

Economic Development Sub-Committee

Item No.

Report title:	A47 Road Investment Strategy - update
Date of meeting:	24 November 2016
Responsible Chief Officer:	Tom McCabe – Executive Director, Community and Environmental Services
Strategic impact Community and Environmental Services contribute directly to supporting the following council priority: <i>“Good infrastructure – We will make Norfolk a place where businesses can succeed and grow. We will promote improvements to our transport and technology infrastructure to make Norfolk a great place to do business.”</i> The transport network is fundamental to the local economy as it plays a major part in every aspect of our lives. An effective network enables everyone to move around more easily for access to work, key services and leisure. The A47 is crucial as it is the major east-west trunk road providing access for the County to the Midlands, north of England and Scotland; connecting the major settlements of King’s Lynn, Norwich and Great Yarmouth.	

Executive summary

<p>Highways England is developing a number of A47 improvement schemes as part of their Roads Investment Strategy 1 (RIS1: the trunk road programme 2015 to 2020). These schemes include dualling from North Tuddenham to Easton and Blofield to Burlingham; and junction improvements at Thickthorn, Norwich, and Vauxhall and other junctions in Great Yarmouth. Public consultation on these schemes will commence in Spring 2017, with construction currently due to start in 2020.</p> <p>In addition to these major schemes, Highways England is planning to renumber the A12 to the A47 from Lowestoft to Great Yarmouth. This is going through their approvals process with delivery targeted for this financial year.</p> <p>Highways England is also undertaking a trial to translocate snails from dykes adjacent to the Acle Straight to other locations. If this trial is successful it could facilitate the dualling of the Acle Straight to be included in RIS2, the programme from 2020 to 2025. This is one of Norfolk County Council’s priorities, together with dualling from Tilney to East Winch. Work is ongoing to secure funding for these schemes through RIS2 when it is announced towards the end of the decade.</p> <p>Recommendations:</p> <p>Members are recommended to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1) Note the status and timeline for RIS1.2) Note the likely timeline for RIS2 decisions and actively engage with the A47 Alliance to ensure successful approval of our priority schemes.

1. Proposal

- 1.1. Activity is ongoing to support successful delivery of funded schemes, currently programmed to start on site in 2020. This work is not only aimed to support successful delivery, but also to ensure that the needs of the County are reflected

in the proposals.

Technical and advocacy work is also ongoing with the aim of securing an announcement later in the decade that Acle Straight and Tilney to East Winch dualling are included in the RIS2 programme for 2020 to 2025. This work, much of which is being channelled via the A47 Alliance, is now being geared up to reflect that we are now approaching the run-up to the decision-making processes. This approach was extremely successful previously when we secured over £300m of investment into the A47 for the current RIS1 programme.

- 1.2. Details of the activities are described below. Members are asked to consider if any additional activities should be undertaken to support delivery of schemes in RIS2; or to support the inclusion of the two additional, county council priority, schemes in RIS2.

2. Roads Investment Strategy 1

- 2.1. In the Autumn Statement 2014 government announced over £300m of investment for improvements to the A47 in the Roads Investment Strategy 1 (RIS1). RIS1 is government's trunk road programme over the period 2015 to 2020. This will be delivered by Highways England.
- 2.2. A47 schemes in RIS1 are:

A47 North Tuddenham to Easton Dualling

Dualling to provide continuous dual carriageway between Norwich and Dereham.

A47 Blofield to North Burlingham Dualling

Dualling to complete a gap in the dual carriageway between Norwich and Acle. Combined with the North Tuddenham to Easton dualling scheme, this will provide full dualling between Dereham and Acle.

A47/A12 Great Yarmouth Junction Improvements

Junction improvements, including reconstruction of the Vauxhall roundabout.

A47 Acle Straight Safety Measures

Safety improvements at key hotspots and joint working with Natural England to establish environmental impacts and mitigation measures for the medium and long term which could include installation of safety barriers, junction improvements and road widening or capacity improvements.

A47/A11 Thickthorn Junction Improvement

Improvement of the interchange to give improved access to Norwich.

