

Wiltshire Council

Cabinet

27 March 2018

Subject: Proposals for the Creation of a Major Road Network - Consultation

Cabinet Member: Cllr Bridget Wayman

Key Decision: No

Executive Summary

In July 2017, Department for Transport's "Transport Investment Strategy" was published.

As part of the Strategy, Government committed to creating a 'Major Road Network' across England – more specifically a network of England's most important routes which complement motorways and strategic trunk roads.

In December 2017, Department for Transport (DfT) issued a consultation document "Proposals for the Creation of a Major Road Network" (MRN).

The consultation suggests how the MRN might be defined, and outlines proposals that acknowledge the need for a long-term funding stream for an MRN, specifically through use of the National Roads Fund.

This report explains what that opportunity represents, a high level indication of resource implications and seeks views on the need to establish associated regional governance.

Proposals

Note the contents of this report.

Delegate responsibility to the Director of Highways and Transport in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Waste to enter into discussions with neighbouring authorities in the South West, to establish:

- a) the level of individual and collective support for establishing a Sub-National Transport Body (or Bodies) and
- b) the geography over which that Body or Bodies are most likely to be most effectively defined.

Note the additional potential financial implications arising as a result of this opportunity, which will require more detailed discussion as the Council's position is further developed.

Reason for Proposals

To ensure that the Council is best placed to take advantage of this significant funding opportunity.

Alistair Cunningham – Corporate Director

Wiltshire Council

Cabinet

27 March 2018

Subject: Proposals for the Creation of a Major Road Network - Consultation

Cabinet Member: Cllr Bridget Wayman

Key Decision: No

Purpose of Report

1. To advise Cabinet of a new significant funding opportunity for major road scheme funding, and to seek views on the need to establish associated regional governance.

Relevance to the Council's Business Plan

2. The Wiltshire Council Business Plan 2017 – 2027 sets out a vision to create strong communities, with priorities for growing the economy, strong communities and protecting the vulnerable. As part of growing the economy it is acknowledged that it is necessary to have good transport networks. The goals are that:
 - Strategic Road infrastructure is improved
 - New infrastructure is delivered to support housing and employment growth

Main Considerations for the Council

3. In order that the above goals are achieved, the Council needs to keep abreast of national and local funding opportunities, and ensure that it is best placed to take advantage of those opportunities as and when they emerge.
4. England's existing road network consists of the Strategic Road Network (SRN) and the Local Road Network (LRN). The SRN and LRN are funded and managed differently. However, users do not distinguish between the two networks when making journeys, and rightly expect a seamless experience.
5. The Strategic Road Network:
 - Comprises nationally significant roads which connect the main centres of population. These roads provide access to major ports, airports and inter-modal freight terminals and the main crossborder

routes to Scotland and Wales. In Wiltshire, that comprises the M4, A303, A419 and A36.

- Is the busiest part of the road network consisting of 4,400 miles which is 2% of England's road network, but carrying a third of traffic and two thirds of HGV traffic.

6. The Local Road Network:

- Consists of 184,100 miles of road, 98% of the entire road network.
- Responsibility is split between 153 Local Authorities.

7. Funding

The Strategic Road Network

- The SRN is managed by Highways England and its funding is determined by Government through the statutory Road Investment Strategy (RIS) cycle.
- It is now mid-way through the first (2015 - 2020) £15.2 billion RIS and planning has started for the second period beyond 2020.
- The first RIS is funding improvements to the A303 between Amesbury to Berwick Down, including a twin bored tunnel at Stonehenge.
- In collaboration with BaNES and Dorset Councils, the West of England Combined Authority and Poole Harbour Commissioners and our respective Local Enterprise Partnerships, the Council has put together a proposition that argues a "case for action" based on improving north - south links between M4 and the south coast. The partnership is lobbying for its inclusion in RIS2.

The Local Road Network

- Local Authorities are funded to maintain their local road networks with sustained grant funding and other incentive-driven competitive schemes totalling £6.2 billion between 2015 and 2021. This is chiefly made up of the Highways Maintenance Fund and the Pothole Action Fund. £1.55 billion has also been allocated over the same period for small local roads schemes from the Integrated Transport Block.

Additional funding streams have been created to provide support to the local road network:

- The Department for Transport contributed £7 billion to the Local Growth Fund (LGF), to meet priorities set by Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) Swindon and Wiltshire LEP has awarded £16 million toward transport schemes in Wiltshire since 2014.

- The Large Local Majors Fund was launched by DfT in 2016 and provides funding for capital schemes that are too large to be funded from the regular LGF allocations to LEPs. The Council submitted an unsuccessful bid to this fund for a bypass at Beanacre.
- £244 million has been awarded to Local Authorities from the National Productivity Investment Fund to deliver small projects. The Council is delivering 25 projects in 2017/18 using this funding to a total value of £2.946 million.

