



Strategic Transport Forum

14th May 2021

Agenda Item 6: Strategic Roads Update

Recommendation:

It is recommended that the meeting:

- a) Note the announcement in respect of the Oxford to Milton Keynes section of the Expressway, and welcome the presentation on next steps at the July meeting of the Forum**
- b) Agree to make a representation in support of the A428 Black Cat to Caxton Gibbet Development Consent Order**
- c) Agree that the EEH Business Unit the Sub-national Transport Body, if required, at the examination of the Development Consent Order**

1. Context

- 1.1. The regional transport strategy sets out how we can realise the economic potential of the region while achieving net zero carbon emissions from transport, with an ambition to do so by 2040.
- 1.2. Delivering on this ambition requires a whole systems approach to the identification of strategic infrastructure requirements. It also requires us to bring together consideration of strategic transport networks, with digital connectivity and indeed energy systems, both of which are essential to support future transport solutions.
- 1.3. Within this approach, the need to invest in the Heartland's road network to support both planned housing and economic growth and to enable our existing communities and businesses to flourish, remains.
- 1.4. However, we must plan a different future for our roads network for both passengers and freight – one that puts decarbonisation at its centre and encompasses strong environmental principles. This will require a shift in the way we look at roads and their role in serving communities and businesses in the future.
- 1.5. The regional transport strategy sets out where investment in the strategically important road network will be supported. Policy commitments state that that investment in the Strategic Road Network and Major Road Network will be supported where it meets one or more of the following criteria and is consistent with wider environmental objectives:
 - i) Protects and enhances the existing infrastructure asset
 - ii) Delivers a solution to an identified problem on the existing infrastructure asset
 - iii) Enables access to new economic opportunities and/or housing growth
 - iv) Enables delivery of sustainable transport linkages such as public transport and active travel improvements

- 1.6. The wider context provided by the Transport Strategy helps set the direction of travel for the outcomes required from investment in the road network.
- i) A network which puts decarbonisation at the forefront of investment priorities
 - ii) A network which supports the Heartland's wider growth aspirations
 - iii) A network which is future ready
 - iv) A network which is managed, planned and delivered in a way that is consistent with the Travel Hierarchy (policy 4 of the Transport Strategy)
 - v) A network which considered the impact on the transport network locally
 - vi) A network which encompasses strong environmental principles

- 1.7. Forum members will also wish to note the Department for Transport's position in respect of the role that investment in roads has to play in supporting public transport and active travel modes. Recent communication from the DfT reinforced their expectation that:

As trailed in the vision document "[Gear Change](#)", the Government wishes to see new road schemes meeting the highest standards (based on the new cycle design guidance LTN 1/20) in order to attract larger numbers of cyclists, for users of all abilities and disabilities. The Government was clear that they were keen for this to be managed in a way that avoided adding further cost to schemes that were already funded or causing lengthy delays to their delivery.

- 1.8. Additionally, and as stated in [A Better Deal for Bus Users](#) (2019, updated 2020), the Government has asked that

"All new road investments in England which receive central UK government funding will be required to either support bus priority measures or explain why doing so would not be necessary or appropriate in that instance. All future funding bids will need to explicitly address this issue." As with active travel measures, the Government is keen to avoid adding further cost to schemes that are already funded or causing lengthy delays to their delivery but has asked that road schemes in receipt of Government funding do take note of this requirement.

- 1.9. It is on this basis that England's Economic Heartland continues to plan and prioritise investment in the region's road network.

2. Oxford to Cambridge Expressway

- 2.1. On 18th March 2021, the Secretary of State for announced his decision to cancel the Oxford to Cambridge Expressway project between Oxford and Milton Keynes.
- 2.2. Whilst the announcement provides clarity on the Expressway, there remains a need to identify the infrastructure required to enable the delivery of planned growth (economic and housing) between Oxford and Milton Keynes: a need that is identified as a strategic priority for the region in the Transport Strategy
- 2.3. Building on the insight already developed by Highways England, the Department for Transport has made funds available to investigate the need for more targeted road interventions in the area.
- 2.4. As the Sub-national Transport Body, England's Economic Heartland is working with DfT and Highways England to take forward this work as a matter of urgency. The scope of the work is expected to consider road connectivity needs across a wider area in support of the Transport Strategy. Highways England will present the proposed next steps for the Oxford – Cambridge Road study to the Strategic Transport Forum in July 2021.

3. A428 Black Cat to Caxton Gibbet

- 3.1. The Development Consent Order required for the A428 Black Cat to Caxton Gibbet Improvement was submitted to the Planning Inspectorate at the start of 2021. On 24th

March the Planning Inspectorate confirmed that the DCO submitted had been accepted by them: this means that the DCO now moves to the next stage in the process.

