

Mega prison traffic: coming to your village

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Introduction: The findings in this note are principally derived from a Transport Assessment Technical Report¹ and a Transport Assessment Scoping Update² both written by AtkinsRéalis³ on behalf of Essex County Council (ECC) and National Highways (NH). Along with a range of other related documents, these were recently obtained by The Fields Association (TFA) through a Freedom of Information Request (FOI) and are therefore now in the public domain.

These reports form part of ongoing Pre-Planning Highways Scoping preparations for the proposed twin Mega Prison complex at the former RAF Wethersfield. They are testament to the fact that the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) is continuing its preparations for a submission of a planning permission application at the site, even though it is currently being used by the Home Office for an Asylum Centre.

It is important to note that data cited in this note is official, not speculation on behalf of TFA or the author. Moreover, the projections relate to when the prisons are operational. They will therefore apply in perpetuity, not just during the construction phase.

Traffic volumes: Based on a total prison population of 3,430⁴, a staff to prisoner ratio of 0.5 and various other assumptions regarding the number of staff on site at any one time, the number of daily visitors and modes of transport⁵, the reports forecast 2,276 daily staff journeys, 538 visitor journeys and 140 additional daily HGV trips⁶.

This staggering total of nearly **3,000** extra vehicles on our village roads is based on a standard model used by the MOJ for all its planning applications and confirms previous analysis by the Wethersfield Airbase Scrutiny Committee (WASC) conducted in 2023⁷.

It would mean that current village traffic volumes effectively double.

Traffic timings: However, reading through the entire series of FOI documents, there seems to be less official concern with this total than with its distribution throughout the day. As most staff work set shifts, there will be a significant spike in traffic from 7 to 9am and around 5pm - far higher than current volumes.

A Transport Assessment looks at the capacity of the road network to allow traffic flow to continue at a 'reasonable' pace by focusing on specific junctions (such as the Coggeshall Road roundabout or Finchingfield Bridge) during these peaks.

The impacts of greater traffic volumes (and their timings) on residents, schools, pedestrian safety, buildings (heritage or otherwise), pollution or greenhouse gas emissions are entirely absent. For residents, these are particularly concerning when we look at projected routes.

¹ Technical Note 1/30, RAF Wethersfield, Pre-Application Highways Scoping 5200124 Ministry of Justice Dec 2023

² RAF Wethersfield TA Scoping Update 25/07/23

³ The company describes itself as "a world-leading design, engineering, and project management organization" [About us – AtkinsRéalis \(atkinsrealis.com\)](https://atkinsrealis.com)

⁴ One Category B prison of 1,715 inmates and one Category C prison of 1,715 inmates

⁵ Debateable assumptions here include: 8% of people will share a car and that travel to work data can be used to gauge prison family visitor origins.

⁶ pp66-69 TECHNICAL NOTE 1/30, RAF Wethersfield, Pre-Application Highways Scoping 5200124 Ministry of Justice

⁷ People and place Are rural Mega prisons in the Local Socio-economic Interest? Richard Sidebottom on behalf of the Wethersfield Airbase Scrutiny Committee, (WASC) Technical Sub-committee, Updated February, 2023 <https://www.thefieldsassociation.org/research-papers>

Traffic routes: Owing to the nature of prison jobs on offer (usually low skilled) and the make up of the local working population⁸, the Prison Service would have to recruit from a very wide catchment area. The reports concede that very few jobs will be created for local people.

Therefore, the reports use a 50-mile radius from the proposed prison site – an area of nearly 8,000 square miles! Most trips originate outside Braintree district. So, it is not just Finchingfield or Wethersfield that face more traffic.

The reports use various approaches to estimate where workers are likely to travel in from. Its model then estimates how many people will use each one of 69 (!) possible routes to Wethersfield. This enables us to look at the specific impact where we live.

