

## Strategic Road Investment Priorities

September 2017

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### 1. England's Economic Heartland Strategic Alliance

- 1.1. England's Economic Heartland Strategic Alliance established the Strategic Transport Forum in February 2016. Membership of the Strategic Alliance covers the area from Oxfordshire, through Milton Keynes and across to Cambridgeshire, and from Northamptonshire across to Luton.
- 1.2. The Forum is the emerging Sub-national Transport Body (STB) for the Heartland area, and works closely with the Department for Transport and Highways England, both of whom are members of the Forum
- 1.3. The Strategic Transport Forum is the focus for a single conversation on strategic transport issues across the Heartland and maintains the overview of strategic investment priorities. .
- 1.4. The Department for Transport's (DfT) recently published Transport Investment Strategy emphasises the importance of STBs in providing local partners with the opportunity to shape future strategic investment priorities. In parallel to developing an STB proposal, a Transport Strategy is being prepared that will outline the strategic infrastructure requirements necessary to enable economic growth.

### 2. Strategic Context

- 2.1. The National Infrastructure Commission's (NIC) Interim Report of November 2016 identified the economic potential of the Heartland area as being of national significance to the long term future of the UK economy. The Interim Report identified the value of the Heartland economy (currently £92.5bn per annum) increasing by between £85bn and £163bn over the next 30 years.
- 2.2. The Commission in their Interim Report identified improved connectivity as being one of two critical issues that needed to be addressed in order to realise that opportunity.
- 2.3. The Government endorsed the Commission's view in the 2016 Autumn Statement, in which it identified additional funding specifically targeted at enabling work on two critical infrastructure investments – East West Rail and the 'expressway' – to be taken forward to the next stage. Delivery of these schemes is seen by Government and the Strategic Alliance as a 'once-in-a-generation' opportunity to create a multi-model spine across the Heartland.

- 2.4. Economic opportunity on this scale is truly transformational in nature. Delivery of the multi-modal spine across the Heartland area will have wider implications for both housing and economic geographies. These will have implications for the scale and distribution of movement across the Heartland area.
- 2.5. In turn this is likely to have implications for the Major Road Network (including Highways England's Strategic Road Network). The Forum's work on the overarching Transport Strategy for the Heartland will be the mechanism for working with Highways England to determine those implications and identifying future investment requirements.

### **3. Strategic Road Investment Priorities**

- 3.1. It is essential that future strategic road investment requirements support the Government's commitment to enable the Heartland's economic potential. This paper therefore outlines the Strategic Transport Forum's priorities for future Government funding rounds (such as the Road Investment Strategy).
- 3.2. The Forums' main priorities to be considered for the Road Investment Strategy 2 (RIS2) process are based on the following three key principles:
  - a) Ensure that RIS1 commitments are delivered in full.
  - b) Ensure that investment priorities identified as a result of the strategic studies undertaken as part of RIS1 are programmed in RIS2 and taken forward into delivery.
  - c) Ensure that any additional investment priorities are determined on a joint basis between Highways England and the Strategic Transport Forum, using an agreed Major Road Network as the basis for identifying those priorities.

These principles and corresponding priorities will be outlined later in the paper.

### **4. The Major Road Network**

- 4.1. The Strategic Transport Forum has supported the concept of the Major Road Network (MRN) since the publication of the Rees Jeffreys Road Fund report in 2016. The Forum's agreed position is that the MRN should be viewed as a single network – one that combines the Highways England Strategic Road Network with the more significant local transport authority roads.
- 4.2. The Forum's position is that considering the MRN as being a single network will ensure that the funds available will be targeted more effectively than if the two 'networks' were considered separately.

- 4.3. The Forum is working with local partners (local transport authorities, local planning authorities and local enterprise partnerships) with a view to identifying how the MRN might look for the Heartland region. Those involved to date have endorsed that the initial work of the Rees Jeffreys Road Fund forms a solid basis from which the Heartland MRN should be developed, and welcome the opportunity to shape the final proposal.
- 4.4. Development of the MRN proposal for the Heartland will continue over the coming months as part of the work to prepare the overarching Transport Strategy for the Heartland. This is essential to ensure that the final proposal meets the needs of future growth across the region. The scale of economic opportunity set out by the National Infrastructure Commission is truly transformational in nature. It is therefore likely that the scope and requirements of the MRN will evolve over time.

## **5. Delivery of RIS1 Commitments**

- 5.1. Whilst there is good progress being made with the delivery of schemes identified in RIS1, not all those identified will be completed in the RIS1 period.
- 5.2. The key scheme in this category is the A428 Black Cat to Caxton Gibbet scheme. Highways England recently consulted on a number of route options for this improvement and an announcement on the way forward is expected shortly.
- 5.3. The original funding provision for the scheme will need to be increased in order to enable the preferred solution to be delivered. Some of that additional funding will need to be secured within the RIS2 allocation.
- 5.4. An outstanding issue that needs to be resolved is the question of the preferred solution to the problems associated with the A1(M) – which bisects the A428 corridor at Black Cat.
- 5.5. Whilst the A1(M) was a strategic study undertaken as part of RIS1, a decision on the preferred way forward has yet to be taken.
- 5.6. In addition to the issues being addressed on the Highways England network, this part of the Heartland area is also bisected by the central section of East West Rail.
- 5.7. Emerging Local Plans for the area are identifying the development opportunities in and around this area, making a decision on both the A428 Black Cat to Caxton Gibbet scheme and A1(M) critical in terms of enabling those opportunities to be realised.
- 5.8. Given the timing of the Local Plan process, decisions in respect of these two issues are a matter of strategic urgency. Allocations within RIS2 should reflect that urgency.

