

Environment, Development and Transport Committee

Item No.

Report title:	A47: Priorities and Government consultation on the future of England's strategic roads
Date of meeting:	19 January 2018
Responsible Chief Officer:	Tom McCabe - Executive Director, Community and Environmental Services

Strategic impact

This report updates Members on current consultation on proposals for trunk roads. Trunk roads form the strategic road network across the country and are of vital importance to the county because they cater for longer-distance road trips to other parts of the UK. Good road links encourage businesses to invest in the county, facilitate business to business interaction and provide services enabling people to get into the county for work or leisure. The trunk road network in Norfolk comprises the A11 and A47. The consultation provides the opportunity for the county council to state what is important for Norfolk and influence government investment decisions and the future shape of the trunk road network.

Executive summary

Highways England has published *Highways England Strategic Road Network Initial Report*. Government has launched consultation, running until 7 February, alongside this. The *Initial Report* informs the decision-making for the trunk road programme from 2020 to 2025. It does not set out proposals relating to individual schemes or proposals but rather sets out the framework for the future development of the trunk road network. The report and associated consultation however does present an opportunity for the county council to restate its priorities and to give evidence in support of these. In January 2015 EDT Committee agreed its priorities for A47 dualling in the trunk road programme from 2020 to 2025 as Acle Straight and Tilney to East Winch as number one and two priorities respectively. These have been reflected in the priorities of the A47 Alliance, which brings together stakeholders all along the trunk road. The A47 Alliance is stepping up its advocacy and lobbying work with government in the run up to decision-making on the trunk road programme.

The report and associated consultation provide an opportunity for the county council to reaffirm its priorities for the A47 and influence government investment decisions and the future shape of the trunk road network so that maximum benefits can be realised for the county.

Recommendations:

Members are recommended to:

- 1. Reaffirm the council's priority commitment to dualling the A47 Acle Straight to the east and Tilney/East Winch (including Hardwick Flyover at King's Lynn) in the 2020-25 trunk road programme**
- 2. Agree that a response to the consultation be prepared, to be agreed with and sent by the chair of EDT.**

1. Proposal

- 1.1. Highways England has published its report *Highways England Strategic Road Network Initial Report*. This is the final stage in evidence gathering before entering the decision-making phase for the trunk road programme from 2020 to 2025.

Alongside the Highways England report, government has launched consultation *Shaping the Future of England's Strategic Roads Consultation on Highways England's Initial Report*. This runs until 7 February.
- 1.2. Highways England's report has been informed by technical work completed by the organisation, customer views and feedback including through consultation, to which the county council responded, and by priorities from government.
- 1.3. Norfolk County Council coordinates the A47 Alliance, which brings stakeholders together throughout the length of the A47 trunk road from Lowestoft to the A1 at Peterborough. The Alliance has been successful in previous campaigns for investment into the road and has agreed on its priorities. In Norfolk these are Acle Straight dualling and dualling from Tilney to East Winch including dualling the Hardwick Flyover at King's Lynn.
- 1.4. Members are asked to:
 - Reaffirm the council's priority commitment to dualling the A47 Acle Straight and Tilney/East Winch (including Hardwick Flyover at King's Lynn) in the 2020-25 trunk road programme
 - Agree that a response to the consultation be prepared.

2. Highways England Strategic Road Network Initial Report

- 2.1. *Highways England Strategic Road Network Initial Report* was published by Highways England, who manage and maintain the trunk road network on behalf of government, in December. It represents the final part of the research phase before the decision-making phase that will lead to determination of the trunk road programme from 2020 to 2025.
- 2.2. Government has set out the process as:
 - Research (2016-2018): Gathering evidence
 - Decision (2018-2019): Determining the strategy
 - Mobilisation (2019-2020): Highways England readies its teams and supply chain
 - Delivery (2020-2025): Implementation.
- 2.3. The main points in the *Initial Report* are summarised below:
- 2.4. **Expressways**

Highways England proposes that investment in the network over the coming twenty years should work towards achieving consistency around four categories of road:

 - Smart motorways (routes with the highest demand, evolving with technology)
 - Motorways (in their current form)
 - Expressways (the busiest A-roads, with better design, technology and on-road response and alternative routes for non-motorised users and slow vehicles)
 - All-purpose trunk roads (other strategic A-roads).

The report proposes a phased implementation for creating expressways, which would ultimately end with their designation as motorways.

2.5. **Dedicated funding for small, regional schemes to address safety and congestion hotspots**

Government has provided funding for Highways England to increase capacity, reduce journey times and improve safety on the trunk road network. The funding is for smaller schemes at existing junctions, roundabouts and slip roads. Highways England proposes that a similar fund, which can be delivered at regional level responding to local priorities, be included in the programme.

