

Strategic Transport Leadership Board

24 September 2021

Agenda Item 6: Strategically Important Roads Update

Recommendation:

It is recommended that the meeting:

- a) Receives a presentation from National Highways on the Oxford-Cambridge Connectivity Study for Roads and provides feedback**
- b) Notes the additional updates on progress with supporting investment in the Strategic Road Network**
- c) Notes the updates to the Major Road Network and Large Local Major programme**
- d) Agrees to the continued commitment for finding a solution to investing in Century Park Access Road in Luton, commencing with Phase 1.**

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. Board 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 Cambridge Connectivity: Roads Study

- 2.1. On 18 March 2021, the Secretary of State for Transport announced his decision to cancel the Oxford to Cambridge Expressway project between Oxford and Milton Keynes.
- 2.2. Whilst the announcement provided clarity on the expressway, there remains a need to identify the infrastructure required to enable the delivery of planned economic and housing growth between Oxford and Milton Keynes.
- 2.3. Building on the insight already developed by National Highways, the Department for Transport has made funds available to investigate the need for more targeted road interventions in the wider area.
- 2.4. As the sub-national transport body, England's Economic Heartland is working with DfT and National Highways to take forward the work. Together, EEH, DfT and National Highways officers have developed a proposed scope of work. The work will focus on defining what constitutes an appropriate level of service for the strategically important road network and consider how investment should best be prioritised to deliver that level of service in the region.

- 2.5. National Highways is attending the Board to provide a presentation of the proposed study, including next steps and timings.

3. Other Strategic Corridors

- 3.1. The EEH business unit continues to work with its partners to ensure that the case for delivery of the right improvements in strategically important corridors, such as the A34 and A1 (south of Huntingdon) corridors are being developed. We are working with the relevant partner authorities to ensure engagement and input is being sought by National Highways and relevant government departments.

4. Planning Future Investment - Road Investment Strategies

- 4.1. National Highways is now in the early stages of planning RIS 3. Key parts of the evidence base being developed are: the development of route strategies; the RIS3 pipeline development; and additional studies such as the 'Role of the Urban SRN'.

Route Strategy development

- 4.2. Route strategies are a key part of informing and setting out our strategic priorities for the strategic road network. EEH is working closely with National Highways to ensure our priorities are well developed and considered.
- 4.3. The proposed timings for route strategies is a commencement date of summer 2021, with the delivery of route strategy reports planned for spring 2022.
- 4.4. National Highways is on track with the programme timeline. The work will be delivered through a joint team, led by Jacobs and Atkins consultancies.

RIS3 Pipeline

- 4.5. 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 National Highways 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.

5. Major Road Network (MRN) and Large Local Majors (LLM) Programme

- 5.1. EEH is responsible for preparing the region's advice in respect of investment priorities for the MRN and LLM Schemes programme (2020-2025). In May 2019 EEH submitted scheme proposals for the first five-year programme. Scheme proposals were appraised through a multi-criteria assessment framework that was developed in collaboration with local partners. During the review process, EEH Delivery Partners provided independent technical and professional advice and, in many cases, supported scheme promoters strengthen their business case before the programme was formally submitted to the DfT.
- 5.2. In July 2019 EEH submitted 11 schemes totalling circa £724 million pounds of investment to the DfT for the first five programme (2020-20205). These comprised nine schemes at pre-SOBC stage and two at SOBC stage. Schemes submitted were not ranked, or in competition with each other, they were reviewed on their own individual merit for inclusion in the programme of investment. Schemes are a mixture of bypasses, new alignments, improved access, missing links, major junction upgrades and packages of improvements. EEH MRN/LLM schemes submitted to the DfT are shown in Annex 1.

