

Report to: Economy, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Committee

Date of meeting: 9 November 2016

By: Director of Communities, Economy and Transport

Title: A27 Roads Improvements Update

Purpose: To update the Scrutiny Committee on the improvements being proposed by Highways England for the A27 between Lewes and Polegate and the case for a more comprehensive solution to support the growth plans in the county.

RECOMMENDATION: The Economy, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Committee is recommended to note the progress that is being made by Highways England on their smaller scale proposals for the A27 between Lewes and Polegate and for making the case for a more comprehensive offline solution that supports economic growth specifically in the Eastbourne/South Wealden areas as well as the rest of the county.

1 Background Information

1.1 The A27 from Falmer to Pevensey, along with the A21 (except in Hastings), the A259 from Pevensey to Guldeford (except in Hastings) and the A26 (from Beddingham to Newhaven) form the strategic road network within the county and is the responsibility of Highways England (HE).

1.2 There has been requests for significant improvements to the A27 between Lewes and Polegate for decades. In the early 1990's proposals were developed for an offline dual carriageway between Lewes and Polegate (with a then estimated cost of £90m) alongside proposals for bypasses of Polegate and the Stone Cross, Westham and Pevensey area. Whilst those two bypass schemes were subsequently built, the proposals for Lewes to Polegate, which got to preferred route stage, were dropped in 1996 and it was announced that they would be replaced by three smaller scale improvements – Southerham to Beddingham improvement, Selmeston bypass and Wilmington bypass.

1.3 The South Coast Multi-Modal Study (SoCoMMS), which commenced in 2000 and was published in 2002, re-considered these three schemes for the A27 and recommended that all three schemes continued to be required.

1.4 In his decision on SoCoMMS in 2003, the then Secretary of State did not support the Wilmington and Selmeston bypasses citing that “both schemes would adversely impact on the (then) Sussex Downs AONB and surrounding landscape and on biodiversity” and asked that the then termed Highways Agency (HA) develop less environmental damaging options. Various options were developed by the HA and put forward for funding through the regional transport programme, however no decisions were made on preferred options and therefore these were never taken forward.

1.5 Therefore, the only one of the three schemes identified in SoCoMMS taken forward was the Southerham / Beddingham improvement, which involved the removal of the Beddingham level crossing, which was completed in 2008. Aside, the only other improvements along the A27 between Lewes and Polegate in recent years have been local safety schemes with the introduction of right hand turn lanes at Middle Farm, Charleston and at Brown Jack Avenue near Polegate as well as a shared footway / cycle route alongside the A27 between Beddingham and Firle Road.

Supporting Information

2.1 One of the key priorities for East Sussex County Council is driving economic growth, and the delivery of strategic road infrastructure, such as improvements to the A27, plays a key role in supporting this achievement. They unlock housing and employment space and encourage inward investment to create new jobs. The necessity for investment in our strategic road network, in particular the A27 corridor, to support economic growth in the county is referred to in the County Council's Local Transport Plan (LTP), the County's East Sussex Growth Strategy (2014-20), the Local Enterprise Partnership's Strategic Economic Plans (SEP) (2014) and the Three Southern Counties Devolution Deal (2016).

2.2 In 2013, the Government announced a series of improvement studies to help identify and fund solutions to tackle some of the notorious and long standing hotspots in the country. One of these studies focussed on the A27 corridor between Portsmouth and Pevensey. Following an analysis of the evidence available and the potential issues / future pressures that may arise, the feasibility improvement study identified three priority areas along the A27 corridor for further consideration – Arundel, Worthing and east of Lewes.

2.3 For east of Lewes, the study identified that there were considerable operational issues in terms of network performance, journey time reliability, safety and resilience. The study considered the potential options – ranging from localised bypasses to more comprehensive offline solutions – to address these issues with an assessment of the strength of the economic case including whether they demonstrated value for money and were deliverable.

2.4 Following the outcomes of the A27 improvement study in 2014, the Chancellor in his 2014 Autumn Statement and subsequently the Department for Transport's (DfT) Roads Investment Strategy: Investment Plan published in March 2015, identified that around £75m had been set aside for improvements east of Lewes.

2.5 The DfT and Highways England (HE) appointed consultants to take forward the development of the smaller scale capacity improvements and sustainable transport improvements using the available funding in the Roads Investment Strategy. HE and their consultants have been developing these proposals over the last 12 months and HE is consulting on their proposals between 27 October and 8 December. These proposals include schemes at Selmeaton, Drusillas Roundabout, Wilmington and Polegate.

2.6 However, the A27 Reference Group – which brings together the MPs, local authority leaders in the county and the Local Enterprise Partnerships – as well as the business community are developing the case to Government that a more comprehensive offline solution for the A27 east of Lewes is critical in order to enable the delivery of the significant housing and employment growth planned in the Hailsham / Polegate area through the emerging Wealden Local Plan as well as support the growth of existing business in East Sussex and encourage new businesses to move to the county.

2.7 A detailed summary of the A27 Feasibility Study outcomes and Highways England's proposed smaller scale capacity improvements for the A27 east of Lewes is at Appendix 1.

3 Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations

3.1 Investment in improvements to the A27 between Lewes and Polegate is critical to supporting business and delivering new homes in one of our key growth corridor areas – Eastbourne / South Wealden – as well as the supporting our wider growth plans for the county. There has been significant under investment in the A27 over the last 50 years and as a consequence the road is currently not fit for purpose to fulfil its function of carrying strategic and long distance traffic.

3.2 Following the outcomes of the A27 Feasibility Improvement Study in 2014, £75m has been set aside in the Roads Investment Strategy towards a package of smaller scale improvements to the A27 east of Lewes. Whilst HE have developed a package of smaller scale capacity improvements which are currently subject to consultation the case is being developed for a more comprehensive solution for the A27 between Lewes and Polegate which is critical to delivering the significant level of planned growth in the Hailsham / Polegate area, supporting the creation of new jobs in the county and thereby supporting the County Council's priority of 'driving economic growth'.

3.3 It is recommended that Scrutiny Committee note the progress that HE have made in progressing their smaller scale capacity improvements for the A27 east of Lewes and that a case continues to be made for a more comprehensive offline solution for the A27.

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LOCAL MEMBERS:

All

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

None