

SWALE JOINT TRANSPORTATION BOARD 12 DECEMBER 2011

- Subject:** **Sittingbourne Northern Relief Road
Sittingbourne Southern Relief Road**
- Director/Head of Service:** Director of Regeneration Projects
- Decision Issues:** These matters are within the authority of the Kent County Council
- Decision:** Non-key
- SBC Ward/KCC Division:** **West Downs / Swale East, Swale West**
- Summary:** Update on transport modelling and work on strategic highway schemes in Sittingbourne following previous reports to Members on Sittingbourne Northern Relief Road.
- To Recommend:** **Members are requested to revisit their March 2011 resolution in order to provide greater flexibility in considering planning and transport strategy for the Borough. Views are sought from Members on the issues to report to the KCC Cabinet Member for Environment Highways and Waste for decision.**
- Classification:** THIS REPORT IS OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Strategic Highway Schemes for Sittingbourne include the Northern Relief Road (SNRR) and the possible Southern Relief Road (M2 – A2 Link). The Northern Relief Road is being built in stages with the latest phase (Milton Creek Crossing) due for opening to traffic imminently. The Southern Relief Road has been considered in the context of the emerging LDF Core Strategy and potential employment growth proposals at the Kent Science Park. The Strategic Planning context of the highway schemes is important as the overall intent is to ease transport pressures in Sittingbourne Town Centre, facilitating central area regeneration whilst not impacting negatively on the wider population (especially communities to the east of Sittingbourne, ranged along and next to the A2).
- 1.2 The final section of the SNRR (The Bapchild Link) was subject to public consultation in 2010 and the results of that process were debated by Members at the JTB in March 2011. With no consensus on a route from the public response Members resolved the following:

“That in the light of the detrimental effects to communities to the east of Sittingbourne and in light of the lack of evidence from the consultees, and whilst accepting the strategic importance of the link, this Board

recommends to the KCC Cabinet Member for Environment Highways and Waste that the SNRR is progressed no further, until KCC comes forward with option proposals to move traffic to the M2.”

- 1.3 Work has therefore been carried out on the wider strategic transport issues for the Borough in the context of the emerging Core Strategy, informed by the results from runs of the County Council’s Strategic Transport Model. This report is to update Members on the principles of the work carried out and suggest a way forward for future development of Strategic Transport Schemes for Sittingbourne. The outcome of the debate will be reported to the KCC Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways and Waste.

2.0 LDF Core Strategy

- 2.1 The Borough Council have consulted on options for the emerging Core strategy and have undertaken substantial study work on the various options for development. Transportation considerations are one part of the overall picture that needs to be addressed by Members and various future development and infrastructure scenarios have been reported to Members through the LDF process. The development scenarios studied each have different detailed impacts on the local transport network, but the overall impact remains broadly similar.
- 2.2 The development options proposed for Swale are quite significant and will generate additional volumes of traffic on the local highway network. The infrastructure constructed in the recent past (for example: A249 Sheppey Crossing, SNRR, Swanstree Avenue Extension, Rushenden Relief Road) has brought additional capacity to different parts of the Borough and provided a broad platform on which to consider expansion. Projecting the potential demands on the system forward to 2031 shows that the highway network will be more congested than it is now, although with additional infrastructure (such as the Bapchild Link, and modifications to the Town Centre) the overall system will continue to function.
- 2.3 The discussion at the March 2011 JTB concentrated on the split of results from the public consultation and drew in the issue of impact of the SNRR (and SSRR) on the A2 to the East of Sittingbourne. At the time, the LDF Core Strategy was still to emerge and it was clear that there needed to be more assessment done on the implications of the spatial planning options before suitable decisions could be taken with confidence.

3.0 Transportation Modelling

- 3.1 The spatial planning options for development in Swale have been run through the County Council’s Strategic Transportation Model to assess the likely level of infrastructure investment required and to inform Members of the likely levels of congestion resulting. It is clear that the level of growth suggested in Swale will result in additional pressures on the Highway network and that further investment will be necessary. However, the congestion predicted is not as severe as in many other locations in Kent and the balance between development and infrastructure seems in the main to be acceptable.