6. Major Road Network and Large Local Major Programme and the December 2020 Spending Review

- 6.1. On 15th December 2020 HM Treasury set out its one-year spending review. Whilst the Government remained committed to the MRN/LLM schemes, the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic meant that the previously anticipated MRN/LLM funding settlement to 204/25 was reduced to a one-year settlement for 2021/22.
- 6.2. Although a multi-year settlement may be possible in the current spending review, it has meant to date that the process for approving MRN and LLM projects will need to adapt and schemes now require approval to proceed from Treasury.
- 6.3. In response, the DfT are working with EEH local authority promoters to take forward schemes prioritised for the programme based on their individual project timetables. The original scheme 2024/25 end-dates are no longer considered relevant and government funding for each scheme is being dealt with on a case by case basis.
- 6.4. DfT officials are keen for local authorities to maintain momentum and deliver schemes at pace. In March 2021, DfT circulated further guidance to local authorities reiterating the need for engagement with National Highways to understand the impact of schemes on the SRN. The guidance also confirmed DfT's requirement that future road investment must incorporate active travel and public transport measures in scheme development.
- 6.5. In March 2021, EEH met with the DfT MRN team to discuss the future of the MRN/LLM Programme. STBs have been encouraged to develop a long-term plan for the future of the MRN in their areas. Included in this is the need to capture a pipeline of future priorities in anticipation of further calls for schemes. This work is under development and EEH is engaging with its partners to seek initial views on future MRN priorities.

7. EEH Major Road Network and Large Local Major Programme Scheme Updates

- 7.1. The ten schemes previously submitted in 2019 as part of EEH's programme of investment have each undergone varying levels of technical development over the last two years. This is partly a consequence of the impact of COVID-19, which has exacerbated local transport authority's capacity and capability to deliver schemes. Scheme development has also had to account for changes to exogenous factors (land use and transport) that have arisen since 2019 and subsequently effect the base assumptions previously underpinning proposals.
- 7.2. Individual scheme summaries and their status in the MRN/LLM development process with DfT are provided in Annex 2.

8. Century Park Access Road, Luton

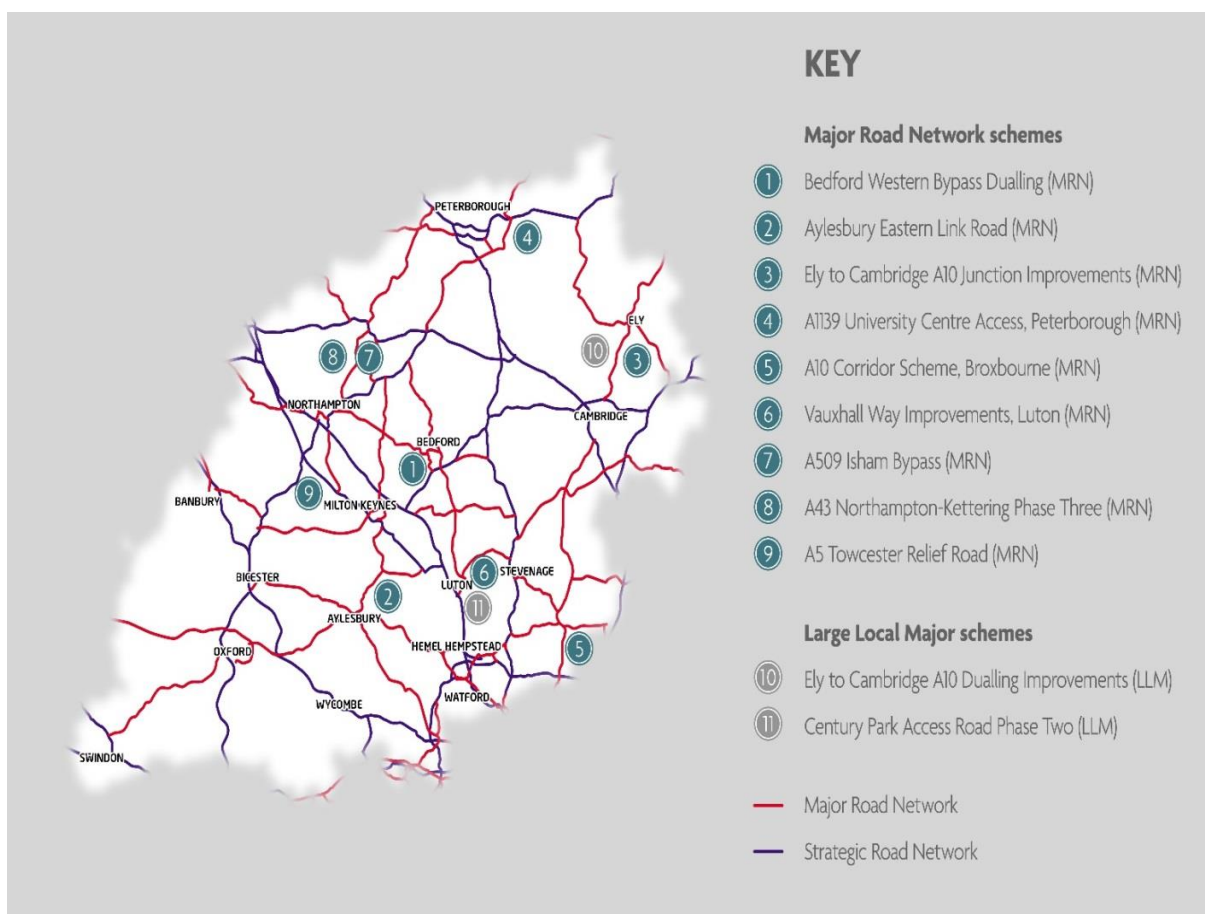
- 8.1. Of the schemes, there has been some more significant changes to the Century Park Access Road scheme in Luton.
- 8.2. The original proposal sought DfT funding for Phase 2 of the scheme, with Phase 1 originally planned to be financed by Luton Borough Council.
- 8.3. However, in summer 2021, Luton Borough Council presented DfT and EEH with an option that CPAR Phase 1 could instead be brought forward as a first phase of investment for Government. The Phase 1 scheme will facilitate access to B1/B2/B8 development on the Century Park site and residual areas of land to be acquired for Phase 1 on the existing airport business park. Phase 1 is a stand-alone scheme and the economic benefits associated with it are derived from the consented development of the Century Park site. Whilst airport expansion will strengthen its economic case, the scheme is not dependent on it.
- 8.4. Being unable to implement both CPAR Phase 1 and Phase 2 would mean the majority of the Century Park site would in effect remain landlocked, stifling inward investment, growth in jobs and economic potential.

