

Agenda Item No. 7(d)

DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET

26 April 2018

Report of the Strategic Director – Economy, Transport and Environment

A515 ASHBOURNE TRANSPORT STUDY (HIGHWAYS, TRANSPORT AND INFRASTRUCTURE)

(1) **Purpose of Report** To advise Cabinet of the findings of recent studies into transport issues around Ashbourne and their potential solutions, and to seek authorisation to undertake Stage 2 work.

(2) **Information and Analysis**

Background

At its meeting of 29 June 2017, Cabinet agreed for detailed investigations, surveys and preparatory work to be undertaken to explore and develop strategic solutions to the range of traffic issues being experienced within the unique historic core of Ashbourne (Minute No.195/17 refers). This particularly related to north-south movements along the A515 which connects the Peak District National Park to the national strategic road network (via the A50 trunk road) and passes through Ashbourne town centre. The work included procuring consultants to carry out Stage 1 activity (detailed surveys, site analysis and the development of strategic options) and to initiate a programme of local stakeholder engagement, including local businesses, residents and Members of Parliament.

Following consideration of the findings of Stage 1, a further Stage 2 report is recommended, constituting further appraisal of options in line with Government guidance on the preparation of major transport projects.

The work to explore strategic solutions to the traffic issues in and around Ashbourne is prioritised in the current Council Plan 2018 – 2021 approved by Council on 11 April 2018, having been developed from the Administration's manifesto in 2017. This states that:

“Traffic congestion and concerns about safety in Ashbourne have made the construction of a new bypass a key priority for the Council. Options for the bypass have been assessed and the Council is making a case to the

Department for Transport for the inclusion of the scheme in their funding programmes.”

Issues

The town of Ashbourne is a major visitor attraction and serves as one of the principal gateways to the Peak District National Park (the boundary of which lies some 2 kilometres to the north). The A515 principal road which connects the Park to the national strategic road network (via the A50 trunk road) passes through the town centre, negotiating 90° turns at junctions and offering a relatively poor level of service to road users, as well as impacting upon the amenity of the town centre. A key issue is that, as a principal road, the A515 carries a substantial volume of heavy goods vehicles transporting minerals (largely limestone) extracted from the major quarries on the fringes of the National Park to other parts of the UK. Neither the road network within the town nor the urban fabric are well suited to this purpose.

In recognition of the scale of the traffic problems in Ashbourne, the County Council has maintained a position of ‘in principle’ support for a north-south bypass for some time. The broad objectives of this are twofold:

- to relieve the town of through-traffic and heavy vehicles in particular; and
- to serve as a more suitable route for visitors to the Peak District National Park.

Any new north-south bypass would complement the east-west bypass already formed by the A52.

As investigations into the potential bypass solutions continue to develop and refine through Stages 1 and 2 of the work, the ‘in principle’ position described above will also impact on wider considerations, such as local plan policy, land assembly and disposal. A number of route options have been considered in the past but none are currently protected against competing land-uses. The position taken by the Council some considerable time ago was that a preferred route alignment would connect the A52 west of the town to the A515 in the north; in other words, bypassing the town on its western side. This is also reflected in Policy S9 of the Derbyshire Dales Local Plan adopted in December 2017. The impacts of these issues are considered later in the report.

Stage 1 Findings

Aecom, the Council’s principal consultant on highways and transport matters, has completed Stage 1 work and provided initial reports in relation to baseline conditions, forecasting and options. This work was undertaken based upon a ‘fixed fee’ basis at a cost of £20,000. In summary, the headline findings of the various reports are as follows.

The Baseline Conditions report:

- provides an up-to-date assessment of traffic levels within the town, both to quantify the scale of existing problems and as a basis upon which the effectiveness of potential interventions can be tested. Results of this work showed that volumes of traffic on a number of key town centre routes are as high as 10,000 to 12,000 vehicles per day;
- utilises newly-gathered data to assess the degree to which traffic within the town has local or external origins and destinations. This is particularly informative with regard to the A515 and north-south movements with almost half (46%) being identified as 'through' traffic with no origin or destination within the town therefore confirms the strategic nature of the roads and the significance of the issues to be addressed;
- includes an assessment of the performance of 11 key junctions in and around the town centre.
- provides an initial estimate of the valuation which can be placed on delays caused to users of the network; this is particularly important given that the value of time 'saved' by the implementation of any improvement scheme is likely to be the basis of a full business case submitted to funders;
- collision statistics have also been used to provide a monetary value associated with road collisions.

The value of delays, at approximately £1.5 million per annum, gives a guide to the extent to which any potential scheme might demonstrate 'value for money'. Appraisal of transport schemes in accordance with Government guidance is over a long period of up to 60 years, and it is evident that the current levels of delay being experienced in Ashbourne would accrue substantial costs over such a period. No transport scheme provided in response will entirely remove these delays. However, the scale of existing problems can be regarded as sufficient to justify further investigation of the case for a scheme.

The Forecasting Report takes into account growth in traffic over future years associated with planned development as identified in the Derbyshire Dales Local Plan. Not surprisingly, further deterioration in the performance of key junctions is forecast as they have to accommodate rising traffic levels. The report also includes an initial assessment of how the performance of each of the tested junctions would be affected by the reassignment of through traffic onto a nominal western bypass (reflecting the current County Council policy position rather than any fixed alignment). Although, again, it is important to note that a bypass would not entirely remove the queues and delays associated with existing and forecast traffic, it would clearly make a material difference to the operation of the highway network within the town.