- 3.2 All the options studied include development in the Thames Gateway region of the Borough and locate the bulk of the development in and around Sittingbourne itself (including the substantial expansion of the town centre), plus a considerable amount on the Isle of Sheppey. The key differences between the options tested are the quantum of housing proposed and the employment at both Sheerness and Kent Science Park. With significant infrastructure located to the north and west of Sittingbourne, it is relatively easier to absorb the impacts of development on the Isle of Sheppey and in the Ridham / Kemsley areas than it is on the south-east of Sittingbourne.
- 3.3 The Transport Modelling results show, in very crude terms, that any substantial development scenario requires the SNRR Bapchild Link to be completed. The network is predicted to function reasonably well (albeit with higher congestion than currently exists) and the queues and delays are broadly acceptable. If the Southern Relief Road is included then it needs to be located close to the south-eastern fringe of Sittingbourne in order to maximise its utility, optimise the transport case and minimise the costs involved. Ideally an alignment that closely served development would be desirable and beyond a proposed employment expansion of the Kent Science Park, there are no other development proposals put forward in the Core Strategy options that would relate directly to the SSRR.
- 3.4 The traffic pressure on the A2 east of Sittingbourne is a particular concern from the public engagement processes undertaken. In crude modelling terms, completing the SNRR is likely to encourage some trips to switch from the M2 motorway onto the A2. In reality, the “friction” along the route of the A2 will militate against this and traffic is likely to find a balance between the alternatives available. Predictions suggest that there could be around 10% to 20% additional traffic on the A2 as a result of both general growth and diversion effects from the revised network. In practice, the peak periods would struggle to absorb such an increase so the prediction is unlikely to be realised. Adding the Southern Relief Road into the network provides more opportunities to divert strategic trips and the relief to the A2 is predicted to be in the region of 5% to 10% or so. Again the prediction needs to be tempered with reality.
- 3.5 The different development scenarios considered for the Core Strategy can work with additional infrastructure, but the completion of the Northern Relief Road is a requirement. The route frees up the Town Centre and allows the allocation of additional development sites in the Core Strategy. The SNRR needs to be identified in the Core Strategy Implementation Plan in order to attract development funding via the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). The Southern Relief Road does provide more network capacity and helps to rebalance the system but would need more integration with additional development to be required. It is therefore inappropriate to continue to link the two schemes in Transportation terms in order not to hamstring the development of an appropriate planning and transport strategy for the area.

4.0 Financial Issues

- 4.1 A key consideration for including major transport schemes within the LDF Core Strategy is to be sure that finance is likely to become available within the horizon period (2031). Any scheme that cannot demonstrate viability is likely to either be removed as being unsound, or to cause the whole Core

Strategy to be deemed unsound and therefore fail. The Southern Relief Road in particular, is expensive at around £100 million or so and there is no real prospect of providing such funding in the short to medium term. It is very much a longer term option that needs to be explored. Further work on new funding mechanisms such as the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and Tax Increment Financing (TIF) will be required alongside “normal” funding mechanisms to develop a “funding cocktail” for such an expensive scheme.

- 4.2 Although a preferred route was not agreed for the Northern Relief Road (Bapchild Link) it is clear that a scheme to complete the Northern Relief Road is more deliverable than the Southern Relief Road and therefore for financial reasons it is also sensible that the two schemes should be decoupled from each other, and progressed separately, relating to the spatial planning needs of the LDF Core Strategy. This will enable the SNRR to be included within any CIL schedule and for both schemes to be identified within the appropriate future transport programme.

5.0 Possible Way Forward

- 5.1 The Core Strategy will be developed and reviewed over time as the Borough grows. There is still an unresolved issue about the route of the Bapchild section of the Northern Relief Road which would be best dealt with through an “Area Action Plan” approach within the Core Strategy. The Southern Relief Road is however, less well defined at this stage and it is more appropriate for it to be “signposted” within the Core Strategy, subject to a future review of the LDF process.

6.0 Summary

- 6.1 This report has reflected on the work carried out on transportation modelling and financial assessment for the SNRR and SSRR since Members last considered the issues in March, and resolved to effectively “join” the two schemes together. In the light of the new work undertaken it is considered inappropriate to directly link these two schemes such that each would be progressed via a different mechanism in the LDF process for Swale.
- 6.2 Both schemes have strategic importance for the regeneration of Sittingbourne but they both have major localised implications for communities in the vicinity. It is clear that the schemes relate to quite different development scenarios being considered for the Borough. Members are invited to note the contents of the report and debate the issues. The comments provided will be reported to the KCC Cabinet Member for Environment Highways and Waste for a decision.

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