8.5. To that end, Board Members are recommended to remain committed to finding a solution to investing in CPAR Phase 1, and subsequently Phase 2. In restating the Board’s commitment to the scheme, EEH business unit will work with Luton Borough Council to review our initial assessment of the strategic benefits of CPAR so we are able to quantify and restate the strategic benefits of Phase 1 as a first step towards delivery of the full scheme.

8.6. Further details about the Century Park Access Scheme are set out in Annex 2.

Naomi Green
Interim Director
September 2021

Annex 1 – EEH Major Road Network Investment Priorities Phase 1



Annex 2 - Major Road Network and Large Local Major Programme Scheme Updates

Individual scheme summaries and their status in the MRN/LLM development process with DfT are provided below.

Bedford Western Bypass Improvement Scheme

The MRN scheme will improve the Western Bypass that connects the A6 with the A421 to reduce congestion, improve unreliable journey times and the associated problems for drivers and local communities. The improvements will support new development as they come forward and help realise the potential for growth in the vicinity of the bypass.

A pre-SOBC was submitted to the DfT in 2019 and Bedford Borough Council (BBC) is refreshing the pre-SOBC for this scheme. Since the scheme was originally assessed in May 2020, the Bedford Borough Traffic Model has been developed and validated for local plan scenario testing. The base data in the new model is more recent than that used in the previous pre-SOBC, and the assumptions about allocated and presumed growth of housing and employment sites have been updated. BBC has also just finished public consultation on the development strategy for Local Plan 2040. All four options which have been put forward for consideration include growth in the urban area which extends to Bedford Western Bypass. Bedford Borough Council has agreed the scope of works for the refresh and will re-examine the three original options for improvements. The work is taking place in autumn 2021.

Aylesbury Eastern Link Road

The Eastern Link Road will connect the A418 and A41 in the east of the Aylesbury. The MRN scheme will dual the link road and in doing so improve north-south connectivity within Aylesbury. The dual carriageway will follow the alignment of the current planned single carriage which was identified as necessary to deliver the major development sites east of Aylesbury. Delivering the road as a dual carriageway offers an opportunity to future proof the Eastern Link Road and deliver it with less disruption. A SOBC was submitted to the DfT in 2019 and since then discussions have continued between Buckinghamshire Council and the Department for Transport on options for progressing the scheme in line with wider ambitions for connectivity improvements across Aylesbury.

