

# THE A20

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## The Great Highway Hold-up

IN JUNE 1991 work began on the A20 highway to link the M20 to Dover Eastern Docks. It was expected that the road would be opened in the summer of 1993 and this issue of the Newsletter could have been celebrating its completion! Instead it is far from finished and the completion date is still not available. However the contractors state that "strenuous efforts are being made by all parties to secure the earliest possible completion of the contract".

When it became evident that the work would not be completed on schedule there was an outcry in Dover, from the town in general, but in particular from residents and businesses along the route, who had already suffered disruption and inconvenience for



LOWER SNARGATE STREET (The AA building on the right)

two years and had hoped to see an end to this by the summer of 1993. Shops, restaurants and hotels had already applied for compensation for loss of revenue and were now faced with more disruption for an unspecified period. It seemed to the people of Dover that the contractors were giving low priority to the completion of the work in the town as compared to other sections



THE SUBWAY AT BENCH STREET UNDER CONSTRUCTION

Observers reported absence of labour from sites for days at a time, sections started and left unfinished, numerous examples of half-hearted efforts and half-finished curbs, walls and pavements, sometimes dangerous to pedestrians, sections having to be re-built, relaid or rectified; little overtime, it appeared, in the long summer evenings; little week-end work and only small groups of workmen doing small amounts of work.

By summer protests led to a public meeting in August and, following this, Mott MacDonald issued monthly Newsletters to residents and businesses along the route of the A20 in the town and described their schedules for a phased completion of the various sections of the road.

The September Newsletter indicated that the first section to be completed would be from Wellesley Road to Marine Parade in October, followed by further sections in

Snargate Street, York Street and East Cliff soon afterwards and the "final, most critical sections at Bench Street and Archcliffe being completed in late Autumn".

Following this Newsletter the pace of activity on the roadworks in the town increased substantially in October. By the end of the month this accelerated, with work taking place on all sections from York Street to Jubilee Way simultaneously, with men working on surfacing, paving, brickwork, central reserve barriers and street lighting all along the route. Once again observers, amazed at this frenzied activity, were inclined to conclude that, had this pace of work been undertaken throughout the summer months, the road might have been completed to schedule.

Outside the town large sections of the road are finished but the Dover Express on 28th October reported that the roads minister could still give no date for the final opening of the road, saying that some parts of the highway were not ready for the safe passage of traffic. However, the contractor's Newsletter, distributed in Dover at the end of October, suggested that in the town they expected that many sections would be virtually complete by the end of November, with only finishing-off work to be done. Certainly, by the beginning of 1994 we can expect completion. We asked Dover Society members to give their views on what they think the opening of the road will mean for Dover.

- The new pedestrian underpass at King Street/New Bridge will prove to be a planning disaster. Pedestrians will be loth to use it except at busy periods. It is likely to become a sleeping place for tramps and to be mis-used by late-night revellers –
- the underpass *may* turn out to be as reasonably user-friendly as the New Dover Road underpass in Canterbury, but the town of Dover will still be cut off from the seafront as North Wales and Devon towns are by the GWR –
- A dual carriageway (especially if the reported 40mph is allowed) in this urban location with very limited crossing points has serious implications for the safe movement of pedestrians, both residents and visitors alike



EAST CLIFF, approaching the Eastern Docks – service road at left

While many members were worried that there would be more fast-moving traffic others felt that with the number of roundabouts, pedestrian crossings and lights to be negotiated it would scarcely be faster than before.

Another aspect considered was whether the opening of the road would encourage travellers to stop in the town. There were various opinions, for and against, the general consensus being that travellers would have to be persuaded to stop.

- I do not think this road will improve the prosperity of Dover – only encourage travellers to speed by – even more so if shipping declines –
- I cannot see that people in cars rushing up and down are going to stop and enter the town and I've tried to work out (unsuccessfully) how they would get easily to park and patronise our shops, such as they are – one hopes for an improvement! –

- The road goes through the town and makes us more available to tourists
- if landscaping and refurbishing of the approaches are successful motorists *may* be encouraged to stop in the town –
- The new road will become the main approach to Dover from the West. Traffic to and from the Eastern Docks will virtually miss the town unless it is persuaded that the place is worth a visit. Some of the persuasion can be written (advance publicity as it were) but I think the most effective will be visual. Those driving along the A20 to or from the docks must like what they see and be persuaded to stop –
- When the M25 and the Dartford Bridge were completed it was believed that motorists would find the journey to Dover easier, and that they would flock to Dover. They did, but merely took earlier ferries without staying the night. Trade from such travellers did in fact drop. A similar situation could now occur with the opening of the A20 – traffic slipping into the port without any desire to stop in Dover town, **UNLESS**, by some corporate genius we create methods to arouse the excitement and interest of the traveller –

There was optimism as well as pessimism:- Many members listed ways in which the opening of the road would benefit the town, as follows:

- Provide better access to the docks to keep cross-Channel ferries as a viable alternative to the tunnel –
- Makes the development of the Western Docks possible –
- Facilitate two-way commuting with East Kent towns –
- Provide dual carriageway all the way from Dover to Carmarthen!
- Improve conditions for residents in the Folkestone Road as traffic will be much reduced –
- Improve conditions for Capel residents –
- Improve traffic flow in the town centre once the new traffic lights are in operation at the Queen Street/York Street junction –
- Remove heavy traffic from the town centre –
- Create a fine panoramic approach to Dover from the west which must make a favourable first impression on visitors –
- Improve the approach from Eastern Docks with new promenade and sea wall at East Cliff –
- Make the journey to Dover easier for day trippers who are not travelling on the ferries, but coming to spend a day in the town –

All members who returned the questionnaire sheets in time for the publication of *Newsletter* No 18 are thanked for their co-operation. Answers to question A have been used in this summary.

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** The section of the A20 from the M20 to Court Wood was opened on Friday, 5 November and it is surprisingly scenic in the rural section.