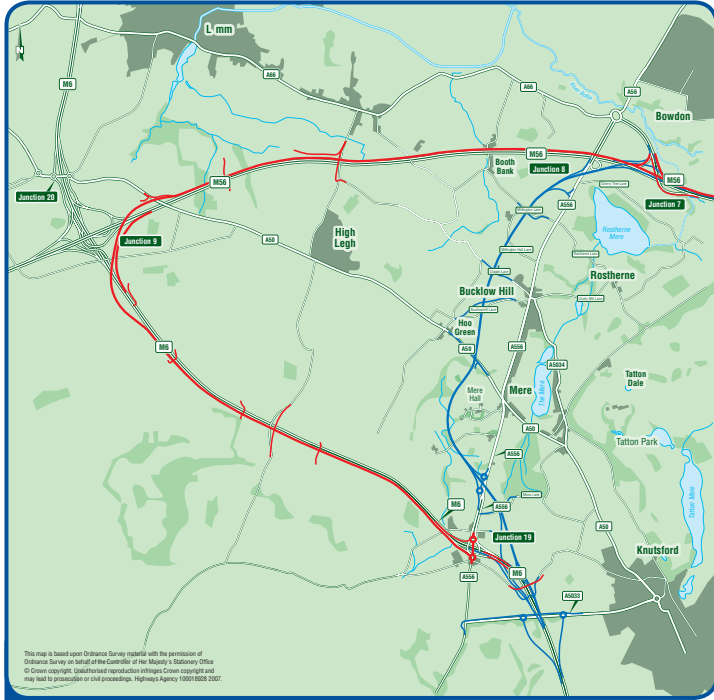


Rejected route/options

The rejected route involved the construction of a new motorway through open countryside to link the M6 and the M56. The other option was to improve the M6 junction 20 to encourage traffic to make a longer journey using the M6/M56.

Reason for rejecting this route

The Secretary of State rejected the motorway link route on environmental grounds and the M6 junction improvement option, which would bypass the A556, as it could not operate effectively.



Rejected route/options

Why is a new road required?

A new road will address the significant congestion problems and will reduce accident numbers within the area. The air quality within the area will also be improved.

Scheme budget

The proposed budget allocated for the scheme is around £107m.

What is being done now?

We have an ongoing programme of improvements for the A556. This includes measures to improve safety and congestion on this section of the road. For details please visit our website or contact the information line.

What happens next?

The Secretary of State for Transport will carefully consider your views together with those of Local Authorities and other bodies.

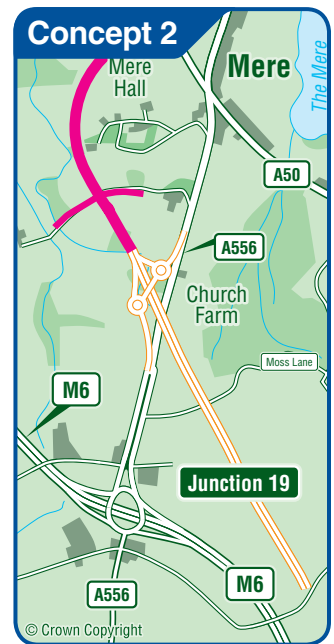
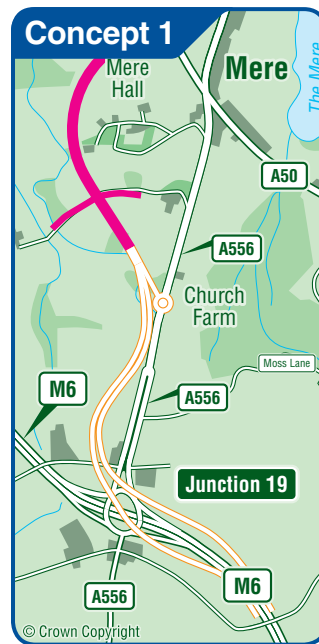
A decision will then be announced on whether the proposal is to be taken forward. If it is, a route will then be protected for planning purposes and developed in greater detail.

By commenting now, you will not prejudice your right to comment for or against any future detailed proposals subsequently published under the Highways Act. We look forward to seeing you at the exhibition.

Adjacent Scheme - M6 Widening

Widening of M6 Motorway to dual four lanes south of junction 19 (J19) to junction 11A is currently being developed. This work is at an early stage and a number of ways for connecting a widened M6 Motorway to the A556 improvement are possible.

The M6 widening and junction 19 concepts will be developed in more detail for an M6 public consultation early next year. Any views expressed about J19 will be passed to the M6 team for their consideration.



Environmental effects

We attach great importance to environmental issues. The proposed routes will be designed as sensitively as possible. For example, planting of native trees and shrubs would be used to help

integrate the road into the surrounding landscape. Steps will also be taken to safeguard water quality, ecology and cultural heritage. A full Environmental Impact Assessment will be carried out. Preliminary results are summarised on the following table.

Environmental issue	General effect of the proposals	Comment
Air Quality	Beneficial	Heavy traffic will be moved away from many houses and businesses
Cultural Heritage	Adverse	Full effects are unknown as yet
Ecology and Nature Conservation	Adverse	A number of ponds, hedgerows and woodland blocks will be affected, and birds, bats and other species may be harmed
Landscape Character	Adverse	Both options traverse open countryside
Visual Impact	Beneficial	Traffic will be moved away from many houses and businesses
Demolition	Adverse/neutral	Option A requires some demolition at Bucklow Hill; Option B does not
Community Land	Neutral	No community land will be affected
Development Land	Neutral	No development land is known to be affected
Agricultural Land	Adverse	Both options traverse agricultural land
Traffic Noise and Vibration	Beneficial	Heavy traffic will be moved away from many houses and businesses
Pedestrians, Cyclists etc	Beneficial	The greatest benefit would be with Option B
Driver View	Neutral	Depends largely on balance of cutting and embankment
Driver Stress	Beneficial	The greatest benefit would be with Option B
Water Quality and Drainage	Neutral	Both Option A and B should perform better in environmental terms than the existing road drainage
Geology and Soils	Neutral	No impacts are envisaged at this stage

For real time traffic information:

08700 660 115

www.highways.gov.uk/trafficinfo

24 hours a day, 365 days a year

(Calls from BT landlines to 0870 numbers will cost no more than 8p per minute; mobile calls usually cost more)

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Safe driving at roadworks

Remember that tiredness can kill. Take regular breaks from driving.



During 2005, five workers were killed and 12 seriously injured in the course of their work on Highways Agency roads. This was the worst year since 1999.

For the safety of all road users and roadworkers, drivers approaching roadworks are advised to:

- Keep within the speed limit – it is there for your safety
- Get into the correct lane in good time – don't keep switching
- Concentrate on the road ahead, not the roadworks
- Be alert for works' traffic leaving or entering roadworks
- Keep a safe distance – there could be queues in front
- Observe all signs – they are there to help you