2.6. **Studies to address connectivity and resilience issues**

The suggested themes cover: free-flow connections at important junctions; the 'last mile' connections to key economic destinations; multi-modal integration hubs to help relieve congestion; strategic orbital routes for cities; and upgrades for specific routes including the A1, M60 south east quadrant and the M6 Manchester to Birmingham.

2.7. **Designated Funds**

Highways England propose continuing, albeit with changes to the ways in which they are managed, and their coverage, funds to help tackle specific issues affecting the trunk road network:

- Growth and Housing: The current fund helps support schemes required to unlock growth
- Wellbeing and Environment: The report recommends having a more holistic environment fund that covers human wellbeing and the natural, built and historic environment, continuing a green retrofit for the existing network
- Connecting Communities: To provide more, safer and better links for pedestrians, cyclists and equestrians, and also to help connect communities and encourage people to make sustainable travel choices
- Innovation: Continuing the existing fund to support finding innovative ways of improving safety, customer service, operation, maintenance and construction
- Roadside facilities: Highways England supports a recommendation by Transport Focus for a roadside facilities fund, and suggests this could be used in partnership with motorway service area operators.

2.8. **Performance**

Highways England proposes changes to the way in which its performance is measured and targets set. It suggests that the performance framework should be in two parts: one a set of data that Highways England must report that will be of interest to its customers and wider stakeholders; the other a set of performance measures and targets that Highways England can directly influence.

2.9. **Government consultation**

Government's consultation focusses on the above issues, and whether Highways England's proposals for the way in which the trunk road network develops as a whole are correct. At this stage government is not seeking views on specific schemes or priorities for inclusion into the programme from 2020.

In responding to the report the county council will want to give its views on these matters, but also reiterate its priorities for improvements. The main issues for the county are briefly summarised in Section 4.

3. **Financial Implications**

3.1. There are no financial implications.

4. Issues, risks and innovation

- 4.1. This section briefly summarises the most significant issues of interest to Norfolk in Highways England's *Initial Report*. It is proposed that the county council responds to the government consultation, which closes in February. Further analysis of Highways England's proposals – to gain a better understanding of their likely implications – will be undertaken to inform the response and to support the priorities of Norfolk County Council, but the summary below provides the most likely areas to feature in the response.

4.2. Expressways

The *Initial Report* proposes that the A11 be designated an expressway over its whole length. The A47 is proposed as an expressway between (approximately; it is not clear on the maps in the document) Dereham and Acle.

The main implication of this – although not stated in the report – might be that Highways England does not support the case for further dualling the A47 to Great Yarmouth or sections to the west of Dereham. The county council's immediate priorities for the trunk road programme from 2020 to 2025 are Acle Straight dualling and Tilney to East Winch dualling, including the Hardwick Flyover. We should continue to make the case for these beyond this we wish to see a fully dualled A47, with appropriate grade separation.

It is not clear why Highways England support expressway standard on the A47 only from Dereham to Acle. This does not represent good planning. Highways England's proposals appear to be based instead on the standard of the network – given that they are currently bringing forward schemes to dual the entire section from Dereham to Acle; see below. Great Yarmouth and Lowestoft is clearly a strategically important UK destination, and it would be better planning for the future of the strategic road network if the importance of this destination was recognised and expressway standard planned to Great Yarmouth.

Highways England is currently bringing forward proposals for dualling Blofield to Burlingham and North Tuddenham to Easton. Although we have not yet seen their proposals for junctions, it appears that they might not be proposing grade-separated junctions throughout. This appears a missed opportunity given that the *Initial Report* suggests that expressways would feature grade-separated junctions. There will be consultation on Highways England's proposals for the dualling schemes in early 2018, which will give the county council the opportunity to comment formally on the proposals. In the meantime officers will continue to work with Highways England on their proposals.

4.3. Funds

The other main implication from the report is on the various designated funds. In the past we have found it difficult to access these funds, or influence their application. We should be seeking a greater voice in how they are used so that they better reflect local priorities and needs, and therefore represent better value for money use of funding.

5. Background

- 5.1. The trunk road network in Norfolk comprises the A47 and A11. The A47 runs from Lowestoft via Great Yarmouth (this section has recently been renumbered from the A12), Norwich and King's Lynn to the A1 at Peterborough. Although the A47 continues west of Peterborough only the section to the A1 is a trunk road. The A47 therefore provides a vital east-west link to The Midlands, north of England and Scotland. The A47 is a mix of single and dual carriageway sections.

The A11 trunk road runs from Norwich, at the junction with the A47, and connects to London via Cambridge. It is all dual carriageway though a number of junctions are at-grade, notably at Mildenhall, Suffolk, and Thetford.

- 5.2. The county council has provided evidence to Highways England and responded to previous consultations. Previous submissions can be provided on request.

Officer Contact

If you have any questions about matters contained in this paper or want to see copies of any assessments, eg equality impact assessment, please get in touch with:

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