

PS [REDACTED]

cc [REDACTED]

M26/A225 OTFORD ROAD SLIP ROADS

1. This submission recommends a decision not to proceed with proposals to provide two slip roads to connect the M26 Motorway and the A225, north of Sevenoaks in Kent.
2. The M26 provides a motorway link from the M25 at Sevenoaks (Chevening Interchange) to the M20 at Wrotham. The final section of the M25 (south of the Thames from Swanley to Sevenoaks) is under construction and should be completed by April 1986. Included in the Swanley - Sevenoaks contact is a link from the M25 to the A21 and A224 near Badgers Mount. A sketch plan showing M26 in its regional context is at Annex B.
3. There is no provision at the Chevening Interchange for connections between the M26 and the local road network, or between M26 and the new section of M25 northwards to Swanley. There is, therefore, no access to the M26/M25 eastbound route, or exit from it, for 18 miles between Wrotham and Godstone. The plan at Annex C shows the present arrangements at the interchange, and the four additional slip roads (in red) which would have been needed to provide the missing connections.
4. Traffic studies carried out prior to the publication in 1976 of the Department's interchange proposals showed that the cost of the four missing connections - £5m at 1980 prices - could not be justified by the low level of traffic expected to use them. In the light of representations received on publication of the orders in 1976, notably from Kent County Council and Sevenoaks District Council, the Department set up a Joint Working Party with representatives of the two Councils to consider the question of additional connections in the Sevenoaks area. Meanwhile, in order not to delay the M25, the Department proceeded to a public inquiry with the limited Chevening Interchange proposal. The Inspector was satisfied that the predicted traffic movements did not justify the cost of providing the missing movements at Chevening, and this was accepted by the Secretaries of State.

5. The absence of east-facing slip roads at Chevening was highlighted by the opening of M26 in November 1980, and attracted critical comment from the public and in the national press, together with letters from five MPs and a Question in the Lords.
6. The Working Party, whose report was considered by Ministers in January 1981, looked at a range of options including some at Chevening and some at Dunton Green and at the A225 Otford Road (see plan at Annex C). Taking account of the overall balance of cost, economic traffic and environmental factors, the Working Party confirmed the earlier decision not to provide the additional facility at Chevening and concluded that the provision of east-facing slip roads at the Otford Road offered the best solution. These findings were subsequently accepted by the County and District Councils.
7. Ministers were advised that the Otford Road proposals would partly offset the omission at Chevening at very much less cost (about £1m at 1980 prices); and would provide a better link between M26 to the east and Sevenoaks, in particular the industrial areas situated to the north of the town. Some opposition from the village of Otford was foreseen, but it was thought that we could dispel fears that additional traffic would be attracted along the A225 through the Darenth Valley. The Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (██████████) announced the proposal to proceed with the A225 Otford Road scheme on 28 January 1981 (Press Notice at Annex D).
8. Since then local amenity groups have developed an active campaign against the Otford Road scheme. The opposition is based on fears that the slip roads would attract significant additional traffic on to local roads in the area, particularly the A225, and would encourage development in an area of planning restraint. Views on the second aspect have hardened in the light of the Government's statements about Green Belt policies, and local interests fear that although the planning authorities may reject applications, they will be allowed on appeal.
9. Until as recently as August 1983, Ministers took a fairly firm line, expressing the view that the right course would be to publish formal proposals for public comment and debate at the earliest possible date. The most recent letter on these lines is at Annex F (penultimate paragraph refers) and was based on the knowledge that the proposal had the support of the County and District Councils.

In September 1983, however, the Sevenoaks District Council withdrew its support for the project, and the County Council subsequently indicated that it could not support a scheme which had no strategic highway significance as far as the Council were concerned and the local people did not want. At Annex E is a list of groups opposed to Otford Road proposal. They have the support of [REDACTED]

10. The Department is left with a proposal for a scheme which is not essential for trunk road purposes, which is not only attracting widespread local opposition but no longer has any evident support. In the existing situation, traffic between the Sevenoaks area and the M20 to the east has to use the A25 to Wrotham; and in view of the local publicity given to this problem some support for the Otford slips might have been expected from the villages on the A25. But there has been no indication of any support, and the Seal Parish Council have joined the campaign against the Otford Road scheme. In all the circumstances, I consider that it would be difficult now to justify proceeding with the publication of orders.

11. The groups which are objecting to the Otford Road scheme, have also asked that a full Chevening interchange should be provided. We have therefore looked again at the economics of adding the four missing connections, and partly because of the changes in COBA since 1976 this would now have a positive NPV in the range of £0.36m to £3.13m. However, this course would have disadvantages. Construction would cost about £7.5m. The interchange is to the north west of Sevenoaks, and it would not be a very satisfactory access for eastbound traffic originating in the town and the industrial estates; and the changes would lead to opposition from residents of Chipstead and possibly Riverhead. Land would be needed from the Chevening Estate and this would probably attract objections from the Trust set up under the Chevening Estate Act 1959. Moreover, the revised economic evaluation is based on a traffic model which does not take account of generated or redistributed traffic. Some doubt about traffic levels will remain until after the M25 traffic pattern has settled down following completion of the Swanley - Sevenoaks section. For these reasons, and because it would be desirable to look again at other possibilities considered - and rejected - by the Working Party, I would not recommend switching at this stage to another solution.

12. There seems to be no point in proceeding to the publication of formal proposals and a public inquiry for the Otford Road scheme in the face of the opposition described above, and with no support from the County Council or any other organisation; we would be promoting a scheme for local benefit, without strategic significance, but in a form that the locals would not want.

13. In my view, therefore, we should abandon the Otford Road proposals, even though for the reasons set out in paragraph 11 above, we are not ready to put anything in its place. But we cannot make a satisfactory statement confined to withdrawal of the proposal without saying something about the possible future need for an additional connection of some sort. In the circumstances I recommend that [REDACTED] should make an announcement to the effect that the proposal to publish Orders for the slip roads on the A225 is abandoned; and that the Department will review the need for additional facilities on the M25/M26 following the opening of the Swanley - Sevenoaks section (including the Badgers Mount Link Road) and in the light of any development which may have taken place in the area in the meantime. I envisage that at that time it might be appropriate to appoint consultants to carry out a study which would not necessarily be confined to Chevening.

14. This proposal would mean that it is likely to be at least eight years or so before any facility could be in use, a point which could attract criticism particularly from the Kent County Council. But in view of the unfortunate history of the Otford slips proposal, we could justify delaying further consideration of the issue until the traffic position becomes clear.

15. If [REDACTED] agrees with the general line, she will wish to consider the draft press notice attached.

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
Director (Transport)
SERO

4 May 1984