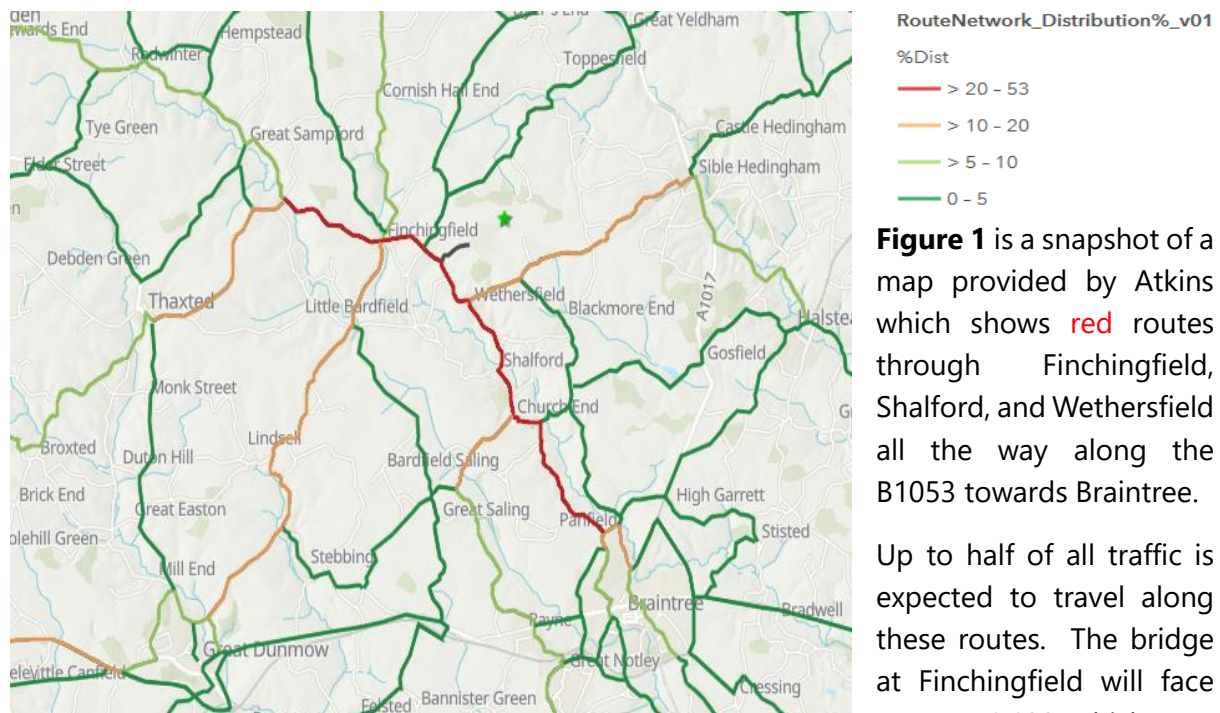


Figure 1: Staff and visitor traffic routes

Figure 1 is a snapshot of a map provided by Atkins which shows **red** routes through Finchingfield, Shalford, and Wethersfield all the way along the B1053 towards Braintree.

Up to half of all traffic is expected to travel along these routes. The bridge at Finchingfield will face an extra 1,100 vehicles per day, including 50 HGVs.

Those coloured in **orange** see slightly less but these include more than 400 extra trips along Rectory Road and Wethersfield Road, Sible Hedingham past the Church and Bus garage, and over 500 trying to traverse Great Bardfield’s single lane bridge.

The data also reveals a ‘spider’s web’ of 1,600 extra trips from the South and East along already congested routes in and around Braintree (including 400 through the narrow streets of Bocking) and a web that reaches South and West as far as Witham, Great Dunmow and beyond.

Using the data and maps provided in the FOI documents, we can identify the precise percentage of daily traffic by village, road, and junction. The following table (**Table 1**) and graphics (**Figure 2 & 3**) highlight the projected impacts in selected sites in our area. The numbers are quite alarming.

⁸ People and place Are rural Mega prisons in the Local Socio-economic Interest? Richard Sidebottom on behalf of the Wethersfield Airbase Scrutiny Committee, (WASC) Technical Sub-committee, Updated February, 2023 <https://www.thefieldsassociation.org/research-papers>

Table 1: Traffic volumes on specific roads

Location	Road	%	Cars	HGVs	Daily total
Bocking	Broad Rd	5%	141	7	148
	Church Lane	12%	339	17	356
	Deanery Hill	13%	367	18	385
	Bovingdon Rd	2%	47	2	49
	Panfield Lane	7%	199	10	208
Braintree	Coggeshall Rd	6%	169	8	178
	Coggeshall Rd	6%	173	9	182
	Manor St	6%	173	9	182
	Aetheric Rd	7%	198	10	208
	Courtauld Rd	7%	198	10	208
	Bradford St	7%	198	10	208
Bran End	B1057	15%	429	21	451
Bulmer Tye	Hedingham Rd	4%	113	6	119
Bumpsteads	HB Water Lane	1%	28	1	30
	SB Haverhill Rd	5%	128	6	135
	SB Finchingfield Rd	6%	175	9	183
Castle Hedingham	Queen St	4%	124	6	130
Coggeshall	A120	4%	113	6	119
Cornish Hall End	B1057	6%	175	9	183
Duck End	B1057	15%	429	21	451
Earls Colne	A1124	5%	130	6	136
Finchingfield	Causeway	7%	184	9	193
	B1057 Bardfield Rd	17%	480	24	504
	B1053 Brent Hall Rd	20%	565	28	593
	Bridge	37%	1,051	53	1,104
Gosfield	The Street	3%	76	4	80
Great Bardfield	Dunmow Road	15%	424	21	445
	B1057 Bridge End	17%	480	24	504
Great Dunmow	Woodside Way	10%	280	14	294
	B1057 Broadway	15%	412	21	433
Great Notley	A131	8%	227	11	238
Great Yeldham	A1017	2%	56	3	59
Halstead	Hedingham Rd	6%	176	9	185
Haverhill	B1057	5%	128	6	135
Oxen End	B1057	15%	429	21	451
Panfield	B1053	24%	678	34	712
Radwinter	B1053	8%	234	12	246
Rayne	Shalford Rd	8%	212	11	222
Salings	Bardfield Rd	2%	45	2	48
	Hyde Cottage	3%	84	4	88
	Shalford Rd	8%	212	11	223
Sampfords	B1051 Thaxted Rd	1%	36	2	37
	B1053 past Howe Lane	8%	226	11	237
	B1053 past school	9%	261	13	274
	Little Sampford Hall rd	11%	313	16	329
	B1053 outskirts	20%	576	29	605
Shalford	Church end	10%	282	14	297
	B1053 Braintree Rd	27%	762	38	801
	George Pub	37%	1,045	52	1,097
Sible Hedingham	Station Rd	4%	123	6	129
	Swan St	6%	175	9	184
	Rectory Rd	14%	407	20	427
Stambourne	Church Rd	1%	16	1	16
	Finchingfield Rd	1%	32	2	34
Thaxted	Bardfield Rd	11%	302	15	317
Toppesfield	Gt Yeldham Rd	2%	56	3	59
Wethersfield	Hedingham Rd	16%	452	23	474
	B1053 Braintree rd	37%	1,045	52	1,097
	Silver St	53%	1,507	75	1,582