A47 Guyhirn Junction Improvement

Creation of a new larger junction linking the A47 with the A141.

A47 Wansford to Sutton Dualling

Dualling the A47 between the A1 and Peterborough.

- 2.3. From the above package of schemes, four are within Norfolk:

A47 North Tuddenham to Easton Dualling

A47 Blofield to North Burlingham Dualling

A47/A12 Great Yarmouth Junction Improvements

A47/A11 Thickthorn Junction Improvement

All schemes are being taken forward to the same timetable, which is outlined below. Officers from the County Council have been involved in detailed discussions with the technical teams from Highways England to make sure that emerging options best serve the needs of residents and businesses, and fit with the existing local road network and future planned developments or proposals such as the Norwich Western Link.

- 2.4. Highways England have established major projects governance structure which determines the overall project development process:
- Stage 0 – Strategy shaping and prioritisations – completed in October 2015;
 - Stage 1 – Option Identification and Selection – started in December 2015. This is a twelve month process and therefore reaching its conclusion; and
 - Stage 2 – preliminary and final design, statutory approval procedures and construction preparation – due to start in late 2016/early 2017 and complete in early 2020.

- 2.5. Stage Two, which will commence shortly, is the lengthiest and most complex of the pre-construction stages. Officers understand HE will consult on three options for each scheme. A report will be brought to Committee to agree the County Council's response to the consultation.

Following the consultation process HE will select their preferred options for each scheme and commence preliminary design work, which is expected to be completed in mid-2018. An application for the necessary Development Consent Orders (DCO) is expected to be made shortly thereafter. The granting of a DCO is a statutory process and is anticipated to be finalised in late 2019 (i.e. it is a 18-month process)

An estimated timeline for development and delivery of RIS1 schemes is shown in the appendix.

- 2.6. Based on the timeline as officers understand it, and recognising the steps HE are required to take to prepare the DCO submission and the 18 months allowed for examination and approval, it is unlikely construction will commence prior to 2020.

Should the Minister wish to instruct Highways England to bring scheme delivery forward, reducing the timescale between consultation and the DCO process appears the main opportunity. However any reduction in timelines is likely to be measured in months (not years).

However there may be an opportunity to deliver some minor schemes (from within the overall package) that are not subject to the DCO process, including Great Yarmouth junction improvements. This option is being pursued by Council officers

2.7. **Acle Straight**

A major blockage to any substantive improvements on the Acle Straight, including dualling, is the habitats of the adjacent dykes. These contain a species protected by UK and European law: the Lesser Whirlpool Ramshorn snail. A licence is required before any work can be undertaken involving the dykes since this could lead to their disturbance or harm. Previous attempts to undertake a trial to translocate the snails, to see if they would survive in other locations, have foundered.

- 2.8. Over 800 snails were moved in spring 2016 and will be monitored over the coming years. The monitoring period is likely to last approximately 4 years to fully understand their survival/breeding patterns.

- 2.9. If successful it could open the way for Acle Straight dualling to be agreed to, and

funded and undertaken in RIS2.

- 2.10. As well as this trial, three improvements schemes are scheduled for Acle Straight at Acle Roundabout, Halvergate and Paddy's Loke. These will be carried out early in 2017.
- 2.11. **A12 renumbering**

In addition to the measures outlined in 2.2, government announced that the A12 between Great Yarmouth and Lowestoft (where the trunk road ends) would be renumbered as the A47. This will make it clearer to road users that the trunk road route to Lowestoft is via the A47 rather than from the south via the A12 local, non-trunk road from Ipswich.
- 2.12. Progress on renumbering the A12 has been disappointing. As this initiative came from the local authorities it was agreed that Highways England would fund changes to the signs on the trunk roads and the local authorities fund those on local, non-trunk, roads (Norfolk County Council, EDT Committee agreed the Norfolk element at their meeting of 16 January 2015.). However Highways England were unable to fund their share of the works in the 2015/16 programme and are currently in the process of getting approvals to include them in the 2016/17 programme.

