

# England's Economic Heartland Strategic Alliance Strategic Transport Forum

12<sup>th</sup> February 2016

## Agenda Item 8: Major Road Network

Recommendation:

It is recommended that the meeting:

- a) **Support the concept of a Major Road Network, and express its support for continued engagement with the Rees Jeffreys Road Fund study**
- b) **Commission work to begin developing a proposal for the Major Road Network across the Alliance area**
- c) **Invite the Rees Jeffreys Road Fund study team to brief it on their recommendations at a future meeting**

### 1. Context

- 1.1. The highway network has a key role in servicing and supporting national and sub-national economies. Just as importantly, the highway network has a key role in providing sub-national/local economies with the accessibility that enables them to prosper and grow.
- 1.2. Highways England was established in April as the company responsible for the Strategic Road Network (SRN). And whilst the network of motorways and trunk roads owned and operated by Highways England is unquestionably of strategic importance it is self-evident that a number of Local Authority owned roads have a strategic significance in terms of supporting both the national and sub-national economies.
- 1.3. It is in this context that the concept of a 'Major Road Network' is being discussed. The emerging thoughts from an independent study commissioned by the Rees Jeffreys Road Fund suggest that there is considerable merit in identifying a 'Major Road Network' – a combination of Highways England's SRN and Local Transport Authority owned roads.
- 1.4. Such a concept could be used by decision makers to inform policy development, shape implementation and investment priorities.
- 1.5. With the National Infrastructure Commission charged with taking a longer term perspective on the identification of infrastructure requirements, and with work beginning later this year on the development of the next version of the Roads Investment Strategy, the Forum has the opportunity to play a major part in contributing to this debate.

## **2. Rees Jeffreys Road Fund Study: Major Roads for the Future**

- 2.1. The Rees Jeffreys Road Fund commissioned its study in 2014. In defining its scope the study team has always taken the view that the 'major roads' network is in fact a combination of Highways England's SRN and those parts of the local authority network that are more important or strategic in the national and sub-national context.
- 2.2. In other words the study team's approach has been to explore the definition of the Major Road Network in terms of functional criteria not by ownership or administrative boundaries. In this regard the team has been helped by its use of an analytical and visualisation tool that it developed using ArcGIS software.
- 2.3. As part of its on-going work the study team has published on its website an indicative map of what might constitute the Major Road Network (annex 1). The fact that it is an indicative map is important: the study team has been very clear that it is for decision makers to consider the implications of their work for their particular interest.
- 2.4. A cursory study of the indicative map is particularly interesting for the Alliance Partners. It provides a strong evidential base as to the critical role that local authority roads play as part of a wider highway network that serves both the national and sub-national economies.
- 2.5. It is particularly noticeable that the study team's work reinforces the importance of local authority owned roads providing key east-west connections. It is also interesting to note that the indicative map highlights a number of key north-south corridors across the Alliance area.
- 2.6. As part of its programme of work the study team met with members of the Alliance programme team in the second half of 2015 – partly to enable the programme team to understand the study team's approach, but also to provide some reflective feedback on how the concept of a Major Road Network might be applied in the 'real world'. The Alliance programme team expressed a strong interest continuing to work with and support the study team as it refines its thinking and develops its recommendations.
- 2.7. Work on the study is starting to draw to a conclusion and the expectation is that the report will be published later this autumn. As such the report would be timely in terms of a potential consideration in contributing to the development of the next Roads Investment Strategy.

## **3. Implications for the Strategic Alliance**

- 3.1. The importance of having a longer-term strategic view on the infrastructure requirements of England is a Government priority as reflected in the establishment of the National Infrastructure Commission. Included within its remit is the need to provide Government with advice on the infrastructure requirements for the highway network.
- 3.2. Traditionally the focus for Government when it comes to such a discussion has been the Strategic Road Network (as owned by Highways England). The announcement in Budget 2015 to ring-fence funds raised through Vehicle Excise Duty for investment in strategic roads whilst welcomed in principle needs to result in investment in those

parts of the highway network that play that key role in servicing and supporting both the national and sub-national economies.

- 3.3. In this context the concept of a Major Road Network – one that better reflects the significance of local authority owned roads – is potentially very significant, offering as it could an evidenced based approach to policy making and implementation, as well as helping inform the identification of future infrastructure requirements.
- 3.4. As already noted, the study team have been clear that its work offers a basis on which others might build. Whilst the Alliance programme team will provide the Forum with a further update on the study once the final report has been published, it is strongly recommended that the Forum commission the technical support group to begin developing a detailed proposal as to what the Major Road Network for the Alliance area might look like.
- 3.5. Such a piece of work would form part of the broader work to develop an overarching transport strategy (considered as part as agenda item 5) and as such it would offer the opportunity to blend the indicative map produced by the Rees Jeffreys Road Fund study and the transport strategies prepared by Partners to date.
- 3.6. This would provide the Alliance Partners with an enhanced evidence base on which to respond to the work of the National Infrastructure Commission, the development of the next version of the Roads Investment Strategy and potential funding opportunities in the short to medium term.

#### **4. Next Steps**

- 4.1. The technical support group to develop a proposition for a Major Road Network across the Alliance area for consideration by the Forum at its meeting scheduled for July.

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