

Strategic Transport Forum

26th January 2018

Agenda Item 6c: Connectivity Study

Recommendation: It is recommended that the Forum:

- a) Welcome the government's commitment to take forward delivery of the expressway at pace and to commission England's Economic Heartland to undertake a wider 'connectivity study'
- b) Request the Programme Director bring a draft brief for the 'connectivity study' to the next meeting of the Forum for its consideration.
- c) Confirms its commitment to take forward the 'connectivity study' at pace in support of work on both the overarching Transport Strategy and the expressway.

1. Context

- 1.1. In its initial response to the National Infrastructure Commission's final report the Government (published as part of the 2017 Budget) committed to:

'... developing an Expressway of high-quality east-west roads between Oxford and Cambridge, key elements of which will be built in the second Roads Investment Strategy period, from 2020 to 2025. In addition, and in line with the NIC's recommendations, the government will accelerate development work, completing option selection and detailed design work on the 'missing link' elements of the Expressway between the M1 and Oxford so that it is ready to open by 2030. A decision on corridor choice will be made by summer 2018. The government will commission England's Economic Heartland to study how communities not on the Expressway itself can still benefit from it.'

2. Co-ordinating the Strategic Studies

- 2.1. The government's commitments as set out in the Budget are welcome, acknowledging as they do the importance of moving at pace to deliver the expressway and the critical importance of commissioning a wider piece of work on improving connectivity at the same time.
- 2.2. In taking both pieces of work forward it is also important to also take into consideration the implications of East West Rail: there being a need to ensure investment in the different modes complement each other and support the overarching objective of improved connectivity in the round to enable the economic potential of the Heartland to be realised.
- 2.3. Timing of this work presents Government and the Strategic Transport Forum with the opportunity to:

- a) Ensure that work on the expressway, the connectivity study and East West Rail is taken forward in a co-ordinated way, enabling the inter-relationships between different elements of the transport system to be properly taken into account
 - b) Ensure that the technical work commissioned on individual elements of the transport system inform the preparation of the overarching Transport Strategy – this is particularly important given that delivery of the ‘multi-modal spine’ is being promoted on the basis it will fundamentally change connectivity across the Heartland (both east-west and north-south). Transformational infrastructure on the scale associated with the ‘multi-modal spine’ will inevitably have consequences for the wider transport system that must be taken into consideration throughout the decision making process. Travel patterns are likely to change fundamentally in response to changes in connectivity impacting on both functional economic geographies and strategic housing market areas.
 - c) Ensure that the identification of the Major Road Network – which will be defined through the overarching Transport Strategy – takes into account those changes in travel patterns, thereby ensuring that investment priorities put forward for delivery complement investment in the ‘multi-modal spine’
- 2.4. The teams involved in the three pieces of work are already actively working together to ensure activity is co-ordinated. Working arrangements for the connectivity study will build on this collaborative approach.
 - 2.5. This Forum’s role as the emerging Sub-national Transport Body provides the opportunity to ensure that the work on these strategic studies informs and is shaped by that on the overarching Transport Strategy.
 - 2.6. It is also worth bearing in mind that there are two further strategic studies – both key components of the first Road Investment Strategy - whose work needs to be co-ordinated as part of the overarching Transport Strategy: the A1(M) East of England study and the M25 South West Quadrant study.

3. Connectivity Study: Next Steps

- 3.1. The Budget response makes it clear that England’s Economic Heartland is being commissioned to take forward the work on the ‘connectivity study’: this work will be funded by the DfT.
- 3.2. In taking the connectivity study forward it is important to move at pace. To that end the Programme Director is in discussion with DfT officials to secure agreement on the proposed way forward. Some initial outputs from the connectivity study will be important to help inform the identification of a preferred corridor for the expressway ‘missing link’.
- 3.3. A key first step is developing the brief for the connectivity study, in collaboration with the DfT. Such an approach will ensure that the connectivity study benefits from experience garnered with similar studies elsewhere in the country.
- 3.4. The Transport Officers Support Group will consider at greater length the brief for the connectivity study at its next meeting, thereby enabling this Forum to consider

the study's scope at its meeting on 16th March. In developing the brief for the connectivity study full consideration will be given to emerging thinking on the strategic objectives for the overarching Transport Strategy.

- 3.5. In preparing the draft brief the core programme team will actively engage with local partners – local transport authorities, local planning authorities and local enterprise partnerships - most directly affect by the connectivity study.
- 3.6. The draft brief will also set out a proposal for the governance of the connectivity study – this will include arrangements for a representative steering group that can work with the core programme team to oversee the study.
- 3.7. The Strategic Transport Forum has considered the expressway at its meeting on 15th September 2017. Annex 1 reproduces the strategic issues identified by the Forum that it agreed need to be considered in relation to the expressway. In developing the draft brief for the connectivity study the core programme team will work with DfT and Highways England to ensure that these issues are adequately covered.

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Programme Director

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Annex 1**Extract from Report to the Strategic Transport Forum
15th September 2017****Strategic Issues for Further Consideration (by the expressway)
(Section 4 of the Report of 15th September)**

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.
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 study's work programme.
3. The key driver for the study 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. 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 study 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 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 planned growth. 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 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 STBs 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 taken for on identifying the Major Road Network there will need to be a dialogue with the 'expressway' study team to ensure that each is taking account the other.

- d) East-West Rail – as noted above the 'expressway' forms part of the mutli-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' study 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 focus of the study is improved east-west connectivity, by association there will be implications for north-south movements. The study team will therefore need to be mindful of the potential for second order effects of this nature.

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.
6. Whilst the 'expressway' is primarily a piece of transport infrastructure its purpose is to enable delivery of planned 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.