

Strategic Transport Forum 15th September 2017

Agenda Item 3: Oxford to Cambridge Expressway

Recommendations: It is recommended that the Forum:

- a) Agree to facilitate the establishment of a spread of 'expressway stakeholder groups' as part of a wider set of stakeholder reference forums covering the functional spectrum – 'expressway stakeholder group' membership to include representatives from local transport authorities, local planning authorities and local enterprise partnerships – to work with Highways England and the project team.
- b) Agree to support the establishment of a 'strategic stakeholder group', on which it is proposed that England's Economic Heartland will sit as a full member, which will guide the reference forums and report to the Project Committee.
- c) Agree to work with Highways England and the project team to arrive at a common understanding and agreement as to the strategic objectives that form the basis for making the public sector making the investment.
- d) Agree that the strategic issues set out in Section 4 need to be considered in more detail in arriving at a common understanding and agreement on the strategic objectives.
- e) Support the need for a wider 'stakeholder reference group' as part of the project control framework process.
- f) Continue to press Government on the national significance of prioritising funding to enable delivery of the 'expressway' as part Government's support for realising the 'once-in-a-generation' opportunity to improve connectivity in support of growth.¹

1. Purpose

- 1.1. The 'expressway' is a key strategic transport project for the Heartland area, and was identified by the National Infrastructure Commission as an integral element of the once-in-a-generation opportunity to create a multi-modal spine that transforms east-west connectivity. The project team will provide an update on the study and outline the approach moving forward, with the subsequent discussion an opportunity for the Forum to identify strategic issues it expects to be addressed.

¹ Whilst the 'expressway' is primarily a piece of transport infrastructure its purpose is to enable delivery of planned and future transformational growth (economic and housing). It is therefore essential that any collaborative working arrangement fully involves local transport authorities, local planning authorities, and local enterprise partnerships.

2. Context

- 2.1. The Oxford to Cambridge Expressway was originally one of six 'strategic studies' identified in the first Highways England Roads Investment Strategy. The intention being that the output from these studies would subsequently inform the development of the second Road Investment Strategy
- 2.2. Consultants WSP were appointed to undertake the initial study. An initial report was published in August 2016. This outlined the high level case for a strategic link to connect the key urban centres across the wider corridor. At that stage the consultants concluded that:
- a) Within the primary study area the east-west road route linking Oxford, Milton Keynes and Cambridge is of variable standard.
 - b) The route provides an important regional and sub-regional function, linking the fast growing Oxford, Milton Keynes and Cambridge functional economic areas.
 - c) Due to the current lack of east-west transport connectivity, there are low levels of strategic long-distance movements along the primary east-west route within the study area.
 - d) Sections of the route interchange with, and form important strategic routes for freight traffic.
- 2.3. The final (stage 3) report of that initial report was published in November 2016. This built upon the earlier stages of the study and identified three options to complete the 'missing link' between the M1 and M40:
- A southern option A via Aylesbury, linking to the M1 south of Milton Keynes;
 - A central option B, following the east-west rail corridor; *and*
 - A northern option C, roughly following the existing A421 to the south of Bicester and via Buckingham to the east of Milton Keynes.
- 2.4. In November 2016 the National Infrastructure Commission identified the 'expressway' as an integral element of a new multi-modal spine (one that combined East West Railway and the 'Expressway'). The Commission identified the delivery of the multi-modal spine as a 'once-in-a-generation' opportunity. It's recommendation to Government was:
- Recommendation 6: The government should commit £27m to the end of 2018/19 to fund the next phase of development work on the Oxford-Cambridge Expressway study, allowing the detailed design process to begin as soon as possible.*
- *Highways England should work with relevant local authorities to develop and assess the potential Expressway options and develop a proposal which maximises the scheme's potential to unlock housing growth and connect it to local and regional labour markets, alongside delivering wider benefits.*
 - *The Commission will support this process as part of the second phase of the Cambridge-Milton Keynes-Oxford study.*

- 2.5. The Government's response to the Commission's Interim Report (set out in the 2016 Autumn Statement) confirmed the commitment to the next phase of the development work.
- 2.6. Highways England has now let the contract to undertake the next phase of development work. The project team will present to this meeting their programme of work.

3. Engagement in the Project

- 3.1. Delivery of the 'expressway' as part of the multi-modal spine is an important part of the strategic infrastructure that will enable the economic opportunity identified by the National Infrastructure Commission.
- 3.2. As such it is important to ensure that it is not seen as simply a piece of transport infrastructure but rather a strategic element of national infrastructure that will enable transformational growth for local, regional and national benefit. Consequently, in taking the study forward, it is imperative that the work is shaped by consideration of opportunities for economic and housing growth.
- 3.3. This makes it essential that there is a framework for collaboration between the local partners (local transport authorities, local planning authorities and local enterprise partnerships), Highways England and the project team.
- 3.4. Local partners across the Heartland have experience of the strength of collaborative working with national agencies in relation to the East West Rail. Inclusive working arrangements involving all the local partners operate at both officer and elected member level, allowing local partners to be an integral part of the scheme development process.
- 3.5. It is proposed that the Forum look to build on this experience and seek a similar level of collaborative working. It is proposed that the Forum facilitate an 'expressway stakeholder group' as a key engagement platform for the project, within a wider set of stakeholder reference forums that will provide engagement opportunities across the functional spectrum (e.g. Local Authorities, Growth and Development, Customers, Environmental, etc.) The 'expressway stakeholder group' would include representatives from local transport authorities, local planning authorities, and local enterprise partnerships affected by the 'expressway' proposal.²
- 3.6. The 'stakeholder group' reference forums would provide the platform upon which the local partners, Highways England, and the project team work collaboratively. The working arrangements would need to provide for both officer and elected member discussions (as is the case with East West Rail). There are likely to be specific issues that the project team will need to discuss in more detail with individual partners (again as is the case with East West Rail). However experience shows that the benefit of a 'stakeholder group' along the lines outlined will add

² The full membership of each 'expressway stakeholder' forum is still being developed; however, it may be more appropriate for Local Enterprise Partnerships to belong to the 'growth and development forum', whilst still being represented on a 'local authorities forum'.

value to ensuring the strategic importance of developing and delivering investment remains the key focus.

