

Agenda Item No. 6(e)

DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET

15 March 2018

Report of the Strategic Director – Economy, Transport and Environment

**MAJOR ROAD NETWORK (HIGHWAYS, TRANSPORT AND
INFRASTRUCTURE)**

(1) **Purpose of Report** To set out the Council's proposed response to Government's proposals to create, define and operate a Major Road Network, elements of which would be managed and maintained by the County Council.

(2) **Information and Analysis** During July 2017, Government published its Transport Investment Strategy which introduced the concept of a Major Road Network (MRN) for England. This recognised the importance of local highway authority roads, alongside the Strategic Road Network (SRN) operated by Highways England, to regional and national prosperity. Government has also committed to a proportion of the National Roads Fund (derived from vehicle excise duty) being allocated to the MRN.

On 22 December 2017, Government started a period of consultation with local authorities and other interested parties on its MRN proposals, including core principles, definition of the network, investment planning, eligibility and investment assessment. The consultation period closes on 19 March 2018 and the Council is keen to provide feedback to Government on the proposals. More details regarding the consultation can be accessed at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/proposals-for-the-creation-of-a-major-road-network> .

In creating the MRN, the Government has set out five central policy objectives which are to:

- Reduce congestion – alleviating local and regional congestion, reducing traffic jams and bottlenecks;
- Support economic growth and rebalancing – supporting the delivery of the Industrial Strategy, contributing to a positive economic impact that is felt across the regions;
- Support housing delivery – unlocking land for new housing developments.
- Support all road users – recognising the needs of all users, including cyclists, pedestrians and disabled people; and

- Support the SRN – complementing and supporting the existing SRN by creating a more resilient road network in England.

In order to deliver these objectives, Government intends to adopt a number of guiding principles for the creation and management of the MRN. These are:

- Increased certainty of funding.
- A co-ordinated investment programme.
- A consistent network.
- Clear local, regional and national roles.
- A focus on enhancement and major renewals.
- Strengthening links with the SRN.

Within the above, Government makes it clear there is no intention to alter the current areas of responsibility between Highways England and the local highway authorities who will manage and maintain the SRN and the MRN respectively. It is the intention, however, that investment programmes for these networks become more closely coordinated.

Definition of the MRN

Government is suggesting an MRN is defined through a combination of quantitative and qualitative criteria. The quantitative analysis identifies roads where traffic flow is greater than a defined level and some of those with lower traffic levels (still above a minimum threshold) where the proportion of heavy/commercial vehicles is greater than a defined level. The result will be the inclusion of particularly heavily trafficked roads in the MRN, along with those that are of particular economic importance for transporting goods.

It is possible though that the quantitative assessment alone will not produce a coherent network at national level so a qualitative assessment is proposed to supplement it. This will help ensure greater coherence by:

- 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.
- Connecting all towns/cities with a population greater than 50,000, plus others “that contribute substantially to the economy in peripheral areas”.
- Connecting all major ports, airports and key transport hubs not already linked by the SRN.
- Considering interaction with the SRN, both in terms of access between the two and improving resilience if one should experience disruption or require long-term works.
- Including, where appropriate, roads transferred from national to local management (“de-trunked”) during the period 2001 to 2009.

Eligible Projects

It is proposed that network enhancement projects for the MRN will be eligible to receive contributions of between £20 million and £100 million, with £50 million regarded as the upper limit except in exceptional circumstances. Local contributions are expected but no minimum level is specified within the consultation. Funding is intended to supplement rather than replace 'core' maintenance and is therefore expected to support schemes such as bypasses, major junction upgrades or major structural renewals, but not carriageway re-surfacing or reconstruction.

Roles of Highways England and Sub-National Transport Bodies

As noted above, there is no intention for Highways England or any sub-national transport body (STB) such as Midlands Connects to take responsibility for roads within the MRN. Government does expect, however, close collaboration between relevant parties on the management of the SRN and MRN. As a result, it is proposed that STBs play a role in the selection of projects through the preparation of 'regional evidence bases'.

