

Strategic Transport Forum

22nd June 2018

Agenda Item 6a: Expressway Study

Recommendation: It is recommended that the Forum note the Secretary of State's response to its letter of 20th April.

1. Context

- 1.1. At its meeting held on 16th March this Forum had an extended debate in respect of the 'expressway study'.
- 1.2. As a result of that debate the Forum set out its concerns regarding the study in a letter to the Secretary of State for Transport (Annex 1).
- 1.3. This Forum is invited to note the Secretary of State's response which was received on 4th May (Annex 2).

2. Commentary

- 2.1. It is clear from the Secretary of State's response that the intention remains to announce a preferred corridor this summer, with work to develop a preferred route to be taken forward over the ensuing 12 months.
- 2.2. On 23rd May Highways England held a Stakeholder Conference in Milton Keynes. The Highways England team also briefed the Strategic Alliance Leaders prior to the conference.
- 2.3. There are a number of significant issues on which there remain some concerns:
 - a) The Forum's letter to the Secretary of State highlighted the importance of ensuring that any decision on the preferred corridor is informed by consideration of the scale and cost of the investment that would be required to connect each of the potential corridors with the wider transport system – for the avoidance of doubt the Forum's letter did not suggest that the corridor selection had to wait until completion of the connectivity study, rather it argued that an interim output from the connectivity study would be sufficient.
 - b) Linked to this is the need to consider the scale of investment in infrastructure that is required in order to enable the delivery of planned growth within the current round of Local Plans.

Delivery of the 'expressway' – particularly the 'missing link' – will only be realised towards the end of the plan period for the current round of Local Plans. With significant investment in highway infrastructure required in order to enable the growth already planned to be realised it is arguably all the more important to ensure that the identification of a preferred corridor for the expressway takes into account the scale and costs of that investment.

- c) The briefings provided by the Highways England team in May suggested that the approach taken with regards to identifying opportunities for additional growth that might be enabled by the expressway might be somewhat simplistic and may not reflect the approach that a local planning authority is required to follow.
 - d) It was also clear from the briefings that the approach taken by Highways England to assessing the detailed implication of each of the corridors treats each of the assessment criteria with equal weight. Determination of the preferred corridor will require weightings to be applied to the criteria. It is understood that the Department will determine the weightings to be applied and that this will be set out by Government subsequent to the identification of the preferred corridor.
 - e) It was clear from the briefings provided by Highways England that the potential corridors for the missing link being considered are often immediately adjacent to one another: what is unclear is whether having identified a preferred corridor this precludes consideration of any part of that corridor encroaching its immediate neighbour.
 - f) What remains unclear is the extent to which the work to date takes into account how future travel patterns, and indeed future travel demand, might change in response to the investment that is being made in strategic rail infrastructure and services, as well as in response to the continued growth of the digital economy.
- 2.4. Fundamentally the Forum remains supportive of the need for significant investment in the highway infrastructure across the Heartland area.
- 2.5. It remains supportive of that investment being prioritised by Government and being delivered at the earliest opportunity.
- 2.6. However, there remains a deep seated concern as to the extent to which the expressway study is being taken forward in relative isolation from some of the wider strategic considerations.

Martin Tugwell
Programme Director

June 2018

Rt Hon Chris Grayling MP
Secretary of State
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20th April 2018

Dear Secretary of State

OXFORD – MILTON KEYNES – CAMBRIDGE EXPRESSWAY

England's Economic Heartland welcomed the recognition by the UK Government of the national importance of the region's economy. As the emerging Sub-national Transport Body for the Oxford – Milton Keynes – Cambridge corridor our focus is on identifying investment in infrastructure and services that will improve levels of productivity, provide capacity for economic growth and accelerate delivery of planned housing.

In that regard the priority given to delivering the 'multi-modal spine' is supported. However, by its very definition, transformational infrastructure will fundamentally change future travel patterns and demand: the current pattern of housing market and functional economic areas will evolve in response to that investment.

It is therefore important that strategic transport investment is considered alongside digital infrastructure (fixed and mobile). Improved digital infrastructure will also fundamentally change future travel patterns and demand. It is for this reason that our overarching Transport Strategy will include consideration of the need for and implications of investment in digital infrastructure.

We appreciate that the expressway is a complex and sensitive project. However, that emphasises the critical importance of meaningful engagement with the key stakeholders. Our collective experience to date has been to leave us feeling that the approach is little more than a 'tick-box' exercise, with no sense that our views are either heard or acted upon. If we are to successfully deliver this significant highway investment it has to be developed collaboratively. That requires a fundamental change by the project team as to how they engage with key stakeholders.

We are also concerned that Highways England's approach with the 'expressway' study fails to take into account the wider transformational agenda. More specifically our concerns regarding the 'expressway' study are focused on three key issues:

- a) Your personal commitment to accelerate the delivery of East West Rail (both the Western and Central sections) is particularly welcome. It enables local partners to plan with greater confidence on the basis of a step-change in connectivity being delivered by the re-opening of this piece of strategic infrastructure. It also creates the opportunity to realistically encourage inter-urban movement across the region to take advantage of that investment, particularly if it is supported by co-ordinated investment in first/last mile infrastructure and services.

In this scenario the strategic objectives for the 'expressway' study need review to ensure that the solutions it identifies complement, not compete with, East West Rail. Based on the work

shared to date by Highways England we cannot be sure that their approach takes such considerations into account.

- b) We agree that notwithstanding East West Rail, there is also a need for significant investment in the highway network. We agree that the justification for that investment is to support realisation of the region's economic potential and accelerate delivery of planned housing.

