

UNLOCKING THE POTENTIAL OF A46 NEWARK BYPASS



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1.0 Introduction

The A46 bypass at Newark is a key road for the region: immediately surrounding and connecting to the road there are a number of large commercial businesses and logistics hubs as well as Newark Town Centre.

The A46 is a key strategic link between the M5 to the Humber Ports, as well as locally providing access between Leicester, Nottingham, Newark and Lincoln. It is susceptible to experiencing high volumes of traffic, from both long-distance travellers and local traffic around the East Midlands.

Cavendish was commissioned by Midlands Connect to undertake qualitative research with local firms to get a more thorough understanding of how they, and the region, are being held back by the lack of investment in this bypass.

It is known to be a particular pinch point for traffic. The route acts as a major logistics and employment hub for the whole region, yet it has become over capacity, and many local firms and stakeholders argue it is not fit for purpose and in desperate need of widening into a dual carriageway.

The businesses and stakeholders who participated in the research were clear that despite the A46's role as a key strategic route for major employers, the bypass is not fit for purpose and in desperate need of widening into a dual carriageway. There is a clear perception that the A46 bypass is over capacity and acts as a pinch point for traffic travelling East / West on the strategic road network, and using this road when travelling through the Midlands on a North / South journey.

2.0 Executive Summary

2.1 Overview

This report provides a summary of insights, including quotes, gathered from local businesses and stakeholders via one to one interviews conducted on Microsoft Teams during April and May 2024.

2.2 Our work

Cavendish conducted in-depth interviews with firms, council members and office space providers with an interest in the A46 Newark Bypass.

Through these discussions, we have gained insights into the perceptions of these figures on the challenges presented by the four junctions and the urgent need for investment as part of the next round of road infrastructure funding.

The research and interviews undertaken during April and May 2024 included:

Name	Role	Sector
Becky Farrow	Centre Manager at Newark Beacon	Office spaces
Tony Bound	Managing Director at Magnet Insurance	Insurance
Graham Wright	Environment Manager at British Sugar	Goods distribution
Simon Eccleston	Chief Executive at Newark Showground	Events and hospitality
Daniel Copper	National Marketing Lead at Vodaphone	Telecommunications
Cllr Keith Girling	Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Strategic Asset Management at Nottinghamshire County Council	Local government

2.3 Interview Summary

The interviews were designed to encourage interviewees to disclose their experiences with the A46 Newark Bypass, helping Midlands Connect to better understand the need for investment. Not all questions were asked in every interview, and some were adapted where necessary to suit the research participant.

The questions used as part of the research are listed below:

- Can you explain how the current A46 Newark Bypass affects your business?
- What impact is that having – financial, logistical etc.?
- Have you taken any steps to mitigate those impacts as a business?
- Do you support the proposed investment in the A46 Newark Bypass?
- What difference would it make for you as a business and your employees/ to those you represent?
- What would you say to those deciding whether or not to make this investment?

2.4 Key Findings

Our interviews drew out five consistent themes:

- Current provision is affecting business operations, as well as the wider community.
- Traffic is costing businesses and the local economy money.
- An improved A46 would improve the prospects of Newark and the businesses based there.
- Despite concerns about the interruption caused by the improvement works, there was unanimous support for the proposals and a desire for them to be commenced without delay.

3.0 Interview Analysis

This section provides detailed analysis of the key themes outlined above, as established from the interviews undertaken.

3.1 Current junction arrangements are affecting businesses operations

Local firms expressed concern that the high level of congestion on the A46 Newark Bypass damages the performance of their businesses, while also being highly disruptive for local residents and commuters.

Respondents explained that congestion on the bypass, especially exacerbated at peak times, is affecting their ability to run their business efficiently, impacting the delivery of services they provide and ultimately risking client confidence.

"We have a number of customer facing colleagues who start at 9am, when they are late that impacts our customers and our service levels." **Daniel Cooper, National Marketing Lead, Vodaphone.**

Similarly, other respondents pointed to delayed starts to events caused by traffic on the A46 reducing customer confidence in choosing Newark as a venue, which has a negative impact on the local economy.

"People who come from out of the area, and even those who know the road network can still get caught out and are caught up in congestion. They are then late to conferences and meetings, which is of course frustrating but also for the organisers of the events they have a reduced confidence in being able to run their events smoothly." **Becky Farrow, Centre Manager at Newark Beacon.**

This is a particular concern for Newark Showground. It holds over 500 events a year and can have up to 15,000 people accessing the showground on a given day.

"Queues can be miles long at busy times and so if you are trying to attend an event at the show ground, clearly that can mean that you are up to two hours delayed... this impacts everyone in the area as well delaying through traffic, but when people regularly struggle to access events it affects reputation and future commercial confidence." **Simon Eccleston, Chief Executive at Newark Showground.**

For other respondents, they have changed the procedures they have in their business to accommodate for the disruption caused by the A46. British Sugar processes all the sugar beet grown in the United Kingdom and supplies 60% of the UK's sugar market. From their base in Newark they process, produce and distribute sugar across the UK. They have made changes to the way their business operates due to ongoing delays and disruption caused by the A46.

"We factor in more time for our drivers to complete journeys as we know taking the A46, the technically most direct route, will lead to delays. As a result, drivers are taking less direct routes, spending more time on their journey and money on fuel." **Graham Wright, Environment Manager at British Sugar.**

Cllr Keith Girling, Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Strategic Asset Management at Nottinghamshire County Council aptly summed up the comments made by those in business:

"A central issue is about business confidence. The A46 causes unpredictability in how a business can operate. It has a very negative impact on our businesses in Newark, and I can easily see how if I was looking to invest in Newark the situation with the A46 would turn me away"

3.2 People are changing the way they live their lives due to traffic

All road users can be faced with congestion, and planning journeys to avoid peak times is often necessary in business planning. However, local businesses argued that excessive traffic around the A46 makes it harder for employees to access work with reliability and makes Newark Town Centre effectively unreachable on a Friday in particular, impacting on local investment into the town centre.

