



A12 INQUIRY EVIDENCE

Following the invitation, received on 12 April 2008, to submit evidence to the A12 Inquiry chaired by Sir David Rowlands, Essex FSB undertook a survey of its 3,500 members to gather factual data about the impact the A12 has on their businesses.

A special team was set up to coordinate the survey and preparation of evidence.

The survey was available on line through the Essex FSB web site as well as in printed form.

The Inquiry Brief:

"To review the present and likely future performance of the A12 trunk road in Essex and to make recommendations which will enhance the level of service to all of its users including, where appropriate, improvements to information, emergency arrangements and capacity."

Respondents had just two weeks in which to reply to the survey which had six main questions.

The aim of the survey was to provide data based evidence for submission to the A12 Inquiry.

This report summarises the responses received and using that data as a foundation makes a number of recommendations for consideration by the Commissioners. The FSB will use the data gathered as part of its lobbying work with the aim of encouraging further investment for the A12 to improve journey times and accessibility.



Essex FSB

The FSB is Essex's leading business organisation with more than 3,500 members.

The Essex FSB Region includes the geographical county of Essex as well as the two London Boroughs of Havering and Redbridge.

Nationally the FSB has 211,000 members across all sectors of business.

With a successful track record of evidence based lobbying the FSB has an excellent reputation for the quality of its data.

Regular meetings with Ministers, Shadow Ministers, MPs, EEDA, GoEast, and ERA representatives as well as leading local authority councillors and senior council officers ensures a good flow of information between the business community and key decision makers.

Background on the A12

■ In February 2007 the A12 was named as the worst road in Britain in a survey of 4,000 drivers by an insurance company.

The A12 from London to Great Yarmouth, Norfolk, has a particularly bad stretch with potholes and regular closures due to roadworks, near to Colchester in Essex, the Cornhill Direct survey said.

■ The future of a £25 million junction linking the A12 with Colchester's new community stadium is in jeopardy after a developer pulled out of building it.

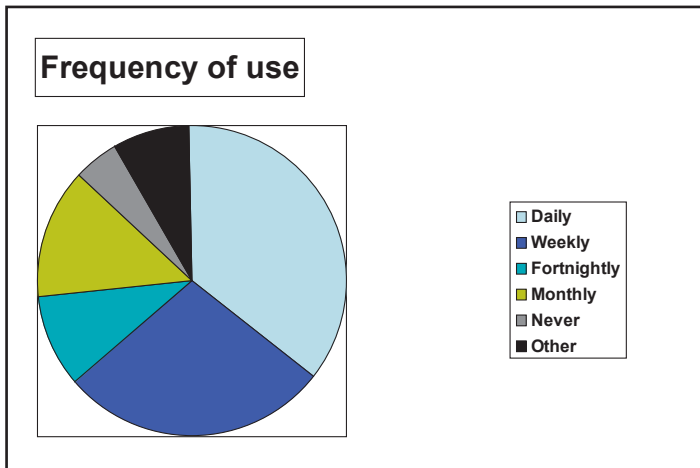
■ In 1995 consultations took place on upgrading the A12 to motorway status and provoked strong opposition, particularly in the Brentwood area. That opposition became vocal again in 2001 when the idea was briefly brought forward for further consideration.

■ The stretches of concrete road surface are seen as major problems for motorists in terms of both safety and comfort.

■ Traffic noise along the A12 has been a major problem particularly on the Ingatestone and Brentwood by-passes.

The background from business

The first question aimed to identify frequency of journeys involving the A12 with 35% of those responding using it daily and a further 28% using it at least weekly. Only 4% of those responding never use the A12.



A total of 59% of journeys were made in the morning and 41% in the afternoon.

This suggests that the A12 is well used by small businesses in the county due to its role as a main arterial road linking the North East of Essex to the M25 motorway and hence to the wider motorway network.

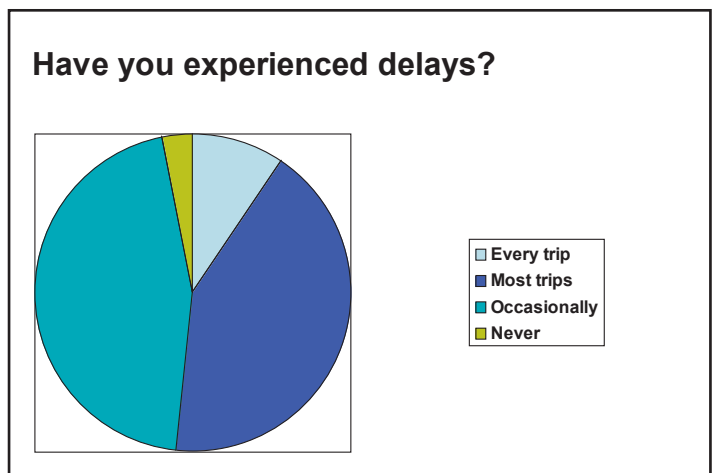
Of those using the A12 only 2% had never experienced delays during their journey while 10% experienced delays on every journey and a further 42% experiencing delays on

most journeys.