Figure 2: Traffic volumes in local villages

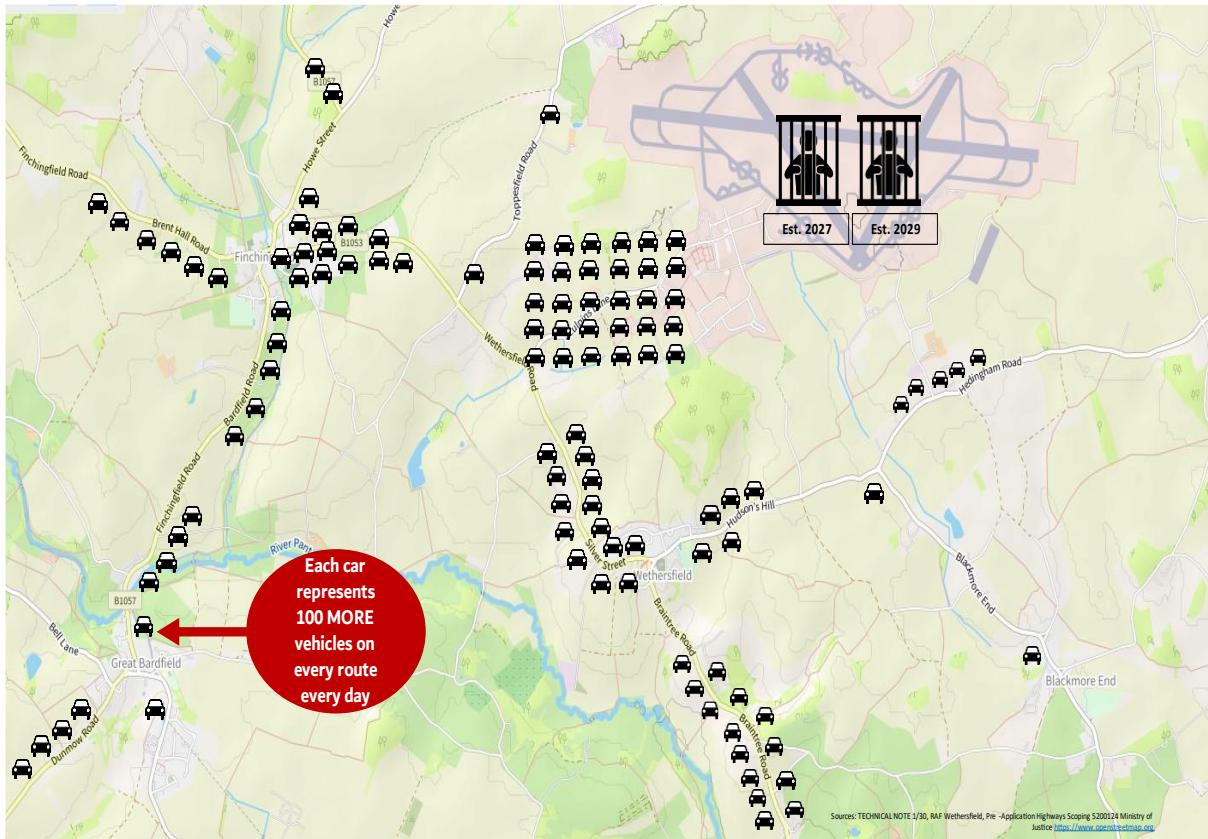


Figure 3: Traffic volumes in the wider area