- 3.7. As part of the original strategic study there was a wider stakeholder reference group. This provided a forum in which the original study team was able to share with a much wider audience progress with that study. The project team has grasped the critical need to continue with wider stakeholder engagement and is therefore currently working up a proposal that would see the spread of 'expressway stakeholder group' reference forums sit below a 'strategic stakeholder group' that would guide the 'reference group' and the higher Project Committee³. It is likely that England's Economic Heartland will be offered a seat on this 'strategic stakeholder group' as a full member. For the sake of coherence, these stakeholder groups will supersede the 'expressway stakeholder reference group' that was stood up to inform WSP's initial study that reported its findings last year.

4. Strategic Issues for Further Consideration

- 4.1. There is support in principle to the proposal set out in the National Infrastructure Commission as to the strategic importance (for the long-term future of the UK economy) of improving east-west connectivity. There is also support in principle for realising the 'once-in-a-generation' opportunity to establish a multi-modal spine across the Heartland area.
- 4.2. However, discussions with local partners subsequent to the publication of the National Infrastructure Commission's interim report have highlighted a number of strategic issues that need to be addressed as integral elements of the project team's work programme.
- 4.3. The key driver for the project has to be ensuring that there is common understanding and agreement as to the strategic objectives that form the basis for making the investment in the first instance.
- 4.4. Based on the discussions with local partners to date, the following issues are ones that need to be considered in greater detail in order to secure that common understanding:
- a) The 'missing link' – the main focus of the Stage 3 report was the identification of three options for the 'missing link' between the M1 and M40. Discussions with local partners (both transport and planning authorities) suggest that there is an urgent need to discuss with Highways England and the project team the presumption that investment in the western half of the 'expressway' should be focused on a single corridor.

Recognising the importance of using investment in infrastructure to enable the delivery of planned growth (a key theme of the National Infrastructure Commission's Interim Report) it could be argued that delivery of the strategic objectives might be realised in a more cost effective way than simply investing in a single new corridor. If a strategic objective is to enable acceleration of planned

³ Sitting below the National Infrastructure Programme Committee.

growth across the Heartland then this may be realised more effectively by using the public monies available to invest in improving a number of existing corridors along which growth is already being planned.

Even if there were agreement that delivery of the strategic objectives might be best realised by investment in the creation of a single new 'strategic corridor', there would remain the need for additional investment to link that 'spine' to the surrounding network, and through that network the areas of planned growth.

- b) The 'eastern section' – the implied assumption appears to be that delivery of the A428 Black Cat to Caxton Gibbet improvement (an existing RIS1 commitment scheduled for completion during RIS2) will result in the delivery of the 'eastern section' of the 'expressway'.

However, in looking forward it could be argued that, similar to the 'western section', there is a need to use the strategic objectives as the basis for reviewing whether in fact there is a need for further investment in order to enable the delivery of the extent of planned and future transformational growth that is desired. And, as with the 'western section', there is a need to consider whether such investment should be concentrated on a single corridor or whether there is a need for investment in a number of corridors.

- c) The Major Road Network - the National Infrastructure Commission's Interim Report identified that investment in the 'expressway' needed to form part of a multi-modal spine across the Heartland.

A step-change in connectivity will result in changes in existing travel patterns. It may also result in changes to both the current strategic housing market areas and the functional economic areas. By definition, a step-change in connectivity means that there will be a need to make informed choices on future growth and the implications for future travel patterns.

All of this will have implications for the Major Road Network across the Heartland area. The concept of a Major Road Network has been supported by the Strategic Transport Forum since the publication of the [Rees Jeffreys Road Fund report](#). In July 2017, the Department for Transport (DfT) confirmed its support for the concept and announced that it would work with the emerging Sub-national Transport Bodies nationally to develop the proposal further. The same policy announcement – the DfT's [Transport Investment Strategy](#) – also announced that Sub-national Transport Bodies would be able to seek investment for improvements to the Major Road Network from the soon to be established National Roads Fund (to be established 2020/21).

Delivery of the 'expressway' will in turn have implications for the scope of the Major Road Network across the wider corridor, and vice versa. As work is undertaken to identify the Major Road Network, there will need to be dialogue between the Strategic Transport Forum and the 'expressway' project team to ensure that each is taking account of the other.

- d) East-West Rail – as noted above the 'expressway' forms part of the multi-modal spine across the Heartland advocated by the National Infrastructure Commission. East West Rail forms the other part of that spine.

In a similar way to there being a need for a dialogue between the 'expressway' project team and the Strategic Transport Forum in respect to the Major Road Network, so there is a need for a dialogue in relation to the East West Rail project.

- e) North-South Connectivity – whilst the primary output of the project is improved east-west connectivity, by association there will be implications for north-south movements. The project team will therefore need to be mindful of the potential for second order effects of this nature.

- 4.5. All of the above serves to emphasise the critical importance of the work on the next stage of the 'expressway' being taken forward on a collaborative basis with local partners across the entire (and extensive) stakeholder community.

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