Between them the respondents experienced an average of 38 minutes delay with the longest delay being 240 minutes (4 hours).

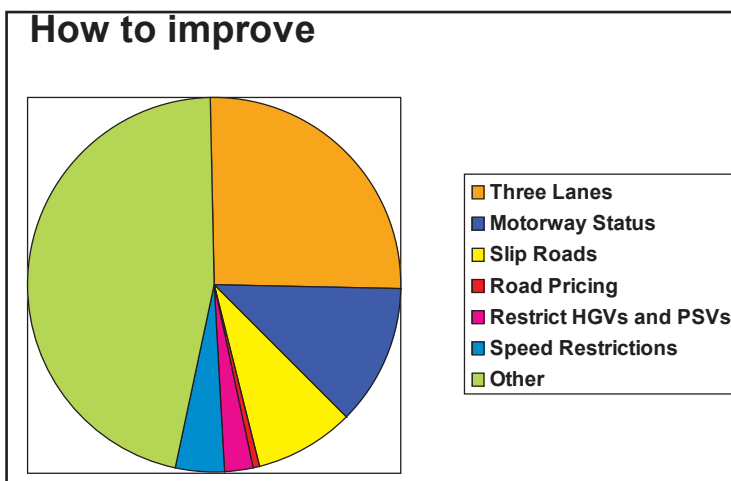
The average cost of the delays was £54.49 with the highest one-off cost being £1900.00 with one respondent claiming delays cost £340 per week - £17,680 per year.

Suppliers trying to reach respondent were delayed in 60% of cases and 47% of the respondents reported that customers had been delayed reaching them due to the A12. The cost of such delays on the suppliers, the customers and the Essex businesses they were working with is impossible to accurately forecast but over the course of a year must total many thousands of pounds.



Suggested solutions

Suggestions were invited on what improvements could be made to solve the traffic congestion problems on the A12 and an extensive list of ideas was received.



The most supported improvements was upgrading the A12 to three lanes for its full length with 47% of respondents recommending this as a course of action with 37% calling for motorway status.

Additional slip roads to allow traffic leaving the A12 to queue without impacting on traffic flow and to allow traffic joining the A12 to merge in to the traffic flow more easily were supported by 10% of respondents.

Other popular suggestions were restricting which lanes HGVs and PSVs could use with 3% supporting such moves. Changes in speed restrictions were supported by 4% of respondents. Road pricing received less than 1%.

Other suggestions include improved lighting, fewer traffic lights, especially at junctions such as M25 where they are blamed for queues on the A12 and speedier clearing of the road following accidents.

WORKING FOR BUSINESSES IN ESSEX

To simplify data analysis the A12 was divided into sections based on the main town by passed by that stretch of road. The majority of journeys recorded seem to be from North East to South West

Less than 1% of journeys continued inside the M25 and less than 5% terminated north of Ipswich.