The Options Report assesses a range of possible traffic management interventions, including the improvement of individual junctions, revised one-way systems, and both eastern and western town bypasses to carry north-south traffic. This report concludes that it is sensible to review the case for an improvement of the Derby Road/Sturston Road junction alongside development of proposals for a bypass. Table 1 below summarises the range of options that have been assessed as part of Stage 1.

Option	Source	Pros	Cons	Objectives Met?	Conclusion
Minor Junction Improvements	Ashbourne Traffic Study (SW, 2009)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More efficient management of congestion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large scale congestion remains 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce travel delays ✗ • Increase reliability ✗ • Remove HGVs from town centre ✗ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taken forward as interim Local Transport Plan (LTP) schemes.
Enlarged One-Way System	Ashbourne Traffic Study (SW, 2009)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improves Capacity of key junctions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increases traffic flow through historic centre; • Impacts on emergency services; • Does not fully address congestion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce travel delays ✓ • Increase reliability ✗ • Remove HGVs from town centre ✗ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Option rejected in 2009 due to impact on emergency services and St. Johns Street.
Major Junction Improvement (Derby Road / Sturston Road)	2016 AECOM Report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improves Capacity of key junction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Land Acquisition Costs • Does not fully address congestion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce travel delays ✓ • Increase reliability ✗ • Remove HGVs from town centre ✗ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No decision taken.
Eastern Bypass	Derbyshire Dales Local Plan – Transport Evidence Base (Draft)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Removes some traffic from town centre. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No geo-technical / design work conducted. • Longer length than Western Option 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce travel delays ✓ • Increase reliability ✓ • Remove HGVs from town centre ✓ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rejected during preparation of Derbyshire Dales Transport Evidence Base
Western Bypass	Ashbourne Bypass Engineering Feasibility Study, SW, 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Removes some traffic from town centre. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Land Acquisition / Construction Costs • Uncertain BCR 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce travel delays ✓ • Increase reliability ✓ • Remove HGVs from town centre ✓ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No decision taken.

The conclusion of this stage of work, therefore, is that although there is still scope to carry out highway improvements within the town, the current levels of delay and the potential of a western bypass to remove through traffic merit further assessment of options for such a scheme.

Alongside work to investigate the baseline conditions and potential options, a range of other activity has been programmed which potentially impacts on the traffic condition in and around Ashbourne. This includes assessment of options for the expansion of Ashbourne Airfield Industrial Estate and associated housing land in accordance with the Local Plan. It remains the case that eastern bypass options would be significantly longer than western

options, and would involve more difficult topography. Officers are working with partners to ensure that access options for the Airfield are compatible with any possible, longer-term, enhancement of highway networks to supplement a western bypass.

Engagement with key stakeholders on the nature of Ashbourne's traffic problems and potential solutions has also been undertaken over the period. This has included a productive meeting with the Secretary of State for Transport, arranged and attended by Sir Patrick McLoughlin as MP for Derbyshire Dales. Also in attendance were County Council and Derbyshire Dales District Council officers and a representative of the town's Neighbourhood Plan Implementation Group. The Secretary of State provided useful guidance on potential sources of funding for a suitable scheme.

Next Steps

To ensure progress and pace are maintained in bringing this priority area of work to a conclusion, it is proposed that the Strategic Director – Economy, Transport and Environment be authorised, in discussion with the Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Infrastructure, to approve final versions of the Stage 1 reports. Aecom has been requested, in parallel, to prepare a firm proposal for Stage 2 work to carry out further appraisal in accordance with Government guidance and develop a 'preferred option' for a suitable scheme. The work will also include traffic management arrangements in Ashbourne associated with any new route. This will involve confirming a methodology suitable to support a business case for external grant funding, likely to involve the creation of a traffic model able to test options, and also public consultation on the proposal. Cabinet is requested to approve the commissioning of this Stage 2 work. Given that this constitutes progression of 'further appraisal' work on western bypass options, it is recommended that any County Council acquisition or disposal of property relevant to these be suspended pending the approval of a preferred option which would be recommended for protection against any competing development.

(3) **Financial Considerations** A total of £20,000 expenditure has been incurred so far. The costs of a Stage 2 (further appraisal) commission for a potential Ashbourne bypass will be contained within the existing Transport Strategy revenue/capital budgets.

(4) **Property Considerations** Any option for the delivery of a suitable solution to traffic problems in Ashbourne is likely to involve land acquisition, but this will only be determined in future stages of development. However, it is recommended, given the progression of 'further appraisal' work on western bypass options, any County Council acquisition or disposal of property be suspended.

(5) **Social Value Considerations** Further development of strategic transport proposals for Ashbourne is likely to provide significant opportunities for engagement with local schools, community groups and colleges. Aecom has been asked to give this specific consideration in preparing a Stage 2 proposal.

Other Considerations

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

(6) **Key Decision** No.

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

(8) **Background Papers** Held on file within the Economy, Transport and Environment Department. Officer contact details - Jim Seymour, extension 38557.

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

- 9.1 Notes the Stage 1 work carried out to date on strategic transport options for Ashbourne, as summarised in the body of the report, and authorises the Strategic Director – Economy, Transport and Environment to approve final versions of the report.
- 9.2 Notes the progress made on related developments in and around Ashbourne.
- 9.3 Agrees to “further appraisal” work being carried out at Stage 2 and that it be funded from existing budgets.
- 9.4 Approves the suspension of land transactions involving County Council property relevant to the development of potential western bypass options.
- 9.5 Notes that a further report will be submitted to Cabinet following completion of the Stage 2 work.

Mike Ashworth
Strategic Director – Economy, Transport and Environment