



## Briefing on roads that have been stopped

What roads have been stopped? How were they stopped?  
What lessons can be learnt?

alliance against road building

### “A road can be stopped!”

You may feel that you have little chance of stopping the road you are opposing; that the odds are stacked in favour of the authorities, and that it a David versus Goliath battle. *It is* a David versus Goliath battle. But the encouraging news is that, over the past 20 years David has won.....many times! This briefing sheet highlights key victories and tries to draw some lessons for campaigners today.

#### The London Road Assessment Studies

In the late 1980s, the Government proposed the biggest single road building programme that London had ever seen. There were plans for new and widened highways right across the Capital. They would have demolished thousands of homes and decimated many parklands. It is thought between £12 and £20 billion had been set aside for the roads. In 1990, all the road schemes were dropped! They were dropped long before public inquiries as a result of massive, visible grassroots protests. The protest movement was quite clear it was not NIMBY - it opposed all road building schemes for London, which enabled it to put forward alternatives based on public transport, walking and cycling.

#### The Archway Road

Plans to widen the Archway Road in North London were dropped as part of the London Assessment Studies. But the Archway Road proposals preceded the Assessment Studies. They emerged in the early 1970s. The campaigners against the plans radicalised anti-roads campaigning. Instead of being content to make well-crafted arguments at a Public Inquiry and leave it at that, they backed up their arguments with well-timed disruptions of Inquiry when they felt the Inspector was not being reasonable. The objectors ensured that, even after four Public Inquiries, permission had not been given for the road to be built. When the road was dropped in 1990, it was the culmination of a 20 year campaign.

#### The Hereford Bypass

The dropping of this road made history: it was (and still remains as far as we are aware) the only time that a Public Inquiry Inspector rejected a *national* road scheme. He argued that the environmental objections to the scheme, which would have cut through the famous Lugg Meadows outside Hereford, outweighed any economic and traffic reasons for building the road. The Inspector was retiring after this Inquiry, so knew that finding against the Government would not jeopardise his prospects of being appointed Inspector at future inquiries! The local campaign group had made excellent arguments at the Inquiry, but it had also used the media and wider campaigning to highlight the destruction the road would bring in its wake.

#### The Norwich Inner Relief Road

This local road scheme was dropped when the Inspector found in favour of the objectors at the Public Inquiry. The campaigners had made this scheme a cause celebre, beyond the confines of the Inquiry. They used an expert to discredit the local authority's traffic modelling and presented a public transport option for Norwich (which the Inspector recommended).

#### The East London River Crossing

One of the most famous victories. Just after it was dropped in 1993, ALARM UK wrote,

*"Right now Oxleas is the most famous wood in Britain. But it wasn't ever thus. Only a few years ago a small number of people were desperate to bring Oxleas Wood, then little-known outside South-East London, to the attention of the nation. How they achieved this, and defeated the mighty machine of the Department of Transport in the process is an inspiration to us all and a wonderful message of hope for every one of the small groups of people fighting road schemes in faraway places"*

From 1936 the Roads Lobby had pressed for this road - a bridge over the Thames, plus a six lane highway that would have destroyed hundreds of homes and decimated the ancient Oxleas Wood - to complete the link between London's North and South Circular's and thus provide an Inner Ring Road for the capital. It was a critical road. The local campaigners lost two public inquiries. They then formed an alliance involving national groups and pinpointed Oxleas Wood as the most eye-catching element in their campaign. The 'Save Oxleas Wood' campaign resonated around Europe. Tens of thousands of people pledged to 'beat the bulldozer' to save it. Fearful of a direct action uprising just after Twyford Down, the Government dropped the road scheme.

#### Amongst the other the roads dropped:

**Road-widening in Inner South Birmingham** (centring on the Stratford Road) - rejected by the local authority after a high-profile campaign rooted in the local community.

**The Exeter Northern Bypass** - dropped after the local campaign, with the assistance of the local MP, (uniquely) persuaded the Department for Transport to commission a report into the *need* for the road (don't rely on the DfT being so accommodating in your case!). The report found there was no real need and the DfT dropped the scheme.

**The Preston Southern and Western Bypass** - £126 million scheme dropped after a high-profile local campaign

**The M1-M62 in Yorkshire** - a £125 million scheme that would have driven a six-lane motorway through quiet hills and valleys. Dropped after a determined community-based campaign made the proposal road national news.

**The Durham Western Bypass** - dropped after consistent community pressure

**The Kidderminster, Blakedown and Hagley Bypass** - dropped after community pressure

**The M62 Relief Road outside Manchester** - a massive scheme that would have destroyed hundreds of homes. Dropped after a high-profile local campaign

**The Greater Manchester Western and Northern Relief Road** - to be built in stages, dropped after community pressure.

**Widening of the A1 (M)** - to be built in stages, all dropped after a determined locally-based campaign.

**The A40 Longford to Gorsley (M50) Improvement** - this Gloucestershire scheme was dropped after a visible, media-savvy local campaign

**The 4th Trent Crossing in Nottingham** - dropped after a highly visible and determined local campaign. Their victory at the time was described by ALARM UK: "*...this level of campaigning is brought about by a handful of activists, in touch with the heartbeat of their community, working together with flair, imagination and deep dedication....*"

**The 2nd Tamar Crossing** - controversial second road crossing over the Tamar outside Plymouth, dropped after a skilful community campaign

**During the 1990s, over 150 schemes were dropped.**

**The key lessons:**

1. The wider national campaign involving local people, national campaign groups, direct action activists and sympathetic academics created the climate where government and local authorities were under pressure to drop schemes.
2. The key element in successfully stopping a scheme was visible, determined campaigns by local people.
3. Only once - Hereford - has a Public Inquiry Inspector found in favour of objectors at a Public Inquiry into national road scheme. There have been more instances where objectors to *local* road schemes have won at Public Inquiries, but even these have been few and far between.
4. Start campaigning long before a Public Inquiry is even a twinkle in the Inspector's eye. Try and win before the Public Inquiry. Most roads that were stopped never reached the Public Inquiry stage. Some were dropped by community pressure after the Public Inquiry was lost.
5. At a Public Inquiry, refuse to play the official game of simply making well-crafted arguments; accompany good arguments with strategic, high-profile disruption of the Inquiry - as happened so successfully at the Archway Public Inquiries.
6. However low you are feeling, don't give up. Remember, some of the most famous victories came after the campaigners really thought they were getting nowhere.

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