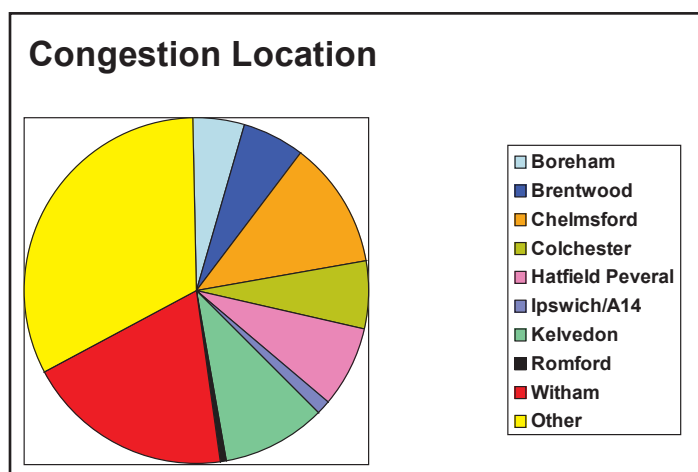
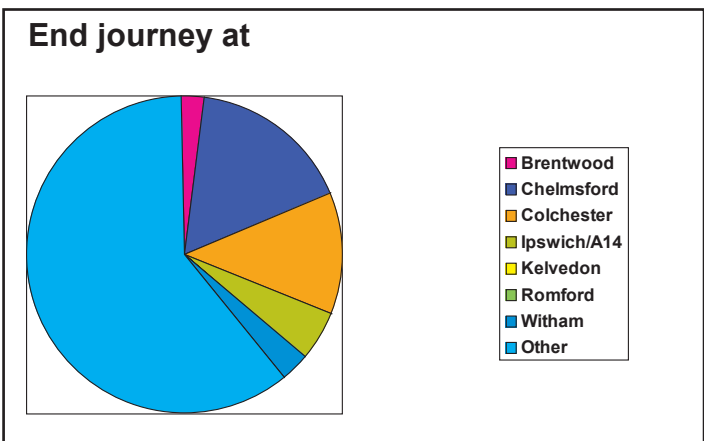
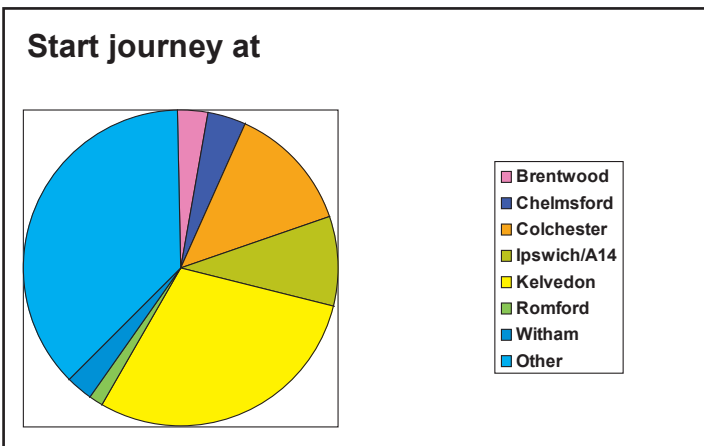
The FSB data suggests that improving the A12 within Essex will bring the maximum benefit for most users.

an increase in overhead traffic information signs alerting drivers well in advance of problems occurring ahead so alternative routes could be sought.

Large volumes of traffic accounted for 31% of the delays.



The causes of congestion were located along most of the A12 with the main areas being the two lane stretches at Witham where 19% of reported incidents occurred and Chelmsford where 12% of reported incidents occurred.

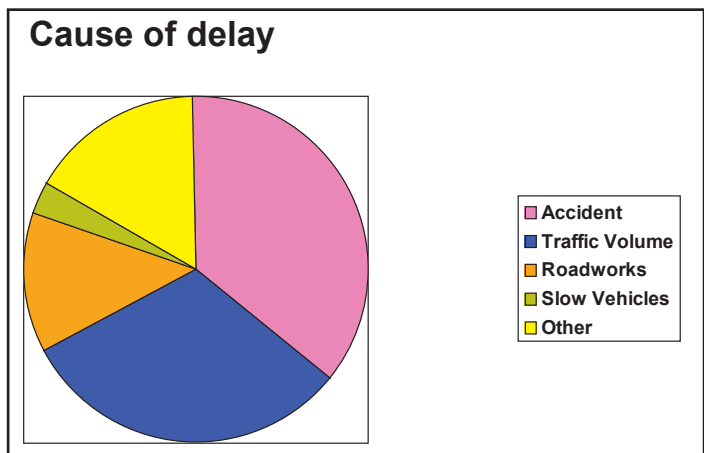


Accidents accounted for 37% of recorded delays which reflects the fact that in 2006-2007 there were 5,976 incidents on the A12 according to Essex Police.

That averages 30 accidents per day with around one in three Road Traffic accidents in Essex being on the A12.

Respondents called for better information regarding delays including improve use of traffic reports on local radios and

Poor lane discipline at the M25 junction by traffic exiting the A12 at that location and similarly at the A14 interchange was a source of major frustration by road users wishing to continue their journey beyond that exit who found all lanes blocked by vehicles wishing to exit.



SLIP ROADS

There was a strong belief that the new slip road from the M25 to the northbound A12 at Brentwood was proving successful in easing congestion and allowing traffic to merge on to the A12 more easily.



It was felt that additional sliproads allowing traffic to merge in a similar way could be installed.

