

Contractors appointed to controversial A303 Stonehenge tunnel scheme

National Highways has appointed an international group of construction companies to carry controversial works to the A303 in the South West.

The £1.7bn upgrade of the road between Amesbury and Berwick Down includes a two-mile-long tunnel under Stonehenge.

The Government-owned organisation's preferred bidder for the scheme is a joint venture – known as MORE JV – that comprises Spain's FCC Construcción, Italian business WeBuild and Austria-headquartered BeMo Tunnelling.

The consortium has been lined up for the £1.25bn contract to deliver the tunnel and main construction work. MORE JV will work with a design consortium including Atkins, Jacobs and Spanish designer Sener, acting as the design joint venture, National Highways said.

The main works contract covers the construction of the proposed tunnel's civil, structural, mechanical, electrical and technology components, including the tunnel boring machine. It also includes the approach roadworks and structures, and the environmental components of the five-year construction phase.

The planning application for the transformational scheme is still awaiting sign off from transport secretary Grant Shapps after a [High Court decision to block the plans in 2021](#). In a victory for campaigners against the scheme, Mr Justice Holgate ruled the minister's decision was "unlawful" due to a lack of evidence for the impact on the historic site and a failure to consider alternatives.

The announcement in August last year was called a ["body blow"](#) by South West business groups, which said the upgrade would bring billions of pounds of investment to the region's economy.

National Highways said the appointment of a preferred bidder on Thursday, May 26, "in no way" pre-empted any decision by Mr Shapps.

Derek Parody, National Highways' project director for the A303 Stonehenge scheme, said the contract would only become "live" once the transport secretary had concluded the planning process.

"Once that is finalised, and should the development consent order be granted, having a contractor in place will put us in the strongest possible position to deliver this transformational scheme and deliver the benefits we know it can," he said.

"The scheme will not only unlock congestion along this vital A303 route, but also conserve and enhance the outstanding universal value of the World Heritage Site."

To prepare for the construction phase, National Highways said it had been "working closely" with the Swindon and Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership; South West chamber of commerce Business West; the Federation of Small Businesses; Salisbury and District Chamber of Commerce; and Salisbury BID; and had also partnered nationally with the Supply Chain Sustainability School to provide free online training.

According to National Highways, the preliminary work will provide initial opportunities for local, regional and national companies within the first six months of construction starting.

The contracts for archaeology and enabling preliminary work were announced in 2020, as part of the total £1.7bn capital

cost of the scheme. Wessex Archaeology, one of the largest contractors in the sector, were awarded the £35m archaeological mitigation contract; and Octavius Infrastructure (formerly Osborne) were awarded the £8.5m preliminary works contract.

National Highways said it was also finalising the process to award a delivery assurance partner contract, up to the value of £60m.

Proposed upgrade of A303

- eight miles of free-flowing dual carriageway;
- a tunnel at least two miles long underneath the World Heritage Site, closely following the existing A303 route, but a further 50 metres away from the Stonehenge monument;
- a new bypass to the north of the village of Winterbourne Stoke;
- junctions with the A345 and A360 either side of the World Heritage Site

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