Discussion

The definition and funding of the MRN will clearly open up opportunities to resolve problems on key local roads that have potential benefits to communities and the environment, as well as to the core objectives of the MRN to increase productivity and support economic growth. The outcome of Government's assessment is a draft MRN which includes significant sections of Derbyshire's highway, specifically:

- The A6135 and A619 from the Sheffield boundary through Eckington and Barlborough to the Nottinghamshire boundary, west of Worksop.
- The A61 from the Sheffield boundary to the A38 at Alfreton and from the A38 to the Derby City boundary at Little Eaton.
- The A617 from Chesterfield, via M1 Motorway Junction 29 to the Nottinghamshire boundary at Pleasley.
- The A38 east of M1 Motorway Junction 28.
- The A610 from the A38 at Ripley to the Nottinghamshire boundary.
- The A609 and A6096 through Ilkeston.
- The A511 through South Derbyshire.
- The A516 in the Etwall area.
- The A52 from Derby to the Staffordshire boundary.
- The A6 from Derby to the East Cheshire boundary at New Mills.
- The A53 from Leek to Buxton.

This could potentially lead to the delivery of projects which would otherwise remain very difficult to bring forward. Based on Government's draft proposals, examples would include grade-separation of major junctions on the A61 Chesterfield Inner Relief Road, or bypasses for settlements on the A6. However, there are a number of roads within Derbyshire which are not

included in Government's proposals but for the Council would argue there is justification to include. Those considered most appropriate would be:

1. The A619 and A6192 connecting Chesterfield to the Staveley area development zone, HS2 track maintenance depot, Markham Vale and M1 Junction 29a.
2. The A515 between Buxton, Ashbourne and the A50 Trunk Road which is critical to the transporting of minerals and provides an important access into the Peak District National Park.
3. The A514 providing connectivity between Derby, Melbourne and Swadlincote.

The above additional proposals have been presented to Midlands Connect as the relevant STB for inclusion in its own response to Government. Initially, the A515 has already been included in the Midlands Connect draft MRN, but not the other two sections of road listed above. Finalisation of the MRN inevitably will be subject to refinement and confirmation through a process of negotiation.

Irrespective of which roads are included in the MRN, it is likely that expectation amongst the general public and external stakeholders will be raised that certain projects may become priorities and that MRN routes may be maintained to a higher standard than others, although they will attract no additional 'base' budget.

Securing adequate local contributions to MRN projects could be challenging, as could revenue funding for initial feasibility work. It is already the case that a significant proportion of the Council's integrated transport capital settlement is apportioned to major projects supported through the Local Growth Fund and National Productivity Investment Fund, and it appears likely that this would need to be replicated for MRN projects.

The absence of a specified, minimum local contribution makes it difficult to judge the requirement but, assuming this was 20% it would require £4 million for a £20 million project; the Integrated Transport Block currently stands at £3.6 million per annum and is the source of funding for local safety and connectivity schemes as well as contributions to major projects. Whilst it may be the case that some support from external sources such as developer funding may be available, it seems unlikely that the Council would be able to sustain a substantial programme of MRN improvement projects.

Given that other local highway authorities are likely to find themselves in a similar position, this may be an issue to be taken up through Midlands Connects to identify whether a project development fund, in some form, is feasible. This would complement the role suggested for STBs in compiling regional evidence bases and carrying out an initial sift of proposals which will

itself be helpful in judging whether to carry out early stages of scheme assessment.

Consultation Response

The following section of the report sets out the proposed, draft response to Government's consultation on the MRN and specifically, to the consultation questions posed. *NB: Draft Council response is shown in italics.*

- Do you agree with the proposed core principles for the MRN outlined in this document?

The County Council agrees there is a case for the creation of a 'top tier' of local roads linking and supporting the Strategic Road Network with additional ring-fenced funding at a national level. The Council is clear that the efficiency and resilience of the highway network can help increase economic productivity and this could/ should be made more explicit in the objectives. Also, reference to the MRN in supporting local industrial strategies should be made as this provides the connection to the SRN and the national Industrial Strategy.

The focus on 'major renewals' though needs to recognise the potential of upgrading MRN corridors through the application of technology and readiness to accommodate connected and autonomous vehicles.

The certainty of funding at a national level is welcomed, however, additional clarity through the provision of indicative regional (STB) allocation projections would assist in the determination of an appropriate quantity of local resources committed to business case development. This approach is likely to assist in negating abortive works.

- To what extent do you agree or disagree with the criteria outlined and their application?

The criteria themselves are logical and accord to the work we and Midland's Connect have undertaken in advance of the DfT consultation, but the Council would stress the need for the definition and review of the network to be flexible to influences better understood at sub-national level – and again, linked to other stated strategies and priorities e.g. infrastructure investment plans and the LIS..

