

Dear RAPID,

I am deeply disappointed that the RAPID gated process, designed to make decisions on the key strategic infrastructure projects, has not apparently made much in the way of decisions.

If we are going to all-but “nod through” all the major projects, we should certainly treat them as interconnected in terms of their costs, benefits, issues, and challenges. All of the water transfer projects, for example, HAVE to be interconnected if they are intended to fulfil the NIC key recommendation to provide a National Grid of water.

The major projects for my area are SESRO, STT, and Thames to Southern Water Transfer and these are the key areas on which my comments are made.

I am going to frame my comments in a way that should be prominent in the minds of all of us: what will we tell the next generation? What will be our legacy? It has been mentioned that “we want to be on the right side of history.” What will be the story that history tells? Short-term benefit to any companies or individuals will be hugely eclipsed by the repercussions that our decisions will have on millions of people for generations to come.

Because if we make an obviously bad decision here – a decision where a reasonable person would see it is wrong and damaging – the future will not have mercy. And it is a characteristic of the human condition that they *will* search for the “Guilty Men [and women].”

This is, of course, of particular focus upon such people as the Managing Director of RAPID, the CEO of Ofwat, the CEO and Chair of the Environment Agency, and all on the RAPID Board, as they will be the initial targets for any search for the guilty and blame to be put upon them. Scrutiny will even fall on wider stakeholders and all consultees, as we failed to prevent the bad decisions – could we have tried harder and done more? We are all potentially “in the dock” should a bad outcome come to pass.

History, and the next generation, will demand answers to a number of questions. Questions like:

- Why did we insist on using population projection figures that we **knew** were obsolete and excessive (ONS16 and the projections that descended from it, such as the Housing projection figures - rather than ONS20)? Especially given that this was flagged up repeatedly by interested parties throughout the RAPID process.
- Why did we put in excessive abstraction reduction targets and then plan to only achieve them decades down the line? Comparing the work of Chalk-Streams First with the output of this process shows just how bad are the inputs and solutions of this process – and we will have to explain our choices here to the next generation and we will be remembered by history.
- Why did we schedule the water transfers from the wet to the dry parts of the country to come in AFTER such projects as SESRO? Every strategic water resource study for literally half a century has highlighted these as essential and the highest and earliest priority!
- Why did we ignore what was already known about megaprojects (that monolithic and inflexible megaprojects have a 90% chance of being over budget, over time, and under delivering, whilst flexible and modular projects are those far more likely to be delivered on time and budget whilst delivering the intended benefits)?

- Why, then, was an inflexible and monolithic megaproject (SESRO) given the go ahead to be scheduled first rather than a flexible and modular one (STT), especially when the latter (STT) looked to be able to provide all the water needed, at minimal disruption and environmental impact, and able to be scaled up and down even as the project got under way? How on Earth can this process have pushed “right” the STT – delivering the strategic need to transfer water from the wetter and less populated north and west to the dry South East?
- Why did we pass SESRO through the decision-making system so far before provision of such essential information as the flood risk modelling – especially seeing that all previous modelling resulted in considerable increases in flood risk for Abingdon and surrounding areas? How on earth, after all this time and money spent, can the flood risk modelling be “still under review”? How can we pass this project through to Gate Three with this information STILL outstanding? Surely we **must** have answers on this before allowing it through?
- Why, instead, was so much work done on making SESRO look simply like a large marina (omitting any explanation of how the significant INNS issues might be overcome)?
- Why was no work apparently done on the microclimate effects of such a large and raised body of water inland and placed next to a major arterial road route (such as evaporation fogs and radiative fogs coupled with katabatic winds).
- Why were leakage reduction figures for Oxfordshire of only 14% considered acceptable when reduction of 50% would clear so much of the water need (even with the excessive population projections)? This would be deliverable progressively and far more quickly.
- Why did we accept the argument that SESRO would be useful against droughts from climate change? The figures given by Thames Water indicate that SESRO would only be useful to combat droughts from climate change if the most extreme assumptions were followed. Crucially, though, to predict output in such a drought, TW had to use the **median** climate change model. This implies that if SESRO is necessary for climate change, it will not be effective; if it were to be effective, it would not be necessary. I find it impossible to be able to explain this to the next generation.
- Why was the work on STT evaluation split between multiple teams (STT itself, Minworth WTW study, and Severn-Trent strategic sources study)? The aspects of the proposals cannot be properly evaluated. The mission statement of RAPID is to “identify and address issues relevant to the development of joint infrastructure projects and to analyse the feasibility of nationally strategic supply schemes” – treating them holistically is an obvious fundamental element of this!

We will be asked these questions if SESRO goes ahead and remains scheduled before STT.

The thing that makes all of this particularly difficult to explain is that there has been an obvious best option throughout: start work on STT and its various sources (as well as other water transfer schemes in a holistic approach) and aim to scale up or down as we go, as better information comes in about population growth and climate change. Given that these water transfers have been the recommendation of the National Infrastructure Commission and before them, Water UK, the

National Rivers Authority, and the Water Resources Board, we cannot plausibly say we did not realise this.

Unlike SESRO, STT is not solely reliant on a water-stressed river in a water-stressed region. Unlike SESRO, it provides new water to the water-stressed and highly populated South East. Unlike SESRO, it is modular and flexible (and thus more quickly and reliably deliverable, as well as being able to be rescaled as more information comes in on such things as population growth and climate change). Unlike SESRO, the faster potential output could provide scope for abstraction reductions to be achieved far sooner. Unlike SESRO, there is no potential for elevating flood risk in populated areas, or of the much higher environmental damage and disruption that SESRO will inevitably cause.

All of this is well known. Why, then, can we claim to posterity that “the process” indicated that we shouldn’t follow that route?

I fear that we will end up in a future where SESRO is a massive, expensive, damaging, disruptive, and eventually unnecessary “white elephant,” (or even begun and never completed, following many years of disruption and construction, with huge amounts of money thrown into it and the carbon cost incurred), and we will certainly end up on “the wrong side of history.”

When such things happen, the most cynical views on motives are invariably those that come to the fore. Our successors will certainly decide that the key motives involved a desire to provide a return on Regulated Capital Value to water companies such as Thames Water. Any movement of key personnel into water companies following these decisions will be seized upon by history and highlighted as circumstantial evidence of corruption, regardless of actual motives.

This leaves anyone prominent in the process with the uncomfortable dilemma of either accepting significant restrictions on their future employment, or having a considerably elevated risk of being named as a key scapegoat for the outcome. This is not how I would like to be remembered.

We all wish to leave a legacy. The way the process has continually ignored many of the concerns raised as described above is very disappointing, and looks to lead to a future where the legacy we leave is a very bad one, with bad motives ascribed to many of us.

Regards,

Cllr [redacted]

Councillor for Drayton Ward on Vale of White Horse District Council