

Committee	<b>Lead Cabinet Member for Transport and Environment</b>
Date	<b>4 April 2005</b>
Report By	<b>Director of Transport and Environment</b>
Title of Report	<b>Highways Agency A27 Southerham-Beddingham Improvements – publication of draft Orders and Environmental Statement</b>
Purpose of Report	<b>To consider the County Council’s response to the publication of the draft Orders and Environmental Statement.</b>

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## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 1. To welcome publication of the draft Orders and draft Compulsory Purchase Orders for the A27 Southerham - Beddingham Improvements and the opportunity to respond to them; and**
  - 2. To submit representations on the draft Orders and draft Compulsory Purchase Orders as set out in Appendix A.**
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### **1. Financial Appraisal**

1.1 The scheme will have financial effects for the County Council in respect of the Council’s responsibilities for road maintenance and for traffic management. Widening of the A26 on the approach to Southerham roundabout will result in an increased future maintenance liability. The scheme should result in more traffic using the A27 and less traffic using parallel County Council roads which could result in a reduced maintenance and traffic management requirement. However, redistribution of traffic may result in the need for alterations to road junctions in the Lewes area. The requirement to manage traffic flows during the scheme’s construction will result in a small increase in revenue expenditure during that period. More work will be required before these costs can be estimated.

### **2. Supporting Information**

2.1 The A27 between Southerham and Beddingham and the A26 between Beddingham and Newhaven are trunk roads managed on behalf of the Government by the Highways Agency. This section of the A27 carries over 30,000 vehicles per day, 50% more than its efficient capacity. The A26 north of Southerham is a County Council-managed primary route. The roundabout junctions with the A26 at Southerham and Beddingham are too small to take the volumes of traffic using them and severe congestion results at peak times. The road is single-carriageway with a short section of westbound climbing lane. Congestion is exacerbated by barrier closures at the level crossing of the A27 with the Lewes-Eastbourne railway.

2.2 The Highways Agency proposes to alleviate the congestion and safety problems by increasing the capacity of the roundabouts, widening the A27 between the roundabouts to three lanes throughout (with two westbound lanes and one eastbound) and by building a road bridge over the railway. The anticipated start date for scheme construction is currently Spring 2006 and opening would take place in 2008.

2.3 In order to take powers to construct the scheme the Secretary of State for Transport needs to make Orders under the Highways Act 1980, both to build new sections of highway and to make alterations to “side roads” adjoining the scheme. A Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) must also be made to ensure that the necessary land to construct the scheme is available. Draft Highway Orders were published on 11 February 2005 and the draft CPO on 8 March 2005. An Environmental Statement has also been published. The Highways Agency has asked that comments on and objections to both sets of Orders be received by 31 March 2005, but the County Council has been given slightly longer to fit in with its meeting cycle.

### **3. Comments/Appraisal**

3.1 Congestion and safety issues on the A27 east of Lewes have led to a number of proposals to improve the route. The current proposal follows a recommendation from the South Coast Multi-Modal Study for a dual carriageway scheme, subsequently rejected after earlier consultation by the Secretary of State “on environmental grounds”. The current wide-

single carriageway option has an early start date and will significantly improve conditions on this congested length of highway.

3.2 A bridge over the railway is long overdue and should be welcomed. At the level crossing some drivers are tempted to weave round the closed barriers, putting themselves, other road users and train passengers at high risk of death or severe injury. Safety cameras and other measures have been introduced, and Network Rail propose to replace the crossing with full barriers, which would significantly increase already-existing traffic delays.

3.3 The approaches to and the roundabouts themselves are generally narrow and queues of traffic quickly build up in peak periods. The roundabouts are also the locations of significant clusters of crashes. The scheme will include the addition of further traffic lanes on the approaches to the roundabouts, wider carriageways, and dedicated 'through' and left-turn lanes, all designed to speed the safe flow of traffic through the junctions.

3.4 The proposed highway design is below the standard recommended for the current volume of traffic, particularly as development occurs in the future, but will to a limited extent improve traffic flow. The original proposal for a dual carriageway would have had significant safety, operational, and environmental benefits and would have resulted in a longer-lasting solution to the problems on the route. The Highways Agency should be asked to ensure that the option of a future dual carriageway is not precluded by any aspect of the proposed scheme.

3.5 The scheme, once implemented, should attract traffic back to the A27 that currently uses less suitable routes. During construction, the Highways Agency proposes to keep the road open, but there will inevitably be an impact on other roads, in particular the A259/C7 and B2124/B2192, which will need to be managed.

#### **4. Environmental Issues**

4.1 The scheme is almost entirely within the Sussex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (proposed for designation as a National Park) and an Environmentally Sensitive Area, and is adjacent to areas subject to various environmental designations. Much attention was paid during the development of the scheme to mitigating landscape and ecological impacts, and the County Council was consulted extensively on these aspects. While the scheme's design does not meet all the County Council's concerns, it is in general acceptable, and it is hoped that further consideration will be given to mitigating the environmental impact of the scheme at the detailed design stage. Further comments appear in Appendix B.

#### **5. Conclusion and Reason for Recommendation**

5.1 The A27 Southerham-Beddingham Improvements as proposed fall far short of a desirable solution to the existing congestion and safety problems on the route and pay only limited regard to its crucial role in the East Sussex and regional strategic road network. However, they should be welcomed as potentially leading to an improvement on existing conditions and are the only Government-approved option on offer. The Secretary of State and the Highways Agency should be made aware of the County Council's reservations on the scheme, which need to be placed on record.

