

FREEPOST
A428 Black Cat to Caxton Gibbet

Programme Office
c/o Buckinghamshire County Council
County Hall
Walton Street
Aylesbury
HP20 1UA

23rd April 2017

Dear Sir,

A328 BLACK CAT TO CAXTON GIBBET IMPROVEMENT CONSULTATION RESPONSE

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.

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. The Forum works closely with the Department for Transport and Highways England, both of whom are members of the Forum.

The Strategic Alliance partners have set out their commitment to set out the case for establishing a statutory Sub-national Transport Body: work on developing the case for such a body is underway. Funding for the Forum is a combination of local partner contributions matched by funding from the Department for Transport.

An agreed priority for the Forum is providing regional advice on national investment programmes, including those of Highways England and Network Rail.

Planning for Growth

In October 2016 the Forum published its position statement – Planning for Growth. This identified five immediate investment priorities, one of which was the delivery of the Oxford – Cambridge Expressway.

The Forum's agreed position on the A428 Black Cat to Caxton Gibbet improvement is to

- a) Support the need for investment to address the issues associated with the A428 Black Cat to Caxton Gibbet
- b) Support the need for the investment to be made to a standard consistent with the longer-term ambition to realise an Expressway standard route between Oxford and Cambridge.

Response to Consultation Proposal

The Strategic Transport Forum received a briefing on the proposals published for consultation at its meeting on 24th March. This response is based on the Forum's subsequent discussion, supplemented by input from those members most directly affected by the proposals.

The Forum supports the conclusion that there is an urgent need to improve the A428 between Black Cat and Caxton Gibbet. It does so on the basis of the analysis that the current level of service for road users (as demonstrated by journey time variability, levels of congestion and accident record) is incompatible with the road's strategic role in support of the Heartland economy.

The need to improve east-west connectivity has been identified by the independent National Infrastructure Commission as being a key priority to enabling the Heartland economy to realise its economic potential. In doing so the Commission identified the critical importance of the Heartland economy to the long-term success of the UK economy.

In responding to the Commission's Interim Report, the Government accepted the Commission's recommendations thereby confirming the national significance of delivering improved east-west connectivity. In committing additional funding to enable the development of detailed proposals for the Expressway the Government confirmed its support for the Expressway.

The Strategic Transport Forum endorsed the National Infrastructure Commission's Interim Report and welcomed the Government's recognition of improved east-west connectivity as being of critical importance to realising the economic potential of the Heartland.

The Forum also welcomed the Government recognition of the need for investment in improved east-west connectivity on both road and rail networks. From a strategic perspective investment in both are seen as complementary and essential to realise the vision identified by the National Infrastructure Commission to create a new 'multi-modal spine' across the Heartland.

Set in this context the Strategic Transport Forum response to the proposals published for the A428 Black Cat to Caxton Gibbet is as follows:

- Delivery of the A428 Black Cat to Caxton Gibbet improvement must be delivered in accordance with timescale commitments set out in the Road Investment Strategy – it is absolutely essential that both local residents and potential investors have confidence that planned improvements are delivered in accordance with published programmes. It is also essential in order to allow local planning authorities to take the improvement into consideration when identifying future land allocation through their Local Plans.
- There is an urgent need for clarity on the preferred option for the A1(M): the Forum notes that both on-line and off-line solutions remain options as a result of the work completed to date. Clarity on the way forward is urgently required in order to inform the final design of the Black Cat to Caxton Gibbet improvement.

- Any work required in respect of the A1(M) corridor should be prioritised to enable this outcome and maintain the delivery timescale for the A428 Black Cat to Caxton Gibbet improvement
- Notwithstanding the uncertainty regarding the way forward for the A1(M) corridor there is an urgent need to upgrade the Black Cat roundabout in order to provide a 'free flowing' junction. Any improvement to the Black Cat should enable the current traffic movements to be maintained. Any improvement to the Black Cat should prioritise the need for a design that is easy to comprehend and navigate from the road user perspective.
- The information currently available is insufficient for the Forum to offer a definitive view on the preferred route. Based on the information available it would appear that the Orange Route may be preferable on the basis that it makes greater use of the existing corridor, thereby serving to reduce the overall impact of the improvement (any difference in operational performance between the three options when considered as part of the wider strategic Expressway corridor being negligible).

Highways England must ensure that the Forum and its partners have access to all the information that enables a preference to be identified as a matter of urgency in order to ensure the planned timetable for delivery is maintained.

- Highways England must, as a matter of urgency, work with the local transport authorities directly affected by the proposal to ensure that they have access to all the relevant technical information required to enable proper consideration of detailed issues associated with the improvement. This must be in parallel with the work required to ensure that the delivery timescale for the improvement is maintained.
- All junctions along the route of the improvement must be designed to a standard consistent with its wider strategic role as part of the Expressway.
- In taking forward the detailed design of the improvement Highways England should ensure that they take into consideration proposals relating to the A428 Cambourne – Cambridge public transport project, including the longer-term aspiration for this to include a link to St Neots.
- The Strategic Transport Forum has also identified delivery of East West Rail as being of regional significance. In taking forward the detailed design of improvements to the A428 corridor it is essential that Highways England work with Network Rail to ensure that their works complement each other.

The Strategic Transport Forum looks forward to continuing to work closely with Highways England in order to ensure that this improvement – which has strategic significance for both east-west and north-south connectivity – is delivered at the earliest opportunity.

Yours sincerely



PP Martin Tugwell

Cllr Heather Smith

Chairman, Strategic Transport Forum
Leader Northamptonshire County Council