- Have both the quantitative and qualitative criteria proposed in the consultation document identified all sections of road you feel should be included in the MRN?

No. With reference to the given criteria, the Council firmly believes the following roads within Derbyshire should be included in the proposals:

- The A619 and A6192 connecting Chesterfield to the Staveley area development zone, HS2 track maintenance depot, Markham Vale Employment Zone and M1 Junction 29a.

- The A515 between Buxton, Ashbourne and the A50 Trunk Road which is critical to the transporting of minerals and provides an important access into the Peak District National Park.

In addition, there is support for inclusion of the A444 from Burton upon Trent to the M42, including the section through Derbyshire.

- Have the quantitative or qualitative criteria proposed in the consultation identified sections of road you feel should not be included in the MRN?
No. The Council would be prepared to consider removal of certain sections if proposed by others, but is not requesting this.
- Do you agree with the proposal for how the MRN should be reviewed in future years?
The Council supports the future review of the MRN. This will be particularly important to account for the impact of new major housing and employment sites on the MRN and SRN. Periodic review of the MRN will ensure that it is being utilised correctly and efficiently, whilst giving the flexibility that could otherwise constrain development. This can be achieved and managed through the development of regional evidence bases.
- To what extent do you agree or disagree with the roles outlined for local, regional and national bodies?
The Council supports the proposed role of STBs in the strategic development of investment programmes and would encourage Government to confirm Midlands Connect as a formal STB as soon as possible and to assist its capacity to provide resources for early assessment and sifting. The Council's retained responsibility for maintaining and managing its existing networks which form part of the MRN is also welcomed.
- What additional responsibilities, if any, should be included? Please state at which level these roles should be allocated.
The Council would welcome more certainty provided by a longer term approach to regional funding allocations for MRN projects. This would support a more strategic approach to resource planning, investment and increased effectiveness, especially the allocation and commitment of local resources invested in business case development. Funding to be administered by STBs with increased flexibility to develop a long term programme of project development.
- Do you agree with our proposals to agree regional groupings to support the investment planning of the MRN in areas where no sub-national transport bodies (STBs) exist?
Not applicable.

- Are there any other factors, or evidence, that should be included within the scope of the Regional Evidence Bases?
No, on the basis that Strategic Outline Business Cases for projects would need to demonstrate compliance with existing sub-national policies and priorities.
- Do you agree with the role that has been outlined for Highways England?
Highways England has experience of project preparation and delivery which could be of assistance to local authorities pursuing MRN projects. The consultation suggests valid roles but is ambiguous about the ways in which these might be exercised. This needs to be made more explicit. The Council would encourage the use of specific facilities agreements with individual STBs.
- Do you agree with the cost thresholds outlined?
Whilst acknowledging that thresholds in some form will be required, the adoption of a fixed entry threshold of £20 million could exclude projects which would still be worthwhile and would still meet other essential criteria around productivity and supporting growth. Entry criteria relating to benefits as well as costs could perhaps be used (and perhaps at STB level) to produce a more flexible approach.
- Do you agree with the eligibility criteria outlined?
The Council supports the eligibility criteria except that the criteria for public transport interventions appear unnecessarily restrictive and requires greater clarity. These require delivery as part of a package as well as supporting MRN objectives. There appears no reason why a project such as a rail station with a park-and-ride facility which reduces traffic on an MRN route should not be eligible, even if not as part of a wider intervention.
- Do you agree with the investment assessment criteria outlined?
Yes. However, given that some (such as supporting housing delivery) have access to other funds, the weighting given to each criterion will need careful consideration. The Council would favour STB determination or influence over this.
- In addition to the eligibility and investment assessment criteria described what, if any, additional criteria should be included in the proposal? Please be as detailed as possible.
None.
- Is there anything further you would like added to the MRN proposals?
No.

(3) **Financial Considerations** There are no financial considerations directly associated with this report, although it is noted that funding for MRN directly from vehicle excise duty could have a detrimental impact on other areas of national funding for transport.

Other Considerations

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, social value 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** Held on file within the Economy, Transport and Environment Department. Officer contact details - Jim Seymour, extension 38557.

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

7.1 Agrees the draft response to Government set out in the report on Proposals for the Creation of a Major Road Network for England.

7.2 Delegates authority to the Strategic Director – Economy, Transport and Environment to submit a formal response by 19 March 2018 deadline.

Mike Ashworth
Strategic Director – Economy, Transport and Environment

Indicative Major Road Network (MRN)

