

DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**CABINET MEMBER MEETING – JOBS, ECONOMY AND
TRANSPORT**

4 March 2014

Report of the Strategic Director – Economy, Transport and Environment

CONSULTATION ON M1 MOTORWAY SPEED LIMIT

(1) **Purpose of the Report** To confirm the County Council's response to proposals to introduce a mandatory maximum speed limit below the national speed limit on sections of the M1 Motorway within Derbyshire.

(2) **Information and Analysis** A scheme to put in place a 'managed motorway' system on the M1 Motorway, between Junctions 28 at South Normanton and 31 at Aston (South Yorkshire), has been under development for some time. Preliminary works are taking place at present and the scheme is due to be complete in 2015. Another scheme covers the section between Junctions 32 and 35, with slightly different but complementary measures on the (four-lane) section between Junctions 31 and 32. This project has, to date, been supported by the County Council on the basis that the essential movement of people and goods in the area relies heavily upon the Motorway being able to deal efficiently with strategic traffic. Managed motorways operate through a system of real-time monitoring and control, allowing immediate responses to congestion or incidents by imposing mandatory changes in speed limit (with camera enforcement) and by directing traffic to use or to avoid specific lanes. These systems have been in place for some time on sections of the motorway network including the M42 in the West Midlands, and have recently been introduced on the widened section of the M1 between Junctions 25 and 28. The current project is different, though, in that it provides a fourth running lane but no continuous hard shoulder, with emergency refuges provided for incidents such as breakdowns.

The Highways Agency (HA), which is responsible for the maintenance and improvement of the M1, expects the managed motorway scheme to result in smoother traffic flows, reduced congestion, better journey reliability and better information for users. An environmental assessment of the scheme, though, has shown that because it would allow traffic volumes to grow, it would impact adversely on existing Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs), three of which are in Derbyshire and contain residential properties. AQMAs are a statutory designation, and highway authorities are required to respond to them. It is

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therefore necessary for the HA to find ways to mitigate the impact of its proposals.

A number of possible measures could be introduced, for example barriers, noise-absorbing surfacing or even realignment or tunneling. The conclusion reached by the HA, though, is that none of these is as deliverable or effective as the introduction of a lower speed limit. The specific proposal is that a maximum limit of 60mph would apply between 7am and 7pm every day. Lower limits could apply during these periods in response to incidents or congestion. Between 7pm and 7am, the 'default' speed limit would be 70mph, again variable in response to conditions at any given time. This is quite a significant proposal, representing the first time such a measure has been introduced in the UK, but it is important to note that it is proposed under very specific circumstances. If, in future, it becomes possible for AQMA designations to be removed (which is quite probable given improvements in vehicle and fuel technology), the relaxation of the speed limit could follow.

The introduction of a maximum mandatory speed limit is, at this stage, a proposal on which the views of stakeholders are invited. The closing date for the consultation is 3 March 2014 and, because this occurs before the date of this meeting, the recommendations contained in the report have been agreed for submission with the Cabinet Member for Jobs, Economy and Transport.

For the County Council there appear to be several key considerations, relating to the impact of the proposal on:

- the use of roads for which the County Council is responsible;
- road safety;
- the local environment and on carbon emissions; and
- the ability of the M1 to serve its purpose as one of the key corridors on which the County and its economy depend.

By definition, a lower speed limit on the M1 reduces its capacity to accommodate traffic growth, and an important question is therefore whether this impacts upon local roads. Of particular concern for Derbyshire are those which parallel the M1, potentially acting as alternative routes to it, which themselves have locations with noise and air quality problems. Information provided by the HA shows that a 60mph limit is predicted to have a range of effects on different roads. Over time, the relative environmental impact on most local roads is predicted to improve; whilst there will still be growth in traffic, the proportion accommodated by the M1 is greater with the managed motorway scheme (and the 60mph daytime limit) than it would be in the absence of the scheme. This does have the effect of increasing (in relative terms) flows on some local roads connecting to the M1, such as the A617 and A6192. These increases are of similar magnitude to those on the M1 itself, and are not viewed as having a material impact on environmental conditions.