It is for this reason that we are committed to commissioning the 'connectivity study' – announced in Budget 2017 - as a matter of some urgency. For it is only by comparing the potential costs of connections to/from a new 'expressway' with the alternative of investing in upgrades to existing corridors that we believe a considered view can be taken on how best to achieve the long term strategic objectives for the corridor within the likely funding available.

The need to consider improvements to existing corridors is particularly pertinent given that delivery of planned housing growth identified in emerging Local Plans is largely dependent upon the ability of what is an already congested network to deal with additional growth.

We agree that there is a need to move forward at pace with the identification of priorities so that they can be incorporated into investment programmes. However we are deeply concerned that the remit given to Highways England fails to allow for any option other than investment in a single new 'expressway' corridor.

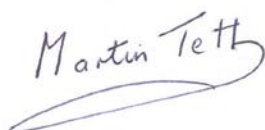
- c) There is a further concern that the strategic importance of committing to and then delivering investment in improvements elsewhere on the highway network is not reflected in the work of the 'expressway' study. The delay in an announcement on the preferred route for the A428 Black Cat to Caxton Gibbet investment (a RIS1 commitment), and the strategic importance of identifying a way forward for the A1(M) corridor are two examples of this concern.

We share your commitment to ensure that the work to identify strategic transport priorities is taken forward at pace. However it is critical that work on individual elements firmly sits within the wider strategic context. For that reason we question whether the evidence base exists to enable a preferred corridor for the 'expressway' to be identified this summer.

We are committed to working with DfT to enable a considered view on the 'expressway' to be taken at the earliest opportunity. We are using the funding available to us to establish (for the first time) a single overview of planned growth across the corridor and to commission the development of a 'policy scenario modelling tool'. The latter is specifically designed to enable decisions makers (nationally and sub-nationally) to come to a considered view on long term strategic investment needs.

Our work programme will see the draft overarching Transport/Connectivity Strategy for the corridor available at the turn of the calendar year, and would strongly urge that any consideration of the way forward for the 'expressway' is deferred until that is available.

Yours sincerely,



Cllr Martin Tett

Chair England's Economic Heartland
Leader Buckinghamshire County Council

On Behalf of members of the Strategic Transport Forum:

- Oxfordshire County Council
- Northamptonshire County Council
- Buckinghamshire County Council
- Milton Keynes Council
- Bedford Borough Council
- Central Bedfordshire Council
- Luton Borough Council
- Cambridgeshire County Council
- Peterborough City Council
- Swindon Borough Council
- Hertfordshire County Council
- Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership
- Buckinghamshire Thames Valley Local Enterprise Partnership
- South East Midlands Local Enterprise Partnership
- Oxfordshire Growth Board
- Central Growth Board
- Department for Transport (observer status)
- Highways England
- Network Rail
- Transport Systems Catapult



Department
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D M. Tett

4 May

Thank you for your letter of 20 April 2018 raising concerns about the quality of engagement from Highways England regarding the Oxford to Cambridge Expressway.

I am delighted that England's Economic Heartland (EEH) supports the Expressway scheme and I agree with EEH on the need for joined-up infrastructure and effective local engagement. As an emerging Sub-National Transport Body I value the local knowledge England's Economic Heartland brings to the development of the Expressway and I am disappointed you have concerns regarding the quality of engagement from Highways England.

As you know Highways England has worked with stakeholders on the Expressway scheme since 2015 and has intensified its programme of stakeholder engagement over the past six months as we prepare to make an announcement on the corridor in summer 2018, as committed to at Autumn Budget 2017. As part of that engagement Highways England has requested written representations from stakeholders across the corridor, including EEH, on which corridor option best suits their growth plans and housing plans.

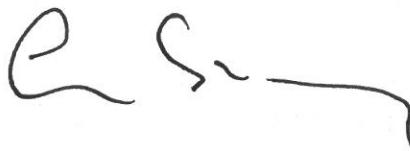
This process was meant as genuine engagement to facilitate Highways England in making a decision on corridor choice that realises both the national and local benefits of the road. I welcome closer involvement of EEH in scheme development through the Strategic Stakeholder Group as the project progresses and I have asked my officials to work with Highways England to ensure this happens. I understand Highways England are holding a conference on the 23rd May to continue this engagement and I hope you participate fully in both this and subsequent engagement as Highways England develop route options.

As you noted in your letter, part of the rationale for building both East West Rail and the Expressway is to facilitate the region's economic potential. The Government recognises the importance of maximising synergies between the two transport infrastructure projects and housing, and will continue to work closely across a number of Departments to achieve this. Following your feedback on this matter, officials from my Department will take a more active role in assisting Highways England with their engagement.

In your letter you suggest delaying the announcement of the Expressway corridor until after EEH has completed its Transport Strategy and the Connectivity Study to ensure the road supports the long term strategic objectives of the arc. I remain committed to corridor selection in summer 2018, making the decision based on evidence available at the time. Some certainty on which corridor the road will be built in will facilitate both Authorities as they plan new housing, and Local Enterprise Partnerships as they develop their Industrial Strategies.

A delay of the announcement by even a few months would impact on the delivery of these benefits. Further, the road is of national significance and there is an urgent need to address poor East-West connectivity to realise benefits in relation to congestion and traffic flows across the country. For this reason we are committed to opening the missing link in 2030, a move which necessitates strategic decisions to be made this summer. I commissioned EEH to complete the Connectivity Study to identify ways that places which are not in the vicinity of the Expressway corridor can still benefit from it. This work can only begin once the corridor has been announced.

Highways England remains committed to delivering the A428 Black Cat to Caxton Gibbett scheme, however, Highways England also recognise the need to understand the outcomes of recent work on the A1 East of England Strategic Study prior to deciding on the preferred route for the A428 scheme. Highways England will provide further information on the progression of this valuable scheme in the near future.

With best wishes


Rt Hon Chris Grayling MP

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR TRANSPORT