Suggested locations for such slip roads included the Boreham interchange, Hatfield Peveral, Witham and Kelvedon.



FSB RECOMMENDATION:

That consideration is given to provision of additional dedicated slip roads allowing traffic to merge on to the A12 at key congestion locations.



The slip road west bound from the A12 on to the A14 at Ipswich was also thought to help ease congestion as were the slip roads north bound at Hatfield Peveral and at Colchester.



FSB RECOMMENDATION:

That consideration is given to provision of additional dedicated slip roads off the A12 at key congestion locations.

HGV CONTROL

Heavy Goods Vehicles in the over taking lane were a source of major frustration for many motorists as they did not have the necessary speed to overtake quickly and hence congestion was created behind them.

Buses and coaches also created similar problems.

The motorists behind may often then take unnecessary risks in terms of speed and acceleration to try and make up for lost time.



The problem was particularly exacerbated during the rush hour periods when the volume of traffic was particularly high.

A number of solutions were suggested to alleviate this problem including restricting such vehicles to the nearside lane or restricting them to use the A12 only at certain times of the day.

Both of these suggestions on their own seem extreme but by combining them the congestion caused by all available lanes having slow moving vehicles in them could be reduced.

Restricting the use of the outside lane during the main day time periods seemed to be the best option.

Consideration was given to such a ban during rush hour periods only but it was felt that the potential for confusion, particularly for non-UK national drivers, could lead to an increase in accidents and hence a day time ban would be preferable.



FSB RECOMMENDATION:

That heavy goods vehicles and public service vehicles are banned from using the outside lane of the A12 between 6.00am and 8.00pm.

PROPOSED IMPROVEMENTS

EXTRA LANE - MOTORWAY?

There was overwhelming support for the A12 to be made three lanes for its full length throughout Essex and beyond with strong support for motorway status to be awarded to the road.



The cost of full motorway status with hard shoulders in both directions would be expensive and in some areas would not be practical due to the close location of residential and commercial properties which would prevent the purchase of the necessary land.

Similarly the cost and environmental implications of creating a new M12 motorway following a parallel route to the A12 make such a scheme almost impossible to achieve even if it is thought such a new motorway was desirable.



Where three lanes exist on the A12 it provides an opportunity at exits along those stretches for a dedicated filter lane to take traffic on and off the A12.

Where used correctly these extra lanes allow for traffic continuing along the A12 to flow smoothly and without difficulty as shown in the photograph above.

Where motorists exiting the A12 use all available lanes and a problem then occurs on the exit slip road it can result in no through traffic continuing along the A12 as shown in the

photograph below taken at the M25 interchange Where the lanes reduce from three to two and eventually to one and where an accident on the M25 had halted traffic.

Traffic on the slip road was solid with no space to move forward and poor lane discipline by motorists on the A12 meant both A12 lanes were blocked by vehicles trying to exit on to the M25 or A1023 making it impossible for north bound traffic to continue.



FSB RECOMMENDATION:

That consideration is given to making the A12 three lanes in both directions for its full length within Essex with, where possible, additional lanes for on and off slip roads at key congestion locations.



FSB RECOMMENDATION:

That additional variable signs be installed along the A12 to provide motorists with information regarding forthcoming delays well in advance of the delay and suggesting alternative routes to be used.



FSB RECOMMENDATION:

That additional static signs be installed of the "Get in the right lane" variety to encourage motorists to use the near side lane only to exit the A12.

SPEED LIMIT

Variable speed limits were seen as a relatively low cost way of managing traffic flow and enabling a steady speed to be achieved rather than stop/start traffic flow. Smooth flow of traffic (see photograph below) reduces driver stress and enables journeys to be completed in better time.



FSB RECOMMENDATION:



That consideration is given to provision of variable speed limit signs and the careful use of such signs to manage traffic flow effectively.

LIGHTING

Reducing the number of accidents on the A12 was seen as a significant way of reducing delays.

Concern was expressed about the stretches of the A12 which do not have lighting as it was felt that good lighting was a major safety bonus.



FSB RECOMMENDATION:

That energy efficient lighting be installed on both carriageways of the A12 for its full length and that such lights

should be designed to have minimum light intrusion on the environment.

ROAD PRICING

Road pricing was one option provided on the survey form and it was selected by less than 1% of the respondents as being a suitable way of reducing traffic on the A12.

It was felt that with no major alternative route road pricing would simply become an additional tax on motorists who were already paying significant levels of tax with little of that tax revenue finding its way back to investment in improved highway networks.