- 3.2. The Planning Inspectorate will now start the process of a full examination of Highways England's proposals: this is expected to include a Public Examination later this summer. The Inspectors' recommendations will be considered by the Secretary of State for Transport who will make the final determination as to whether to proceed with construction of the scheme.
- 3.3. The EEH Business Unit has been working closely with Highways England throughout the preparation of the DCO. It is recommended that EEH, as the Sub-national Transport Body, make a representation in support of the DCO as part of the examination process, and that, if required, the EEH Business Unit attend the examination.

4. Other Strategic Corridors

- 4.1. The EEH Business Unit continues to work with its partners to ensure that the case for investment in the strategically important A34 and A1 (south of Huntingdon) corridors is taken forward. Further advice on progress with planning solutions to these corridors will be presented to the Strategic Transport Forum in July 2021.

5. Planning Future Investment - Road Investment Strategies

- 5.1. The Road Investment Strategy 2 (RIS 2) was published in March 2020. Included within RIS2 is clarity over Highways England's expected role for Sub-national Transport Bodies (STBs) going forward, including opportunities to cultivate existing working relationships between Highways England (HE) and STBs.
- 5.2. STBs will play a central role in engagement in the strategies in the following three areas:
 - i) Providing a multi-network perspective at a large scale, helping to guide a more integrated transport network and strengthening resilience where people would otherwise be dependent on an individual SRN link (acknowledging that solutions to an SRN problem may lie elsewhere in the transport system)
 - ii) RIS 3 pipeline – playing an active role in articulating the benefits of proposals being examined in their area (for example, where a proposal can support wider and more ambitious Local Plans for development)
 - iii) Location of strategic studies – RIS2 outlines how STBs are carrying out work on strategic corridors and looks to working together to ensure the same work is not commissioned by both parties.
- 5.3. Highways England is now in the early stages of planning RIS 3. Key parts of the evidence base being developed by Highways England to inform RIS3 are: the development of route strategies; the RIS3 pipeline development; and additional studies such as the 'Role of the Urban SRN'.

Route Strategy development

- 5.4. Highways England's approach to route strategies has now been approved by the Secretary of State, allowing HE to publish its document setting out its approach to route strategies.
- 5.5. From July 2021 HE will work with EEH to take forward the programme of studies underway within the Heartland. Route Strategies are a key part of informing and setting out our strategic priorities for the Strategic Road Network moving forward. EEH Business Unit will work closely with local authority partners to ensure that the Heartland's priorities are reflected in the strategies. Delivery of route strategy reports is planned for next spring.

RIS3 Pipeline

- 5.6. Included in RIS2 was a pipeline of over 30 schemes across England that will be considered for further scoping work to inform RIS3. The RIS3 pipeline is not exhaustive, however £347m has been allocated over the RIS2 period towards their scoping and development.

There are three RIS3 pipeline schemes in the Heartland area, these are:

- i) M11 Junc 13 West (Tranche 2)
- ii) A47/ A1101 Elm Road Junction (Tranche 2)
- iii) A404/ M40 Junc 4 High Wycombe (Tranche 3)

In addition, the A404 Bisham Roundabout is in Tranche 3.

EEH Business Unit has been working with DfT and Highways England to ensure schemes not originally included within the RIS3 Pipeline are considered for investment in RIS3. This includes, A1 East of England, A45 Stanwick to Thrapston and A14 Junction 10a.

Future Trunking/Detrunking Options

- 5.7. In parallel, Highways England is undertaking a number of strategic studies into both the role of the urban SRN and future trunking/detrunking options.
- 5.8. HE is seeking input from partner organisations to inform the studies. This will draw on knowledge of the local area to identify local context, issues and aspirations. Local Authorities covered by the studies are being contacted by Highways England, STBs will also be asked to provide a regional input.

6. Major Road Network

- 6.1. The November 2020 Spending Review resulted in a one-year settlement for the Major Road Network (MRN) programme for 2021/22. This has not stopped MRN and Large Local Majors (LLM) schemes proceeding, however individual schemes do now require approval to proceed from HM Treasury. DfT officials have been working with local authorities on a scheme by scheme basis to support the process.
- 6.2. The Department remains committed to the MRN/LLM programme. DfT has confirmed that the 2024/25 end date for this round of MRN/LLM investment is no longer absolute but officials are keen for local authorities to maintain momentum and deliver at pace.
- 6.3. In March 2021, EEH Business Unit met with DfT MRN team to discuss the future of the Major Road Network Programme. STBs have been encouraged to develop a long-term plan for the future of the Major Road Network in their areas. Included in this will be a need to capture a pipeline of future priorities in anticipation of further calls for schemes.
- 6.4. The Department has not yet given a date or process for STBs to set out their longer-term ambitions for the MRN. Keen to proceed at pace, EEH Business Unit will shortly commence a piece of work to plan and set out our ambitions for the Major Road Network. Transport Officers have been asked to submit early stage scheme proposals by 30 June 2021. Proposals submitted after this time will not be excluded from sifts, the early stage call is merely to get a sense of demand for future MRN investment.

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