Ely to Cambridge A10 Junction and Dualling Improvements

The A10 between Ely and Cambridge is a strategically important road providing the main link between the two cities and the strategic road network via the A14. The MRN scheme will dual the route to two-lane standard and improve capacity at key junctions to congestion and support the delivery of housing and economic growth planned along this corridor. In 2019, two standalone pre-SOBCs were submitted to DfT which separated out the dualling and junction improvement schemes. It was since decided that all highway improvements should be consolidated into a single business case. In June 2021 the A10 Ely-Cambridge scheme was approved to progress to the next stage of development (OBC) under the MRN/LLM programme.

A1139 University Centre Access Peterborough

The A1139 provides a key link between the A1 and A15/A16 to the north and the A47 to the east of Peterborough. Key junctions suffer from long queues and delays and these are expected to worsen with the ambitions of the city and a new university.

The MRN scheme will deliver a new junction and slips from the A1139 to connect into the town centre to relieve junction 5 of the A1139. Since submission in 2019, an SOBC has been developed and was submitted to the DfT that showed there was 2 viable options. The DfT reviewed the SOBC and have supported the development of the first phase of the OBC, which will demonstrate which package should be developed.

A10 Corridor Scheme, Broxbourne

The A10 (Broxbourne) is a dual carriageway with two lanes in each direction. The MRN scheme will deliver a package of highway, public transport, and active travel improvements to the three junctions at Lieutenant Ellis Way, College Road and Church Lane. These interventions will improve the capacity of the A10, helping alleviate congestion, reduce journey time and improve connectivity for non-car users. A pre-SOBC was submitted to the DfT in 2019 and Hertfordshire County Council and Broxbourne Borough Council are continuing to work together to progress the A10 MRN scheme to SOBC stage. The SOBC is currently expected to be completed in spring 2022.

Vauxhall Way Improvements, Luton

Vauxhall Way (part of a longer route between Leighton-Linslade and the M11/A11 east of Royston) is a key north-south single carriageway in the east of Luton and the second busiest corridor used by people travelling to the airport, both as passengers and for people working at the airport and surrounding business park. In addition to the Airport and Century Park development (see paragraph 1.2 above), Vauxhall Way plays an important role connecting existing/ planned homes and land uses in east Luton with the town centre, including 3 of the 4 further strategic employment/mixed use sites identified in the Luton Local Plan, together with regeneration of part of Hightown. The MRN scheme, submitted as an SOBC in 2019 proposed dualling the entire length of Vauxhall Way, with provision made for bus and walking/cycling priority. Capacity increases to Vauxhall Way and better provision for cyclists and pedestrians will also need to be supported by improvements at key junctions along the road (some of which have since been delivered). The scheme will provide an important bus route link to a proposed park and ride/mobility hub and hence more sustainable transport options for the airport, business expansion and other allocated employment sites in the Local Plan, helping to avoid traffic using less suitable roads in the area. The Department for Transport assessed the scheme in 2020 and requested modelling (to inform the economic case) and public engagement should be developed further within the SOBC.

The SOBC submitted in July 2019 proposed to start the improvement works at the north end of Vauxhall Way and work southwards. Other benefits of dualling Vauxhall Way include an allowance for expansion should the development consent order or other applications for expansion be approved beyond the currently permitted 18 million passengers/year. If given approval to 32mppa a second terminal is now not expected to open until 2032/33. In response to this timescale, it was agreed by DfT, EEH and LBC in 2021 to deliver the Vauxhall Way Improvements in two phases. The improvements to the northern section of Vauxhall Way (phase 1) would coincide with the opening of a Park and Ride/mobility hub site on the north east periphery of Luton as a result of further development at the Butterfield employment site coming on-stream by 2026. Phase 2, would deliver the remainder of the improvements post 2030 to align with airport expansion and other employment activity planned in the east of the town. Consequently, the OBC, being developed and planned to be submitted to the DfT in 2023/4 is in respect of Phase 1 only; Phase 2 improvements are considered outside of the current MRN/LLM programme.