FSB RECOMMENDATION:



That road pricing or other tax raising schemes (eg Business Rate Supplement) be rejected as ways of funding improvements to the A12.

INTERCHANGES

Interchanges were identified as significant congestion 'hot spots' yet where work had been undertaken to make the interchanges more driver friendly previous problems had been eased if not eliminated - such as the Mountnessing interchange pictured below..

Badly designed interchanges, such as Boreham, were seen as major causes of congestion.

There was support for more dedicated exit slip roads at interchanges with particular demand for such a road off the A12 to join the M25 clockwise at Brentwood.



FSB RECOMMENDATION:



That all interchanges along the A12 be examined in detail and where necessary adjusted to encourage the freer flow of traffic using the interchange and in particular for traffic exiting and joining the A12.

WORKING FOR BUSINESSES IN ESSEX

Partnerships Needed

While accepting the Inquiry has been set up by Essex County Council, and hence is concentrating on the 53.5 miles of the A12 from the M25 through to Ipswich.

The FSB believes recognition MUST be given to the problems caused at the Copdock interchange at Ipswich where the A12 meets the A14 and at Gallows Corner in Romford where it meets the A127.

Improving the A12 in Essex simply to increase the problems at the county's borders is not a solution which is in the overall best interests of those using the A12.

The FSB believes partnerships are needed with Suffolk County Council and with the London Boroughs of Havering and Redbridge so a joint approach can be made to tackle the problems of the A12.

Approaches should also be made to Transport for London and the Greater London Assembly Member for Havering and Redbridge to gain their support.

The Sub Economic Regional Partnerships, such as Haven

Gateway for Suffolk and Thames Gateway for the London stretch of the A12, also have a role to play.

The East of England Development Agency, Government Office East and other relevant regional organisations should also be approached for support.

The FSB is keen to use its contacts to help lobby and broker stake holder meetings with such organisations.



■ Closing the Gallows Corner flyover for repairs led to major congestion on the A12 leading back to the M25.

The Essex FSB Survey Team



IAN CASS

Essex FSB's Transport Spokesman and a member of the FSB's East of England Policy Unit.

Ian is a businessman who lives and works in Witham so is a regular user of the A12.



DAVID BURCH

As the FSB East of England Area Policy Manager David is the expert on policy issues for East Anglia and drew on the resources of the specialist Transport Policy Team at the FSB's London office to support the survey work.



TERRY TABER

Terry is the FSB's Essex Regional Organiser and took responsibility for issuing the survey and collecting the results ready for analysis.

His expertise was used to develop the on line survey.



KEITH BROWN

Essex FSB's Regional Secretary and a member of the FSB's East of England Policy Unit Keith is a businessman who lives and works in Brentwood so is a regular user of the A12. His statistics background was useful in analysing the data.

Summary of recommendations



FSB RECOMMENDATION ONE:

That consideration is given to provision of additional dedicated slip roads allowing traffic to merge on to the A12 at key congestion locations.



FSB RECOMMENDATION TWO:

That consideration is given to provision of additional dedicated slip roads off the A12 at key congestion locations.



FSB RECOMMENDATION THREE:

That heavy goods vehicles and public service vehicles are banned from using the outside lane of the A12 between 6.00am and 8.00pm.



FSB RECOMMENDATION FOUR:

That consideration is given to making the A12 three lanes in both directions for its full length within Essex with, where possible, additional lanes for on and off slip roads at key congestion locations.



FSB RECOMMENDATION FIVE:

That additional variable signs be installed along the A12 to provide motorists with information regarding forthcoming delays well in advance of the delay and suggesting alternative routes to be used.



FSB RECOMMENDATION SIX:

That additional static signs be installed of the “Get in the right lane” variety to encourage motorists to use the near side lane only to exit the A12.



FSB RECOMMENDATION SEVEN:

That consideration is given to provision of variable speed limit signs and the careful use of such signs to manage traffic flow effectively.



FSB RECOMMENDATION EIGHT:

That energy efficient lighting be installed on both carriageways of the A12 for its full length and that such lights should be designed to have minimum light intrusion on the environment.



FSB RECOMMENDATION NINE:

That road pricing or other tax raising schemes (eg Business Rate Supplement) be rejected as ways of funding improvements to the A12.



FSB RECOMMENDATION TEN:

That all interchanges along the A12 be examined in detail and where necessary adjusted to encourage the freer flow of traffic using the interchange and in particular for traffic exiting and joining the A12.