

10 Myths about the Norwich Western Link

When speaking to people about the planned Norwich Western Link Road (NWL) it is clear that people who currently support building the road believe it is the solution to traffic problems in the Wensum Valley. They care about the area and expect that the road would be built carefully with minimal environmental damage. They believe a road will have economic benefits, and environmental costs can be mitigated. Unfortunately, these things aren't true. When people find out the reality of the Norwich Western Link Road, they often change their mind.

Here are the top 10 myths about the Norwich Western Link Road:

1. It will reduce journey times significantly

The NWL *might* reduce average journey times for those that use it by about 3.5 minutes¹

Only a few people would see the benefits of their daily commute being shorter, but ALL of us in Norfolk and the rest of the UK will have to bear the economic and environmental costs. Is it worth it for a few minutes a day for a few people?

2. Wensum Valley residents will benefit from faster journey times

There will be **NO JUNCTION WITHIN THE WENSUM VALLEY**, so residents of villages in the valley would need to go out to the A47 or NDR to use the link road, so they will not gain any benefit in journey times, while suffering the noise and visual blight on the landscape.

3. It will stop the 'rat-running' that is blighting local villages, so my village will be quieter.

No one has surveyed where people are going when they travel through the valley, so Norfolk County Council (NCC) have no evidence that 'rat-running' through places like Costessey, for instance, would stop. For local traffic to reduce it would rely on people driving further out from the city to join the link road rather than just cutting across as they do at the moment. The same applies for any journey that does not start or finish conveniently near the NWL junctions.

Many **HGVs** will still use local roads because their destinations are within the Valley, and as there is no junction on the NWL within the valley, nothing will change.

Even if local traffic were to improve this will be replaced by the hum of a motorway day and night. NCC's data predict an **increase in traffic noise** for a wide area around the road i.e for most Valley residents.²

3. A link road is the only solution to local traffic problems

There has been no attempt to try anything else first.

Or consult properly with local people on alternatives to a road. In 2018 NCC consulted the public: they wanted investigation into non road alternatives such as public transport and cycling provision as well as a road. But all NCC came up with was road route options.

Have your say on local traffic solutions in the consultation 27th July to 20th September :

<https://www.norfolk.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/major-projects-and-improvement-plans/norwich/norwich-western-link/have-your-say>

A decent public transport service (not just across the valley, but integrated in the Norwich region), or measures such as camera controlled selected exclusion areas. Provision for cycling safely on local journeys. What about upgrades or minor reroutes of selected single lane roads across the valley? If used together, these measures could provide a solution for a lot less money and less environmental damage.

4. It will create jobs and economic growth

Road building costs notoriously escalate: current estimates from the Council are optimistic, and **the NWL could cost £280 million.**³ It would have to create a *lot* of growth to pay its way.

NCC will be funding this road with debt. Local services have already been cut. Adding to the debt burden of a cash-strapped council will inevitably impact on essential services such child services.

Building roads has, at best, mixed economic benefits ⁴. Studies of recent road building schemes in the UK showed most produced no economic benefit at all.⁵ Roadbuilding is so poor at job creation it was dropped from a long list of proposals from the TUC to help kickstart the UK economy.⁶

To rebuild the economy post COVID, NCC could implement far more cost efficient ways that are more environmentally sustainable, such as a Norfolk Green New Deal.⁷

5. The link road will reduce carbon emissions by reducing congestion

Building new roads means more traffic overall: this is the phenomenon of **induced traffic**. **This has been observed again and again when new roads are built.** ⁸ So any benefits of new roads in terms of reduced congestion are soon cancelled out by more journeys being taken on that road. So, congestion creeps back to where it was before.

Norfolk County Council's (NCC) own data predict the road will predict significant traffic increases as the road will produce sprawling development and more car use.

This will mean INCREASED carbon emissions. The UK and NCC have made a commitment to 'net-zero' carbon by 2050. Doing anything that increases CO2 emissions is incompatible with that legal commitment. Campaigners are taking the Government to court to prevent road building which increases emissions, like the NWL, from passing planning ⁹.

6. Increasing traffic is ok because everyone will be driving electric cars in the future

It is still more than ten years before new petrol and diesel cars will be banned, and non-electric vehicles will still be on our roads for decades. So, most of the cars using the NWL would still be using fossil fuels for many years to come. For electric cars to have a positive effect on CO2 emissions they need a fully green electricity supply. Whilst rapid decarbonisation of the national grid is possible, the UK is not currently making the investment needed to drive this. So, even in electric cars, driving on the NWL will increase UK CO2 emissions.

