

Strategic Transport Forum 26th January 2018

Agenda Item 6b: Major Road Network: DfT Consultation

Recommendation: It is recommended that the Forum:

- a) Note the publication of the Department for Transport's 'Proposals for the Creation of a Major Road Network'.
- b) Note the arrangements for responding to the consultation which will be considered at its meeting in March

1. Context

- 1.1. This Forum has been briefed previously on the concept of the Major Road Network. Indeed it received a presentation by the leader of the work commissioned by the Rees Jeffreys Road Fund, David Quarmby.
- 1.2. In October 2016 the Forum published its 'Planning for Growth' position statement. This set out the Forum's support for the concept of a Major Road Network and the Forum's support for the idea that funding from the soon to be established National Roads Fund should be used to invest in the Major Road Network.
- 1.3. Just before Christmas the Department for Transport published its proposals for the creation of a Major Road Network: the deadline for responses is 19th March.

2. Overview

- 2.1. The Forum will consider the DfT's proposals in greater detail at its meeting on 16th March. The purpose of this paper is outline the key issues arising from the proposal and to set out the approach to developing a detailed response.
- 2.2. The consultation seeks views on three major themes: how to define the network; the investment planning process; and a set of eligibility criteria. In putting forward its proposal the DfT suggests that the MRN should:
 - Form a consistent, coherent network, alongside the Strategic Road Network, to allow better co-ordination of road investment.
 - Provide funding certainty to roads in the network through the use of the National Roads Fund, and raise standards and performance across the road network.
 - Provide clear roles for local and regional partners, who will support the Government to develop and deliver schemes.
- 2.3. The Forum should note that within the proposals include an explicit role for the emerging Sub-national Transport Bodies in terms of developing and maintaining a

regional evidence base., with that being used to underpin the identification of the Major Road Network and investment priorities.

3. Issues for Discussion

3.1. Whilst the DfT's commitment to the principle of identifying a Major Road Network is welcome in principle there are a number of key issues that will need careful consideration in developing the Forum's response:

a) A single road network – the original Rees Jeffreys Road Fund research proposed that the Major Road Network should be a combination of Highways England's Strategic Road Network and the more significant local authority owned roads – the argument being that it is the combination of the two that forms the Major Road Network.

The DfT's proposal is that the Strategic Road Network should remain separate from what they see as being the Major Road Network – i.e. those roads owned and operated by the Local Transport Authorities. The difference in the approach advocated by the DfT represents a significant departure from the original concept proposed by the Rees Jeffreys Road Fund. The implications of this difference will need to be considered in developing the Forum's response.

b) Definition based on current road conditions – the National Infrastructure Commission's report on the Oxford – Milton Keynes – Cambridge corridor highlighted the critical role that improved connectivity has to play in enabling the economic potential of the corridor to be realised. Moreover it set out clearly the 'once-in-a-generation' opportunity presented by the delivery of the 'multi-modal spine' as a transformational investment.

By implication delivery of the 'spine' will fundamentally affect travel patterns across the corridor: functional economic geographies are likely to change as are strategic housing market areas. The implications of improved connectivity will need to be considered as the Forum develops the overarching Transport Strategy. The DfT's proposal to base the identification of the MRN based on current conditions underplays the importance of the MRN being a strategic transport policy: one whose role is to change the operation of the highway network in support of planned economic and housing growth.

c) A Programme Approach – the proposal to introduce greater certainty to investment in the Major Road Network is to be welcomed. However, further consideration is going to be given as to how to realise the added value that could be realised by adopting a 'programme approach' to the delivery of an agreed package of investment. The Forum's overarching Transport Strategy will lead to the identification of investment priorities. Taking those forward as a managed programme – in a similar way to that employed by Highways England in the form of the Road Investment Strategy – is likely to offer significant benefits both in terms of ensuring that investment supports delivery of economic opportunities and in terms of enabling local partners to secure reductions in the cost of delivery.

The benefits of promoting a programme approach are ones that need further consideration in developing the Forum's response.

- 3.2. In addition to developing a detailed response on behalf of the Forum, the core programme team is liaising with the other emerging Sub-national Transport Bodies to develop an overarching response to the DfT's consultation. That will be presented to this Forum at the meeting in March.

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