Background

8. In July 2017, DfT's "Transport Investment Strategy"¹ was published.
9. As part of the Strategy, Government committed to creating a 'MRN' across England – more specifically a network of England's most important routes which complement motorways and strategic trunk roads.
10. In December 2017, DfT issued a consultation document "Proposals for the Creation of a Major Road Network"²
11. DfT are proposing the identification of a 'MRN', of approximately the same mileage as the network for which Highways England is responsible.
12. The proposed MRN is underpinned by a number of core principles being:
 - increased certainty of funding
 - a consistent network
 - a co-ordinated Investment Programme
 - clear Local, Regional and National roles
 - a focus on Enhancement and Major Renewals and
 - strengthening links with the Strategic Road Network
13. The consultation proposes that the MRN is defined through the use of both quantitative and qualitative criteria.

Quantitative Criteria

14. Traffic flow levels have been used to identify an initial set of roads for inclusion in the network, specifically:
 - links with average daily flow greater than 20 000 vehicles, along with
 - roads with as few as 10 000 vehicles provided that at least 5% of that flow is heavy goods vehicles or 15% is light vans

¹ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/624990/transport-investment-strategy-web.pdf

² https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/670527/major-road-network-consultation.pdf

Qualitative Criteria

15. The consultation recognises that the MRN cannot be defined by quantitative criteria alone. This would fail to recognise local and regional characteristics and would produce a series of fragmented road links across the country. In order to define a coherent network, a series of qualitative criteria also needs to be applied.

16. These proposed qualitative criteria are:

Ensuring a Coherent Network: The MRN must be consistent and coherent across the country when considered alongside the SRN. In order to achieve this, the following is proposed:

- Adding links to join up stretches of road that meet the traffic thresholds to form continuous sections of road.
- Removing isolated links and those that form part of a corridor where most links did not reach the traffic thresholds.

Linking Economic Centres: Ensuring that major conurbations, airports, ports and other significant economic centres are connected via the MRN. This includes:

- Connecting all towns/cities with a population greater than 50,000.
- In specific circumstances, DfT proposes that it will consider using the MRN to connect economic centres with a population below this threshold. For example, towns that contribute substantially to the economy in peripheral areas.
- Connecting all major ports, airports and key transport hubs not already linked by the SRN.

17. As part of the consultation, an indicative MRN map has been prepared³ – further work is required to refine the criteria and their application.

18. Figure 1 below is an extract from the map showing the indicative MRN in Wiltshire

³ <http://maps.dft.gov.uk/major-road-network-consultation/>

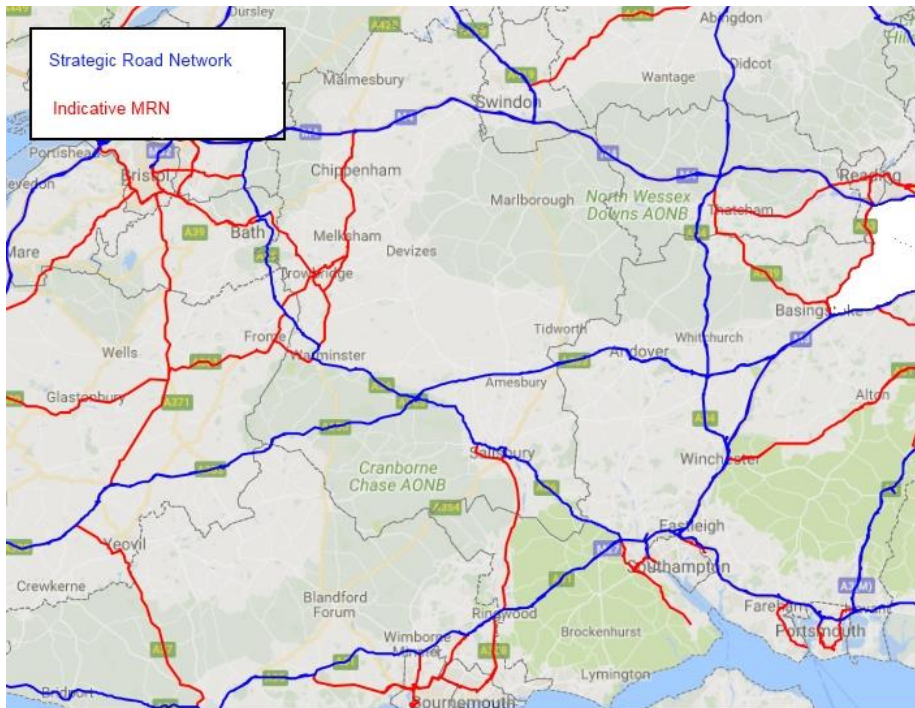


Figure 1

19. For the avoidance of doubt, the roads in Wiltshire meeting the initial criteria are:
 - A350 between M4 J17 and A36 (Warminster)
 - A361 between A350 (Semington) and A36 (Beckington)
 - A362 between Warminster and Frome (to Somerset County Boundary)
 - A363 between A350 (Yarnbrook) and A4 (Batheaston)
 - A338 between A31 (Ringwood) and A36 (College Roundabout Salisbury)
 - A3094 between A338 (Harnham) and A36 (Quidhampton)

20. DfT is also proposing to create a specific new funding stream which will be dedicated to investing in the MRN and raising the performance standards which motorists experience on it.