7. NCC can build a 4 lane highway in an 'environmentally sensitive' way

Old woodland that is habitat for rare bats is close by whatever route you choose through the Wensum Valley. The current route would cut right through ecologically rich woodland. **Barbastelle bats are a protected species and the colonies in the Wensum Valley are of national importance. Bats have already been put at risk by poor practice by NCC's contractors**¹⁰. The presence of bats shows that there is a habitat that is supporting lots of insects and other wildlife. Badger setts are also present on the proposed route.

During construction the area of land that will be destroyed will be 2-3 times wider than the finished road, so what is now a valuable wildlife corridor will be broken up. Habitat fragmentation like this results in the long term decline of biodiversity and the local extinction of species.

The River Wensum is a protected rare chalk stream habitat, which would be very sensitive to any pollution from runoff. There are no details yet on how this sensitive habitat will be protected from potential damage.

There will be **massive viaduct** built over the river that will be **visible for miles**.

The local environment will be severely impacted if a road this size is built. That's just a fact.

8. Impact on habitat can be mitigated e.g. by planting trees elsewhere

NCC claim that they can create a biodiversity 'net gain' by planting trees elsewhere. This treats ecology like a spreadsheet where a certain number of saplings = 1 ancient tree. It doesn't work like that. You can't cut down trees that are hundreds of years old and expect all the lichens, fungi, insects, mammals and birds to survive and hang about waiting for the new to trees to grow to a size and age where they provide them with a home and food. These old trees are irreplaceable.

If you care about preserving Norfolk's woodland and wildlife you can't pretend it can just be replanted somewhere more convenient. It's impossible.

NCC claim that damage to bat habitat can be mitigated by building bridges or underpasses. This is exactly what was done for the NDR. NCC have therefore effectively already performed a test on these measures in almost identical conditions locally. They failed and bat colonies have died out.¹¹

But the most damaging Myth is:

10. The Road is inevitable, so it's not worth fighting to stop it.

If we show Norfolk County Council that we don't want this road we CAN stop it.

The world has changed since these plans were first made: COVID -19 has hit, a recession is inevitable, climate change is becoming more and more obvious and urgent, and the Council is in a financial crisis, affecting social care services.

Central government funding is still on hold awaiting years more work on environmental reports and a business case. The government expect NCC to provide much more evidence on the business case for a road before they provide funding. This preparatory work alone costs millions of pounds. We need NCC to cut its losses now, before it wastes more money on this dinosaur project.

There were plans to build a huge polluting waste incinerator in Norfolk a decade ago. This plan was stopped because Norfolk residents came out against it. We can stop this road in the same way!

Join us:

Website: <https://www.stophewensumlink.co.uk/>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/StopWensumLink>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/StopWensumLink/>

References

1. NCC Options consultation Nov18- Jan 2019
2. <http://norwichwesternlink.uk/>
3. a. Council estimate cost of NWL build will £153 million (Extracts from Strategic Outline Business Case (November 2019)). This does not include associated roundabouts, interest, and inevitable escalation of costs.
b. NDR original estimate was £148 million, current cost (not final, there are still cost being paid out) is £205 million + interest.
4. <https://whatworksgrowth.org/policy-reviews/transport/>
5. <https://www.dev2.cpre.org.uk/resources/transport/roads/item/4543-the-end-of-the-road-challenging-the-road-building-consensus>
6. http://transitioneconomics.net/uk-covid-recovery-infrastructure-jobs-tuc?fbclid=IwAR2QEsxCOmVIMIHNZ_cfPEI5Df6kqPmZ6dzSJ0Qvumn_08sp_G1rS2i2QrA
7. <https://www.greennewdealuk.org/>
8. <https://bettertransport.org.uk/roads-nowhere/induced-traffic>
9. <https://www.crowdjustice.com/case/stop-largest-ever-roads-programme/>
10. https://twitter.com/joe_crowley/status/1283721882508890118?s=19&fbclid=IwAR04c_yzx7U7fBDI2AHM92S7ecNawy5LW4dPhzXHjPo6ry2V33-PKnu4YQM
11. https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/mar/20/norfolk-road-report-rewritten-to-remove-warning-of-risk-to-bats?fbclid=IwAR3BScBx0RmiNw4eA8Z3MTuEZ_ZnLdhidyMLXLPN-0M3wYZcbYvW0iWKyM0