

DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET

29 June 2017

Report of the Strategic Director – Economy, Transport and Communities

A515 ASHBOURNE BYPASS (HIGHWAYS, TRANSPORT AND INFRASTRUCTURE)

(1) **Purpose of Report** To seek Cabinet approval to the carrying out of investigation and preparation work into a possible north-south bypass of Ashbourne.

(2) **Information and Analysis** Ashbourne is regarded as one of Derbyshire's most attractive market towns. Its historic centre includes what is considered to be the finest street of Georgian buildings in the County and contains a large number of listed buildings within a designated conservation area. There are many other non-designated heritage assets in the town contained within the Derbyshire Historic Environment Record.

The town 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.

Significant traffic congestion occurs in Ashbourne throughout the year as a result of visitor pressures and this hinders the operation of many local businesses. Traffic congestion is a clear issue for the town, impacting on its physical infrastructure as well as resident and visitor enjoyment and local trading.

In recognition of the scale of the traffic problems faced by Ashbourne, the County Council has, for some considerable time, maintained a position of 'in principle' support for a north-south bypass. The broad objectives of this would be twofold: to relieve the town itself 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 formed by the A52. A number of route options have been considered in the past but none are currently protected against any competing land-use development. The last formal 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.

The current funding climate for major transport schemes on the scale of a bypass is difficult due to the heavy focus of investment on economic rather than transport objectives. An investigation of options in 2010 placed estimated costs in the range of £6 million to £8 million, but this was based only upon a desk-top assessment. Extreme caution should be applied to the consideration of estimated costs at this stage due to the significant time that has elapsed since the primary investigation and the lack of any recent cost analysis. It would be sensible, therefore, to anticipate that costs would now exceed £15 million and potentially, could be significantly higher.

At present, potential funding sources would include:

- **Local Transport Plan**

The current annual settlement for the County Council for the Integrated Transport element of its capital grant is £3.64 million. This has to cover essential road safety and connectivity projects across the County (which involve statutory duties) and whilst it can contribute to major projects, it is unlikely to fund them in full.

- **National Productivity Investment Fund (NPIF)**

During 2017, Local authorities have, been able to propose one or two projects of up to £5 million (or in exceptional cases up to £10 million) ready for construction during the years 2018-19 and 2019-20. It is not known whether this fund will remain in place beyond these two years or whether eligibility criteria will remain the same, but it does represent a possible delivery route for 'smaller' bypass-type schemes, however, any such schemes need to be pipeline ready.

- **Large Local Major Transport Schemes Fund**

This Fund supports a small number of larger projects deemed too large to be accommodated within Local Growth Fund programmes (see below). To date, it has comprised a single 'call for projects' and a proposal for investigation of an Ashbourne Bypass was put to Government during 2016 by the Derby, Derbyshire, Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Local Enterprise Partnership (D2N2 LEP). Unfortunately, this was not successful. Although it is possible that further calls will be issued, this will remain a very competitive environment.

- **Local Growth Fund**

Significant resources from this Fund have been made available to LEPs over the period up to 2020-21. Derbyshire Dales District sits within both the

D2N2 and Sheffield City Region (SCR) LEPs and proposals from within the District may be submitted to Partnerships as and when further calls for projects are issued. The focus of these programmes is on economic development (jobs and houses), however, rather than transport outcomes and it will be challenging for 'transport' schemes to make their way into funded programmes.

- Developer contributions in the form of 'Section 106' contributions where development warrants is a possible source of supplementary funding.
- Private sector contribution from organisations which may benefit from the improved journey times.

Regardless of the likely sources of funding for construction of a new bypass, money will only be available through a competitive process and successful projects will need to demonstrate a state of readiness (e.g. it is always difficult for schemes which require land assembly and planning consents to successfully compete against schemes which already have these in place). If any scheme is to stand a good chance of accessing funds, it will require initial work to be undertaken so that a 'pipeline' project can be ready for when suitable funds become available. An important consideration from the outset is that a scheme regarded as a 'major' transport project, will need a business case compliant with Transport Analysis Guidance (or "WebTAG" in its electronic publication form) if it is to receive Government funding.

WebTAG sets out the process for stages of a project and has four key principles:

- There must be a clear rationale for any proposal and it must be based on a clear presentation of problems and challenges that establish the 'need' for a project.
- There must be consideration of genuine, discrete options and not an assessment of a previously selected option against some clearly inferior alternatives. A range of solutions should be considered across networks and modes.
- There should be an auditable and documented process which identifies the best performing options to be taken forward for further appraisal.
- There should be an appropriate level of public and stakeholder participation and engagement at suitable points in the process. In most cases this should inform the evidence-base which established the 'need' for an intervention, guide the option generation, sifting and assessment steps, as well as informing further appraisal in Stage 2.

This may appear to be an onerous process for any potential project with no certainty of funding. However, the eventual submission of any business case to Government or an alternative public funding agency will need to include documentation which demonstrates these principles have been followed. For example, for projects over £5 million, WebTAG compliance is a requirement in

order to secure NPIF funding. It is recommended therefore, that any early work on a potential Ashbourne Bypass should be on the basis that the project will need a WebTAG-compliant business case.

A package of work to develop such proposals should build upon engagement with stakeholders and a review of evidence on the nature of problems to be addressed. There is no reason to expect any fundamental departures from a consensus that the town's traffic problems need a comprehensive solution, but it will be important to confirm this and to take it into account via a thorough review of possible solutions. Cabinet will be aware that over time, a number of alternative approaches to traffic management have been considered but none have been shown to truly solve the problem. However, there must be evidence in place that a full range of possible solutions has been considered objectively, including consideration of a full range of possible bypass routes (whether or not these have been discounted in previous assessments).

Subject to Cabinet approval, it is proposed that evidence-gathering, stakeholder engagement and option appraisal assessment could take place over the summer of 2017 with a view to presenting options to Cabinet in the autumn. A programme of stakeholder engagement is proposed as a means of actively seeking out the views of local residents, businesses and other interested parties. To support this, proposals will need to be invited from suitable consultants (most likely under existing Midlands Highways Alliance frameworks). Local members and relevant portfolio holders will be consulted as key stakeholders and be engaged in the process as it progresses.

(3) **Financial Considerations** Costs of a Stage 1 (option appraisal development) project on a potential Ashbourne Bypass will only be known once proposals are received from suitable consultants. These will be funded from the Economy and Regeneration Revenue budgets held within the Economy, Transport and Communities Department.

(4) **Legal Considerations** The Director of Legal Services will advise in relation to the appointment of consultants to carry out the investigatory and preparatory work.

(5) **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.

(6) **Social Value Considerations** The potential wider social value impacts of any bypass, should it be agreed, are considerable. Environmental and economic wellbeing benefits of traffic improvements would need to be balanced against possible impact on local trade. However, there is considerable potential for local construction and related jobs to be maximised through the procurement process.

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

(7) **Key Decision** No.

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

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

(10) **OFFICER'S RECOMMENDATIONS** That Cabinet agrees:

- 10.1 To the carrying out of Stage 1 (option appraisal development) work on a possible A515 Ashbourne Bypass, as set out in the body of the report.
- 10.2 To procure consultants to help develop proposals and options.
- 10.3 To initiate a programme of local stakeholder engagement, including local businesses, residents and Members of Parliament.
- 10.4 To receive a further report on its completion recommending the next steps.

Mike Ashworth
Strategic Director – Economy, Transport and Communities