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Other roads, including the A61 and the A619 through Brimington and Staveley are predicted to benefit, carrying less traffic than they would if the managed motorway scheme was not introduced.

It must be stressed that these impacts are based upon modelling and (should the proposal go ahead) it will be necessary to monitor closely the trend in M1 traffic plus that on local roads. Should it be the case that the lower speed limit on the M1 goes ahead and results in higher traffic flows on Derbyshire roads (and potentially in traffic-related AQMA designations), the County Council would need to have the ability to influence the HA and agree the optimum solution.

Road safety (through the reduction of collisions), is not one of the stated objectives of the managed motorway project. However, the safety record to date of managed motorways is generally good relative to other strategic roads, and there is reason to expect that this would be the case under the operation of a 60mph limit. The proximity of this to the 56mph limit applying to heavy vehicles, together with the good compliance brought about by camera enforcement, mean that most vehicles would travel at similar speeds and there would be relatively little overtaking or lane changing. Lower speeds also allow more reaction time and hence improve the ability of drivers to respond safely when an incident does occur.

The mandatory speed limit is proposed in order to avoid the “significant” adverse impact on AQMAs which would occur if the managed motorway scheme was introduced without it. As this implies, the scheme does not necessarily result in an improvement in conditions, but neither does it make them materially worse. It is forecast that the smoother traffic flows under a managed system together with the restriction to 60mph would result in less traffic noise than either an ‘unmanaged’ motorway or under a 70mph speed limit. As noted above, though, close monitoring of the observed impacts, rather than modelled predictions, will be required should the proposal go ahead.

As a key transport corridor, the existing situation cannot be regarded as satisfactory, with the M1 experiencing significant congestion. Even between the main peak periods average daytime speeds are as low as 60mph, often reflecting stop-start traffic flows which have impacts upon safety and the environment, as well as undermining users’ confidence over journey times. Critically, there is no prospect of investment in additional capacity being made through widening of the carriageway to provide another running lane. The managed motorway project is, therefore, the only available means of protecting the ability of the M1 to work efficiently. However, it is a matter of considerable concern that the introduction of a ‘blanket’ speed limit for 12 hours every day would mean that it would apply at times when emissions would not actually represent a problem. It is also clear from responses already

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made to the proposals, in particular from organisations representing business interests, that the introduction of the limit will add to the perception of the M1 as congested and act as a disincentive to investment in the area and a restriction to economic growth. Other sections of the motorway network, and the M1 in particular, have AQMAs adjacent to them but no resulting speed restrictions, which does call in to question why these should be applied as proposed for Junctions 28 to 35.

Whilst the reasons behind the proposal are understandable, it is therefore recommended that the County Council submits an objection to the proposal and requests dialogue with HA over the options available to find the correct balance between environmental and capacity considerations.

(3) **Financial Considerations** There are no financial considerations associated with this report.

In preparing this report the relevance of the following factors has been considered: legal, prevention of crime and disorder, equality and diversity, human resources, environmental, health, property and transport considerations.

(4) **Key Decision** No.

(5) **Call-In** Is it required that call-in be waived in respect of the decisions proposed in the report? No.

(6) **Background Papers** The consultation on M1 speed limits can be accessed from the www.gov.uk website. Officer contact details – Jim Seymour, extension 38557.

(7) **OFFICER'S RECOMMENDATIONS** That the Cabinet Member:

- 7.1 Notes the proposal for the Highways Agency to introduce a maximum mandatory speed limit on the M1 Motorway within Derbyshire.
- 7.2 Confirms the County Council's objection to the proposed maximum mandatory speed limit because of concerns over its impact on local roads and upon the perceived effectiveness of the M1 as a key corridor.
- 7.3 Requests immediate liaison with the Highways Agency over the options available to balance capacity and environmental considerations on the M1 itself, and on connecting roads.

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