21. The Government has outlined proposals that acknowledge the need for a long-term funding stream for an MRN, specifically through use of the National Roads Fund⁴.

22. It is proposed that MRN funding should target significant interventions which offer '*...transformative solutions...*' to the most economically important local authority 'A' roads. These solutions will include, but are not limited to:

⁴ From 2020/21 the Government has guaranteed that all revenue raised from Vehicle Excise Duty (VED) in England will be allocated to a new National Roads Fund and invested directly back into the road network, providing stable funding that will allow maintaining levels of investment.

- bypasses
 - major renewal work
 - major junction improvements
 - use of technology and
 - widening of existing (MRN) roads.
23. It is proposed that MRN schemes will only be considered if they seek funding in excess of **£20 million**, up to a maximum ceiling of **£100 million**, and are supported by a local contribution.
24. In terms of planning that investment, Government has made it clear that the important national and regional role played by roads included in the MRN means that individual Local Authorities cannot plan investments in isolation; nor can decisions be completely centralised at either a national or regional level. Government proposes that, alongside the local role of highway authorities, there needs to be a strong regional focus for investment planning within a consistent national framework.
25. Government has made it equally clear that Sub-national Transport Bodies (STBs), where they exist, are best placed to carry out this important strategic role – i.e. as bodies designed to enable regions to speak with one voice on strategic transport planning.
26. An early proposed requirement in the MRN process is the preparation of a 'Regional Evidence Base', that will provide the data on which future investment decisions can be made. That evidence basis needs to be data led and underpinned by rigorous analysis.
27. DfT proposes to shortly issue guidance to STBs and regions in the development of their evidence base.
28. For areas of the country where STBs have yet to be established, roles, responsibilities and expectations of Local Authorities are far less clear.
29. What is becoming very clear however, from this consultation and discussion with senior colleagues at DfT, is that those areas without a STB will be increasingly and significantly disadvantaged in terms of future funding opportunities.

Sub-National Transport Bodies (STBs) – Wiltshire's position

30. STBs were identified, with accompanying legislation, within the Cities and Local Government Devolution Act 2016. By formulating a statutory STB, local partners have the ability to have direct influence over decisions that are currently within the control of Government and its agencies. The Act allows existing individual authorities to formally join in a partnership with another authority(s) to formulate, and potentially deliver, a transport strategy for the wider area. Essentially the value of the STB becomes one of greater powers than the sums of the individual authorities.

31. Some key aspects of a STB:
- An STB area must consist of two or more relevant authorities.
 - A relevant authority is: A County Council, Unitary District Council, Combined Authority, Integrated Transport Authority
 - The Secretary of State (SofS) considers all requests for an STB to be established.
 - The SofS will consider the establishment of an STB if:
 - It would facilitate the development of a transport strategy for the proposed wider area
 - Economic growth for that area would be furthered by the development of the joint transport strategy.
 - The SofS may request that the STB:
 - Prepares a Transport Strategy
 - Provides advice to the SofS of transport functions
 - Coordinates transport functions within the STB area
 - In addition the STB can request the transfer of functions to the STB from Government and its agencies.
 - The boundaries of an STB can be amended once established.

Emerging Sub-National Bodies

32. At the time of writing, three STBs have been formed and are working towards becoming statutory authorities. They include: Transport for the North, Midlands Connect and England's Economic Heartland. In addition, a shadow STB has been created for South East England and work has begun on creating a STB for East Anglia. The South West remains the only part of England not covered by an existing or nascent STB.
33. Were that position to remain, it seems clear that Wiltshire, along with other South West Authorities, will be significantly disadvantaged in its ability to take advantage of the opportunities presented through MRN funding. It is increasingly the case that access to other significant transport funding streams will be compromised for areas outside STBs.
34. Having regard to all the above, a main consideration for the Council is its willingness to participate in the establishment of a Sub National Transport Group in the South West of England.
35. ADEPT⁵ (South West) subnational Board meets on a quarterly cycle and is regularly attended by around 20 Councils, Government Departments/Agencies and partners, including LEP Chief Executives and the Institute of Civil Engineers.