A509 Isham Bypass

The A509 Isham Bypass has been proposed to enhance the capacity and operation of the A509 between Kettering and Wellingborough providing improved links to the A14. The MRN scheme, consisting of a dual carriageway bypassing the village of Isham will support significant growth planned in Wellingborough and Kettering and is essential for the delivery of jobs in the area. Since submission in 2019, an SOBC was submitted to DfT in November 2020 and following queries a revised SOBC was submitted in April 2021. A funding decision is awaited from the DfT with regards to OBC development.

A43 Northampton-Kettering Phase Three

The A43 is a regionally significant road that facilitates movement between the Heartland's key settlements of Northampton and Kettering/Corby. The MRN scheme will build upon the wider programme of Northampton to Kettering Improvements (now delivered) by providing online dualling to a key section of the highway north of Northampton. A pre-SOBC was submitted to the DfT in 2019 and following feedback an SOBC has been developed and is largely complete. The next milestone will be submission of the SOBC to the DfT and a request to initiate OBC development.

Century Park Access Road

London Luton Airport and its existing business park, along with the Century Park development site on its northern edge needs transport infrastructure to support existing and planned economic growth. In 2016 the Luton Airport Enterprise Zone was established, one of only 24 areas across England to have secured Enterprise Zone status. This significant development opportunity comprises three sites surrounding or connected to London Luton Airport. Century Park is at the heart of this commercial hub and provides 70 acres of employment land. Century Park provides the location for an ambitious, well-designed, high-quality, high-yield, mixed use development, incorporating business, commercial and light industrial units.

Passenger throughput at the airport reached almost 18million in 2019, and the airport have been consulting on further growth of the airport, including plans for a second terminal as part of a Development Consent Order (DCO) submitted by its owners, London Luton Airport Limited. The Covid-19 pandemic significantly reduced passenger flights and employment at the airport. Should the DCO or other applications for expansion be approved beyond the currently permitted 18 million passengers/year, a second terminal is now not expected to open until 2032/33, well beyond the dates of the current round of MRN/LLM funding.

To realise the full potential of Century Park and the wider Enterprise Zone, the scheme proposes a new access road, delivered by a combination of a new road alignment and improvements to existing roads. These improvements will extend from New Airport Way round the edge of the airport to the business area. Currently, the main access to the existing business park and airport is via New Airport Way (A1081) which connects to the M1 Junction 10. This route and the airport's internal road network already experience peak-time congestion, which is expected to worsen with planned developments in the east of Luton and growth in business and airport activity.

A pre-SOBC was submitted in 2019 which proposed delivering the scheme, which has planning consent, in two phases. Phase 1 includes a new bridge carrying the access road from New Airport Way to Frank Lester Way and will serve the first phase of the Century Park site. Phase 2 involves the online dualling of President Way, together with other roads to serve the rest of the Century Park site. The original proposal sought DfT funding for Phase 2 of the scheme, with Phase 1 originally planned to be financed by Luton Borough Council.

The pandemic's impact on the airport's operation summarised above has affected the Council's ability to fund Phase 1 of Century Park Access Road (CPAR). In summer 2021, Luton Borough Council presented DfT and EEH with an option that CPAR Phase 1 could instead be brought forward as a first phase of investment for Government. The Phase 1 scheme will facilitate access to B1/B2/B8 development on the Century Park site and residual areas of land to be acquired for Phase 1 on the existing airport business park. Phase 1 is a stand-alone scheme and the economic benefits associated with it are derived from the consented development of the Century Park site. Whilst airport expansion will strengthen its economic case, the scheme is not dependent on it.

Being unable to implement both CPAR Phase 1 and Phase 2 would mean the majority of the Century Park site would in effect remain landlocked, stifling inward investment, growth in jobs and economic potential. To that end, Board Members are recommended to remain committed to finding a solution to investing in CPAR Phase 1, and subsequently Phase 2. In restating the Board's commitment to the scheme, EEH business unit will work with Luton Borough Council to review our initial assessment of the strategic benefits of CPAR so we are able to quantify and restate the strategic benefits of Phase 1 as a first step towards delivery of the full scheme.

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