

Wiltshire Council

Cabinet

13 October 2020

Questions from Anne Henshaw on Behalf of the CPRE Wiltshire

Agenda Item 8 – A350 Melksham Bypass

To Cllr Bridget Wayman – Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Waste

Question 1:

Does the continued pursuance of a major road building programme, centred on the A350, reflect the Governments' decarbonising priorities or the impacts of CV19?

Response:

The proposed A350 Melksham Bypass is a long-term transport improvement and is not linked to the Council's current Covid-19 response. The carbon implications of the scheme will be considered in the light of emerging policies and strategies at government and local level. The reduced congestion, better facilities for active travel, and improved road safety would be expected to reduce energy consumption, but this is likely to vary between the different options and will be assessed as part of the options appraisal process

Question 2:

The Western Gateway Sub-National Transport Body consultation in July received so many negative responses that the Plan was delayed for further work to be done. This Plan drives work on the A350.

The highest number of comments were that there remains too much focus on highway investment.

What is the objective of the current survey?

Response:

Questions relating to decisions taken by the Western Gateway Sub National Transport Body (STB) should generally be referred to their board for response.

It is correct however that for a number of reasons, the STB has decided to delay consideration and approval of their draft Transport Strategy until their December Board meeting.

The outcome of that exercise will not affect the funding commitments already made by DfT in respect of the proposed Melksham bypass. The survey is intended to elicit local information and opinion to help consideration of route options.

Question 3:

It is stated that heavy goods vehicles account for around 8% of all the 20,000+ daily traffic movements along the A350. This indicates that 92% are private vehicles or small carriers.

Will the consultations, which it is stated are to be undertaken locally, show the up to date figures post-covid19? The fact that the 5 day car commute is dead (already accepted by the rail industry) and that the rise in on-line shopping has fundamentally altered retail patterns, and therefore traffic patterns?

Response:

There was a significant reduction of traffic volumes earlier this year as a result of the Covid-19 restrictions, but traffic flows have increased significantly since then. The situation is continuing to change and there is still uncertainty about immediate future. The current traffic information uses data collected prior to lockdown, but the traffic figures and future growth information will be adjusted to reflect amended Department of Transport predictions as these are published.

Question 4:

What is the estimated cost of the Melksham Bypass? We understand it is in the region of £30m.

How will this be justified in the light of the decarbonising programme and change in travel patterns.?

It appears that the Melksham scheme is simply following the “predict and provide” model without any consideration of the radical changes within society and how future development will be

Response:

The cost of the scheme will depend on which option is adopted but could be in the region of £130 million for the longer routes. The business case for the scheme will be reviewed against emerging carbon policies and strategies and will use future traffic growth assumptions based on DfT guidance. The strategic case for improvements to the A350 corridor are still considered to be relevant and remain a high priority for this Council.