⁵ The Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning and Transport

36. Supported by its members, the Board has begun to consider what the composition and geography of a Sub-National Transport Body (or Bodies) in the South West might look like.
37. Its early thinking suggests that a single STB comprising all southwest authorities (Gloucestershire, Wiltshire, Swindon, West of England, Somerset, Dorset, Devon and Cornwall and the smaller unitaries) would be too large, and would struggle to represent a shared identity.
38. If that view prevails, it would indicate that the SW region might be represented by more than one STB – likely no more than two.
39. There are options to explore and work to help with that is ongoing.
40. It is acknowledged that STBs take significant time to become finally and formally established. Given the pressing need for regional representation in the MRN process however, DfT has confirmed that constituting a shadow STB in the relative short term would offer much of the input required to guide investment priorities.
41. The Council's response to the MRN consultation based on existing policies is included as **Appendix 1. (to follow)**

Overview and Scrutiny Engagement

42. Whilst no specific Overview and Scrutiny activity has been undertaken to date, it is a matter which appears suitable for consideration in the future.

Safeguarding Implications

43. None.

Public Health Implications

44. A key outcome of the MRN investment is to reduce congestion, securing (inter alia) the following outcomes:
 - improve air quality and biodiversity
 - reduce noise and risk of flooding
 - protect water quality, landscape and cultural heritage sites

Procurement Implications

45. There are no obvious procurement implications to the objectives set out in the report; however, should any arise then they would be undertaken in consultation with the Strategic Procurement Hub and in accordance with the Council's procurement regulations.

Equalities Impact of the Proposal

46. An Equalities Impact Assessment would form part of the proposed Regional Evidence Base referred to above.

Environmental and Climate Change Considerations

47. Assessment of the implications for heritage, archaeology and ecology of proposed schemes would be undertaken as part of individual scheme design.
48. As far as individual schemes are concerned, it is anticipated that they will provide benefits through improved traffic flows, thereby reducing delays and a consequential reduction in noise and excessive fuel consumption and emissions associated with slow moving or stationary traffic.
49. There are no specific Environmental and Climate Change issues to be considered at this stage.

Risk Assessment

50. It is anticipated that engagement with the direct and indirect implications of the MRN proposition will be controversial both in terms of decisions that would need to be made to establish a shadow STB, and also agreeing the priorities for investment.

Risks that may arise if the proposed decision and related work is not taken

51. The opportunity to take advantage of a significant new funding stream could be compromised or lost.

Risks that may arise if the proposed decision is taken and actions that will be taken to manage these risks

52. There are no significant immediate risks to the Council if Members endorse the conclusions of the report.
53. Members will be regularly updated and agreement sought at each of the key stages associated with this emerging initiative.

Financial Implications

54. As proposed, access to MRN funding will require an initial investment in creating a Regional Evidence Base. That cost would be borne by Local Authorities in parts of the country where there is no STB.
55. At the same time, it seems reasonable to assume that where there is no STB, affected Local Authorities will now be considering how best to remedy that situation, and work towards establishing a suitable body (or bodies). That would demand significant unbudgeted resource.
56. For those projects likely to be eligible for MRN funding, the Council may wish to develop individual business cases to a high state of readiness to

improve the prospect of early entry into the programme. Again, that would require a significant unbudgeted resource.

Legal Implications

57. 102F(3)(a) of the Local Transport Act 2008⁶ sets out the legal framework for the creation of STBs namely that the constituent authorities together make a proposal to the Secretary of State for there to be an STB for the area.
58. As any proposal must be supported by the constituent authorities, the Council needs to be involved in the set up discussions to ensure that the Council is informed of all potential benefits and detriments and that the Council has input into issues of governance.
59. As the current thinking is that a single STB for the South West may be too large and difficult to present a shared identity it is appropriate that the Council is represented in these early discussions to have input into what would assist in presenting a shared identity for Wiltshire.

Options Considered

60. None.

Conclusions

61. The proposal to create a Major Road Network with additional funding will lead to improvements along busy roads, which so far have been managed and funded locally, and is therefore generally welcomed by Highway Authorities.
62. There is a compelling argument for the Council to engage with neighbouring Authorities, to explore options towards the formulation of a Sub-National Transport Body (or Bodies) in the South West of England.
63. There is an equally compelling argument for the Councils to establish a shadow STB in the very short term, in order to respond accordingly to DfT's MRN-led call for a Regional Evidence Base.

Parvis Khansari (Director - Highways and Transport)

Report Author: **Allan Creedy** - Head of Sustainable Transport
allan.creedy@wiltshire.gov.uk, Tel: 01225 713444
Date of report: 29 January 2018

The following unpublished documents have been relied on in the preparation of this Report: None

Appendices: Appendix 1 – Council's response to MRN Consultation

⁶ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2008/26/section/102E>