3. Roads Investment Strategy 2

- 3.1. RIS2 is the trunk road programme from 2020 to 2025. Members decided (EDT 16 January 2015) that Norfolk County Council's priorities should be dualling from Tilney to East Winch and the Acle Straight.
- 3.2. The County Council has been working towards getting these schemes included in the RIS2 programme. In broad terms, this is on two fronts:
 - Engaging with Highways England and government in their technical processes for development of RIS2; and
 - Direct advocacy and political engagement, as well as through the A47 Alliance.
- 3.3. The timeline in the appendix shows the anticipated dates for development of RIS2. It should be noted that, although government and Highways England have published the stages in the process, they have not published the exact dates for each step. The timeline must therefore be treated as indicative only in terms of the particular quarters shown for each step (although the year is known).
- 3.4. **Engagement in Highways England's and government's technical processes**

Norfolk County commissioned Mouchel to develop the evidence base to support the County Council's two A47 priorities. This was submitted to Highways England in August 2016 in response to their call for evidence. Further work is now being undertaken to produce an outline Strategic Case to provide the narrative around the problems and opportunities including local stakeholder input, and a very outline Economic Case to quantify the likely benefits. The scope of this work was agreed in liaison with Highways England and will be submitted towards the end of the year, again to meet their timescales in development of RIS2.
- 3.5. The final RIS2 programme is unlikely to be decided by Highways England and government until 2019.
- 3.6. **Advocacy and political engagement**

Norfolk County Council co-ordinates the A47 Alliance. This brings stakeholders (local authorities, local enterprise partnerships and others) together along the entire length of the trunk road route from the A1 to Lowestoft. It is a very

effective vehicle to make the case for, and secure, A47 improvements.

- 3.7. The A47 Alliance will agree its overall priorities for RIS2 at its meeting in early December. Following this, the Alliance will produce a new business case brochure, refresh its website and organise a range of activities (including a business breakfast in early 2017) to secure substantial investment into the road in RIS2. Whilst recent activity has focussed on maintaining the A47's profile in government, the Alliance is now gearing up its activities given that we are now approaching the run-up to the decision-making processes. This approach was extremely successful previously when we secured over £300m of investment into the A47 for the current RIS1 programme.

4. Financial Implications

- 4.1. The current stage of technical work, as described in 3.4, is estimated to cost £62,000. This is being met from the A47 reserve as identified by Members and agreed by Policy and Resources Committee 26 January 2015. All other activities are being funded from existing budgets.

5. Issues, risks and innovation

- 5.1. Any other implications will be examined in the more detailed assessment and appraisal work on individual schemes; or will be considered by Highways England in their work.

6. Background

- 6.1. The A47 is a trunk road. Responsibility for its management, maintenance and improvement rests with Highways England. Government will decide the improvement programme for 2020 to 2025 towards the end of the decade. Highways England is currently developing a number of improvement schemes to be delivered starting in 2020.

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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Appendix A: Timeline of Activities

NB: Programme dates indicative only. (See Section 3.3 in the report.)

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
RIS1 (Programme 2015-2020)					
Highways England: Option Identification	■				
Highways England: Options Consultation		■			
Highways England: Option Selection		■			
Highways England: Preliminary Design			■		
Highways England: Development Consent Order				■	
Highways England: Detailed Design				■	
Highways England: Construction preparation					■
Highways England: Start on site					■
RIS2 (Programme 2020-2025)	■				
Highways England: Call for Evidence to support RIS2 planning	■				
Norfolk County Council response to call for evidence					
Highways England: Develop RIS2 options and route strategies		■			
NCC: Develop Business Case work to support RIS2 priorities		■			
Highways England: Produce Strategic Business Plan		■			
Office of Rail and Road (ORR): Advice to Government			■		
Transport Focus: Advice to Government					
Highways England: Publish Draft Strategic Road Network Initial Report				■	
DfT: Publish Draft Roads Investment Strategy				■	
ORR: Efficiency Review				■	
Highways England: Publish Final Strategic Business Plan					■
DfT: Publish Final Roads Investment Strategy					■