Previous research by Midlands Connect has highlighted that congestion at peak times costs the local economy £419.72 per hour per day – a total of over £1.6 million per year¹. However local firms feel the delays and associated financial costs go well beyond this.

"People avoid going into Newark to go to the shops or socialise after work on a Friday due to the traffic. That's a key night of the week for restaurants and bars so I imagine they are impacted quite heavily by the issues on the A46" **Becky Forrow.**

This sentiment was echoed by **Cllr Keith Girling**, Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Strategic Asset Management at Nottinghamshire County Council.

"It is hard to quantify the scale of the financial impact caused by disruption on the A46, but evidence is frequently given anecdotally about people changing their routes and avoiding going into Newark. All of that will have an impact on the amount people spend in Newark and the efficiency of business operations"

Other respondents were able to pinpoint exactly how the traffic impacted the behaviour of their employees:

¹ <https://www.midlandsconnect.uk/news/delays-at-junction-28-of-the-m1-is-costing-over-1000-hours-and-over-4-million-to-economy/>

"I have colleagues who have to change their working hours completely to avoid congestion, starting at 8am instead of 9am because they can't afford to get stuck in traffic" **Daniel Cooper.**

3.3 An improved A46 would improve the prospects of those living and working in Newark and beyond

There was unanimous agreement that improvements to the A46 would benefit the prospects and lives of those living and working in Newark. Many respondents pointed out that evidence for this was anecdotal, but as people who live and work in the area they are well placed to reflect on their perception of local opinion. They pointed to the fact that people's movements are often restricted by disruption on the A46, and that this impacts on their desire to make spontaneous decisions to go out for a meal or to pop to local shops. It was felt that improvements to the A46 would make this type of decision-making less arduous and make more spontaneous trips out, which would boost local spending.

"If my colleagues and I don't go into the office due to the traffic, we then don't use and spend money in the local shops nearby. It's easy to see how improving the A46 would boost local spending." **Daniel Cooper.**

"Improvements to the A46 would make Newark more of an attractive destination as people wouldn't have to worry about how they would get into and out of the town centre and in what time frame" **Tony Bund, Managing Director at Magnet Insurance.**

Similarly, all reflected on the fact that an improved A46 in Newark had wider implications than simply improving local connections. They argued that this is a strategic place to invest in the road network, given the fact that Newark sits between areas of dualled roads to the North and South. The single carriageway currently causes a natural bottleneck for North-South connections. Improvements to the A46 would lead to better connections and therefore easier journeys for those outside of Newark.

"Nationally connections will be improved because that key corridor will work better, but also people that work here, people who are local to the showground, I'm sure will be much more inclined to come to events at the Showground. If our business develops and if our business expands, which I believe it will through that improvement, there will be a consequential economic uplift to the area as well." **Simon Eccleston.**

3.4 The current A46 situation negatively impacts the local economy

Some respondents also reflected on the impact that not undertaking the improvement works might have on Newark. Vodafone is a large local employer, with a significant base in Newark. Daniel was keen to point out this would only continue if Vodafone felt people were using the office base in Newark. In its current layout, the A46 hinders peoples' ability to reliably travel to the office and were the office space to be underutilised due to this, Vodafone could pull their investment from Newark and look elsewhere.

"With the A46 as it currently is, there is a tangible and measurable increased cost to Vodafone in maintaining their presence here. If people who need to access the office take a longer route to avoid the A46, those miles are charged back to Vodafone. If people are late to their shift as they spend time in traffic, that comes at a business cost to Vodafone. And if people don't make the journey altogether as the unpredictability of the A46 affects their working pattern, Vodafone could just see it as a business decision to close their office in Newark and relocate" **Daniel Cooper.**

An idea which was echoed by **Cllr Keith Girling**:

"If when prospective investors arrive in Newark at a time when the A46 is disrupted, which it often is, why would they invest in the area when they can clearly see the transport issues they might have if they move to the area?"

4.0 Conclusions

Businesses feel they are technically well positioned on the A46, with it being a strategic point intersecting the A1 and A17, linking to the M1 and connecting larger cities such as Birmingham, Coventry, Leicester, Nottingham, Lincoln and Grimsby, running up to the Humber Ports and generally as a place in the Midlands they are well situated to make the most of opportunities UK-wide. However, they all feel that the A46 in its current format acts as a hindrance to making the most of this strategic location.

All urged the Government to press on at pace with the plans to improve the A46, with many saying the work should have ideally already begun.

"Unlocking traffic through the A46 would unlock vital routes connecting the North and South of the country, ultimately leading to better connectivity and the subsequent economic growth which would come with that. The longer the government delays the decision to go ahead with the investment into the A46, the more expensive the project becomes to undertake and the more time is wasted in unlocking new areas of growth around Newark, and of course, UK wide" **Cllr Keith Girling.**

Local businesses and stakeholders are pressing the government to acknowledge the critical need for this essential investment, and for Newark not to be left behind.

"We need Newark to thrive and having good and reliable road networks is key to that" **Tony Bund.**

They believe that pledging support for the junction enhancements in the upcoming phase of road infrastructure funding will unleash the area's potential, thereby enhancing and securing a better future for both residents and businesses.

"Improving the A46 would be the best thing possible for business and the best thing possible for Newark as well. The sooner the works can start, the better." **Simon Eccleston.**