

SEVENOAKS JOINT TRANSPORTATION BOARD – 14 MARCH 2012

A21 TONBRIDGE–PEMBURY DUALLING

Report of the: Director of Kent Highway Services

Status: For Decision

Key decision No

Executive Summary: This report updates efforts being made to secure Government approval to progress the A21 Tonbridge– Pembury scheme.

Chairman Cllr. James London

Head of Service Head of Programmed Works

Recommendation: That Members note the report.

Introduction

- 1 The A21 between the Tonbridge and Pembury is a trunk road and under the responsibility of the Highways Agency (HA). It is an unsatisfactory stretch of single carriageway road with very poor vertical and horizontal alignments. It links two busy sections of dual carriageway and carries over 40,000 vehicles per day which is significantly over its capacity. There are serious delays with a significant cost to the local economy and it has a very poor accident record.
- 2 Serious delays on this section of the A21 hinder economic growth in Kent and East Sussex, not only because of the increase in journey time but also because of the inherent unreliability of travelling along its length.
- 3 The problem has worsened over recent years. The construction of a new flagship NHS hospital as well as a large retail park have both increased traffic flow and will continue to do so. Reasonable accessibility to and from the north to the new hospital at Pembury is entirely dependent on the improvement to this road. The concentration of a number of key services to this hospital from Maidstone increases the need to have good accessibility.
- 4 In the post election Comprehensive Spending Review on 26 October 2010, all A21 schemes were cancelled with the exception of A21 Tonbridge - Pembury Dualling which was deferred into the post 2015 funding review period despite a date having been set for the public inquiry into the statutory Orders.

Current Situation

- 5 The scheme has been under consideration since 1984 and over the past twenty years it has been repeatedly delayed. It has a good Cost Benefit ratio which is well above the threshold for good value for money schemes.
- 6 Given the significance of the scheme to the economies of Kent and East Sussex, Paul Cater, Leader of KCC, ordered a review of the project with the view to developing a common sense affordable proposal. This review has identified that significant savings could be made using Value engineering to reduce the cost of the scheme with larger savings in the treatment of risk and inflation. The outcome was an estimated cost of less than £70m for the delivery of the scheme as opposed to HA's estimate of over £120m, a difference of over £50m.
- 7 This work was the subject of discussion between the Under Secretary of State, Mike Penning and Paul Carter in June 2011. It was agreed that KCC would work with the HA to review the scheme to reach a consensus on the estimated cost to be used as a comparator with competing scheme for development funding of future schemes.
- 8 Using KCC's extensive knowledge of successfully delivering major projects to time and budget, officers worked with the HA using value engineering within the context of HM Treasury and DfT rules to evaluate the scheme. The outcome was that even using Government criteria the scheme would have an estimated cost of around £88m, some £32m less than the HA's previous estimate. This was subsequently the subject of HA's report to the Minister.
- 9 KCC has now undertaken two separate reviews of the HA A21 scheme and each review has shown that it could be delivered for less than £70m, approximately £50m less the HA's estimated cost. This has been reported separately by KCC to the Minister with the recommendation that to achieve the savings, funding should be provided in January 2012 with construction starting in July 2013. To kick start the scheme the Leader of KCC offered to inject some £2m - £4m.
- 10 The Minister has considered the report and has raised a number of queries. The Leader of the County Council has replied giving the required clarification. The Minister's response is awaited.
- 11 In the interviewing periods a local has offered a seven figure contribution subject to delivery of the scheme and their proposed planning application being successful.

Conclusion

- 12 The existing A21 seriously undermines economic growth and regeneration in Kent and East Sussex. The road needs to be dualled and KCC have clearly demonstrated that it can deliver this vital scheme at a greatly reduced cost, at £70m, over £50m less than HA's original estimate and over £18m less than HA's revised estimate.

- 13 KCC has provided all the required information to the Minister, and has shown that:-
- The scheme can be delivered for substantially less than the original HA estimate
 - The scheme can be delivered in a much shorter time frame (pre 2015)
 - KCC is so committed to this important scheme that it is prepared to kick start the required funding and take the full construction cost risk (in excess of £70m).

Legal Implications

- 14 Not applicable

Financial and value for Money Considerations

- 15 Not applicable

Risk Assessment

- 16 Not applicable

Background Papers: None

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