## 6. Investment Priorities Arising from Strategic Studies

- 6.1. The RIS1 programme included three strategic studies that are of significance for the Heartland area (out of just six studies nationally): these were:
  - Oxford to Cambridge Expressway
  - A1(M)
  - M25 South West Quadrant
- 6.2. Based on the presumption that the output from the next stage of the development work for the Oxford to Cambridge Expressway is required to report in 2018/19, provision should be made within the RIS2 programme for funding to enable a commencement of works.
- 6.3. The importance of making provision within the RIS2 programme for funding to enable delivery of both the A428 Black Cat to Caxton Gibbet and A1(M) improvements is dealt with in the previous section of this report.
- 6.4. There is however a large section of the A1 East of England corridor which is not to motorway standard. Whilst there is a need to address current deficiencies there is also a need to consider opportunities for planned growth along this corridor that are being brought forward the Local Plan process. In taking work on this corridor forward it is important to also consider the linkages with the expressway work.
- 6.5. Improved east-west connectivity is a key issue identified by the National Infrastructure Commission as needing to be addressed. It is essential that consideration of improved connectivity is not limited to a single corridor. It is on that basis that the Forum supports proposals to improve connectivity from the A505 to the A1(M) by extending the A5-M1 and M1-A6 routes across to the A505, and consider it to also be a priority for the Heartland.
- 6.6. There is an implied assumption with the work surrounding the Oxford to Cambridge 'expressway' that implementation of the A428 Black Cat to Caxton Gibbet scheme will be sufficient in order to provide an 'expressway' standard route between Milton Keynes and Cambridge.
- 6.7. However, given the scale of economic opportunity in and around the immediate Cambridge area, the Strategic Transport Forum promote the need for a new strategic study for the RIS2 period – one specifically targeted at looking at the longer-term requirements of the Major Road Network supporting the Cambridge economy. If commissioned as a priority at the start of the RIS2 period it may be appropriate to identify some initial funds to enable implementation of the funding at the tail end of the RIS2 period.

6.8. The final report of the M25 South West Quadrant Study was published in March 2017. Its recommendations focused on opportunities to:

- Reduce pressures
- Provide parallel capacity

The intention that these would help relieve the motorway network rather than widening existing roads.

6.9. It is important that any improvements help to relieve strategic issues on the wider local network (connecting to and affecting the M25), such as the A404. If this does not form part of the extended study work, then consideration will need to be given to a separate study to cover this.

6.10. In determining the way forward for the report's recommendations it will be essential to consider the wider context of strategic transport issues covering the area surrounding the M25 itself, specifically:

- The introduction of Crossrail (Elizabeth Line) services serving central London, Heathrow Airport and the wider Thames Valley will have an impact on travel patterns. The need to deliver Western Rail Access to Heathrow as a key component of any expansion of Heathrow Airport is likely to have a further impact on travel patterns.
- In the medium term delivery of development proposals at Old Oak Common, coupled with strategic rail improvements to/from the Heartland area associated with the Northampton – Milton Keynes – Aylesbury – Wycombe – Old Oak Common corridor (identified as a priority in the recently published Network Rail Route Strategy) will likewise have an impact on travel patterns.

6.11. The issues here are multi-modal and any investment in the M25 taken forward as a priority through the RIS2 process needs to have been developed in partnership between the Strategic Transport Forum, Highways England, the London Mayor and the emerging Transport for the South East Sub-national Transport Body.

## **7. New Investment Priorities for RIS2**

7.1. In keeping with the key principles set out earlier in this paper, and noting the establishment of the DfT's National Roads Fund, it is essential that the identification of additional investment priorities are grounded in the need to ensure that future investment is targeted at enabling the delivery of planned growth (economic and housing).

7.2. The identification of the MRN should be used as the basis for determining investment priorities. As noted earlier the transformational nature of delivering the

multi-modal spine, coupled with the scale of economic opportunity identified by the National Infrastructure Commission, is likely to have implications for the scope of the MRN.

- 7.3. Work to develop the MRN for the Heartland is being taken forward on a collaborative basis – with input from local transport authorities, local planning authorities and local enterprise partnerships, alongside Highways England and DfT.
- 7.4. Without prejudging the outcome of that work, corridors that have been identified as potentially being of strategic significance (on the basis of their contribution towards enabling the delivery of planned growth) include:
- The A43/A45 corridor
  - The A505 corridor
  - The A47 corridor
  - The A14 (Thrapston and Brampton)
- 7.5. In addition, in terms of Highways England's network issues that may be identified as being of strategic significance include:
- Improvements to the M1 corridor where these are required to enable delivery of planned growth, focussing on:
    - junctions - in particular Junction 14 and Junction 10A; *and*
    - the southern section (into Hertfordshire)
  - Improvements to junctions on the M11 corridor (potentially picked up as part of the proposed new strategic study)
  - Improvements to junctions on the M40 corridor where these are required to enable delivery of planned growth - in particular Junction 9 and Junction 4

## **8. Collaboration - Highways Heartland**

- 8.1. A new 'Highways Heartland' Board has been established with the DfT and Highways England. The first meeting was held on Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> September
- 8.2. This builds on a similar approach pioneered with Transport for the North wherein the three partners meet on a quarterly basis to maintain an overview of strategic issues and progress with the delivery of the agreed work programme.
- 8.3. This approach is greatly welcomed by the Strategic Transport Forum in terms of strengthening the working relationship between the three parties, ultimately leading to more informed and appropriately prioritised investment.

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