**BOB WILKINS**

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Local Member(s): Councillors Neighbour, Shing, McPherson, Chartier, Rogers, Livings, Mrs Stroude, Martin, Freeman, Murphy

#### **BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

Highways Agency's Draft Orders; Highways Agency's Environmental Statement; South Coast Multi-Modal Study Final Report.

**East Sussex County Council's response to the draft Order, draft Side Roads Order and draft Compulsory Purchase Order for the Highways Agency's A27 Southerham-Beddingham Improvements**

1. To welcome the Secretary of State's commitment to implementing a bridged crossing of the Lewes-Eastbourne railway at Beddingham on the A27 and to increasing the traffic capacity of the roundabouts at Southerham and Beddingham and to press for implementation of the scheme without further delay.
2. To welcome the commitment to implement a widened carriageway on the A27 between Southerham and Beddingham, but to express strong concern that this will be below the standard recommended by the South Coast Multi-Modal Study (dual carriageway) and current highway design standards.
3. To encourage the Highways Agency to implement the improvements in a way that does not preclude, and indeed facilitates, conversion to dual carriageway standard at a later date.
4. To welcome the intended provision for pedestrians and cyclists as an integral part of the improvement.
5. Not to lodge formal objections to the scheme or elements of it, but to make it clear to the Secretary of State that the County Council reserves the right to make representations and to appear at any public inquiry that may be called in connection with the scheme.
6. To request the Highways Agency to resolve safety issues adjacent to the roundabouts (outlined elsewhere) to allow full and safe operation of the scheme on opening.
7. To request the Highways Agency to ensure that appropriate and robust air quality and noise monitoring is put in place both during construction and once the scheme is open to traffic.
8. To request the Highways Agency to discuss with the County Council at an early stage, and thereafter to implement (in partnership with the County Council), robust and effective measures to manage traffic over the immediate and wider areas during the scheme's construction.
9. To request the Highways Agency to monitor the effects of the scheme's implementation on traffic flows on this section of the A27 and the wider highway network and to share this information with the County Council and to monitor the effect on the frequency and severity of crashes on this section of the A27.
10. To request the Highways Agency to provide at the earliest opportunity the results of the traffic modelling showing the theoretical effects of the scheme's opening on the wider highway network.
11. To welcome the landscaping and ecological measures proposed to be implemented as part of the scheme and to request the Highways Agency to monitor the effects of these measures once the scheme is open.
12. To request the Highways Agency to continue to develop measures to mitigate the environmental impact of the scheme at the detailed design stage.
13. To request the Highways Agency to implement the scheme in a way which ensures that there is sufficient scope in the project to implement future dualling without the need for additional land take or environmental and landscape disruption.
14. To remind the Secretary of State in the strongest terms of the urgent need to bring forward improvements to the A27 at Selmeston and Wilmington in order to improve safety and reduce community severance effects on those sections of the A27.
15. To remind the Secretary of State in the strongest terms of the urgent need to investigate and implement more comprehensive improvements of the A27 between Southerham and Polegate in connection with any future development of the Polegate and Hailsham areas and with the provision of a fit-for-purpose trunk road network in East Sussex.

**Additional comments****Environmental aspects**

An Environmental Statement on the scheme accompanies the draft Orders. The County Council was consulted extensively on environmental aspects of the scheme but there is some concern that not all the County Council's views have been incorporated into the current design. It is not clear from the Environmental Statement how comments and representations on the Statement will be handled and addressed.

From a landscape point-of-view a dual carriageway would be favoured as having less overall impact. The landscape design for the current, approved scheme is not considered to be the best achievable, and the Highways Agency should be asked to make improvements at the detailed design stage. In particular the side slopes on the embankment to the north-east of the railway are considered to be too steep, but this has the effect of minimising encroachment on a Site of Nature Conservation Importance and prevents the loss of existing trees. Further design work could result in better use of landform to incorporate the scheme into the landscape and the Highways Agency should be requested to use local materials, for example flint, on visible areas.

There are no major ecological concerns connected with the scheme. However where wildflower-seeded areas have been specified the Highways Agency should be requested to use locally-collected seed. In addition ponds and reed beds to be put in place as part of the scheme should be constructed to maximise wildlife and landscape potential. The County Council would wish to be consulted on the details of these environmental mitigation measures.

Air quality and noise would need to be monitored once the works begin and once the new road begins to be used in order to ensure that the Highways Agency has used reasonable assumptions in assessing the impact of the scheme. It would be useful for the County Council to have copies of the dust control plans that will be drawn up, and, once the scheme is about to begin, a list of contact names and telephone numbers to refer any complaints on noise and air quality to. The County Council would wish to be consulted on the detailed arrangements for construction, for example hours of working.

**Southerham Roundabout**

The Highways Agency proposes to make provision for a dedicated, segregated left-turn lane from the A26 eastbound onto the A27, but is currently unable to say when this lane could be brought into use. The County Council awaits the results of traffic modelling before commenting in detail on the implications of this delay in the full opening of the scheme. Safety concerns about the proximity of the exit from the lane onto the A27 to the access to Southerham village are behind the uncertainty and further work is needed on the Agency's part to resolve this issue. There is also concern locally that restricting access to and from the A27 from the village will result in the use by goods vehicles of unsuitable roads in Southerham. Discussions are continuing between the County Council and the Agency on these issues.

**Beddingham Roundabout**

It appears from the Highways Agency's drawings that there is restricted space on the A27 eastbound adjacent to the exit from the roundabout which may make it difficult for traffic to merge safely. The Highways Agency should be requested to ensure that safe operation of both roundabouts is fully taken into account at the detailed design stage.