

**From:** Mike Whiting, Cabinet Member for Planning, Highways, Transport and Waste

Barbara Cooper, Corporate Director of Growth, Environment and Transport

**To:** Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee – 31 January 2018

**Subject:** KCC response to the Department for Transport's '*Shaping the Future of England's Strategic Roads*' consultation on Highways England's '*Strategic Road Network Initial Report*'

**Classification:** Unrestricted

**Past Pathway of Paper:** N/A

**Future Pathway of Paper:** N/A

**Electoral Division:** Countywide

**Summary:**

This report outlines Kent County Council's draft response to the Department for Transport's '*Shaping the Future of England's Strategic Roads*' consultation on Highways England's '*Strategic Road Network Initial Report*' which closes on 7 February 2018.

The draft response from Kent County Council sets out its position on Highways England's proposals and outlines Kent specific projects on the Strategic Road Network (SRN) needed to support growth, including the new Lower Thames Crossing and the supporting enhancements needed on the M2/A2 corridor, a solution to Operation Stack and various motorway junction improvements.

**Recommendation:**

The Cabinet Committee is asked to consider and endorse or make recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Planning, Highways, Transport and Waste on the draft Kent County Council response to the consultation.

**1. Background**

- 1.1 The Government will shortly take decisions about the Strategic Road Network (SRN) in the second Road Investment Strategy (RIS2), which covers the period 2020-2025. The SRN comprises the motorways and trunk roads managed by Highways England, a Government-owned company. The SRN encompasses only 2% of the combined length of all of England's roads, but carries a third of all traffic, and over two-thirds of all lorry traffic.

1.2 The SRN in Kent consists of:

- M25 (and A282 Dartford Crossing)
- M26
- M20
- M2/A2
- A20 (Folkestone to Dover)
- A249 (north of M2)
- A21
- A259/A2070 (Ashford to Hastings)

1.3 There is a separate consultation on the proposed Major Road Network (MRN), which proposes to bring the most important Local Authority 'A Roads' into a new tier with access to the same funding as the SRN. This is outside of the scope of this consultation and will be reported separately in March 2018.

1.4 To inform the Government's decisions about the SRN, in December 2017 the Department for Transport (DfT) published '*Shaping the Future of England's Strategic Roads*'. The purpose of this document is to summarise the evidence about the SRN and proposals submitted to the DfT for inclusion in RIS2, and the DfT's analytical strategy for assessing these submissions. It seeks comments on:

- Highways England's proposals in its SRN Initial Report;
- DfT's analytical approach and whether it is sufficiently robust; and
- Whether the DfT has heard the full range of views on the scope of the RIS2 programme, including the shape of the SRN.

1.5 The principal focus of the document '*Shaping the Future of England's Strategic Roads*' is the set of proposals made in Highways England's Initial Report, which outlines its view on the current state of the SRN, its potential future needs, and the proposed priorities for the next Road Period (RP2), covering the financial years 2020/21 to 2024/25.

1.6 Responses to this consultation will help to inform the Government's decisions on RIS2 and therefore it is important that Kent County Council (KCC) submits a comprehensive response.

1.7 This report summarises the DfT's consultation document '*Shaping the Future of England's Strategic Roads*' and Highways England's '*Strategic Road Network Initial Report*', as well as KCC's draft response to the consultation questions (the full response is attached in **Appendix A**). The draft response includes making the case for Kent-specific projects on the SRN which are needed to support growth. Examples include a new Lower Thames Crossing, a solution to Operation Stack and various motorway junction improvements, in alignment with the transport policies set out in the *Local Transport Plan (LTP4): Delivering Growth without Gridlock (2016-31)*, adopted by County Council in July 2017.

**2. Summary of ‘*Shaping the Future of England’s Strategic Roads*’, DfT, December 2017**

2.1 RIS2 will be vital to meeting the ambition of the DfT’s Transport Investment Strategy published on 5 July 2017:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/transport-investment-strategy>

2.2 The Transport Investment Strategy sets out four goals for infrastructure investment:

- Create a more reliable, less congested, and better connected transport network that works for the users who rely on it;
- Build a stronger, more balanced economy by enhancing productivity and responding to local growth priorities;
- Enhance our global competitiveness by making Britain a more attractive place to trade, invest and visit; and,
- Support the creation of new housing.

2.3 From the start of RP2 (2020/21), the SRN will be funded from the National Roads Fund (NRF), financed directly from Vehicle Excise Duty (VED) raised in England. The Government states that the NRF will ensure:

- Stable long-term funding for major roads, creating a lasting answer to decades of underinvestment;
- The supply chain can invest for the long-term, confident of a stable supply of future work, creating jobs and bringing down the cost of infrastructure; and
- Road users know that their VED will be spent directly on improving roads.

2.4 As part of Government’s ongoing efforts to modernise and improve England’s road network, it recently announced its intention to use the NRF to enhance funding for the most important local roads, which would be identified as the MRN (this is the subject of a separate consultation, see para. 1.3). Given the detailed thinking that will be underway on defining the shape of the MRN, the Government considers that it makes sense to also think about the shape of the SRN at the same time. Therefore, the DfT is inviting suggestions about changing the extent of the SRN as part of this consultation.

2.5 The Government proposes to continue to use the four-point definition of the SRN set out below and any suggestions received will be judged against these criteria, which classify as SRN those routes which:

- Link the main centres of population;
- Facilitate access to major ports, airports and rail terminals;
- Enable access to peripheral regions; and
- Provide key cross-border routes to Scotland and Wales.

- 2.6 The second RIS will set out: investment in the SRN during the second road period (2020-2025); the performance specification that government will expect Highways England to adhere to during that period; and a strategic vision for the future of the SRN looking towards 2050.
- 2.7 RIS2 will cover investment in the operation, maintenance and renewal of the existing network as well as new enhancements. Through investment in current infrastructure and new construction where it is justified, the Government expects to improve safety, journey reliability, and the environmental and physical design impacts of the SRN.
- 2.8 It will also involve completing the schemes from the first RIS and progressing other schemes that have been announced already, such as the Lower Thames Crossing. These schemes are likely to require all the funding available for SRN enhancements in the first half of RP2, meaning that any new schemes agreed in RIS2 would be for construction later in RP2 and beyond.
- 2.9 The consultation makes clear that the boundaries of the SRN should not be a barrier to action. It is possible that investment may involve spending money on routes which are not on the SRN. For example, investment in a neighbouring local road or an alternative mode of travel may help the SRN to function better.
- 2.10 The five key aims of RIS2, and how success will be measured in RP2, are:
- Economy – providing investment that yields increased productivity and economic output.
  - Network Capability – a network that can meet future demands on it and support growth for the long term.
  - Safety – reducing deaths and injuries on our nation's roads.
  - Integration – create new opportunities for linking the SRN with local roads, major roads and other modes of transport.
  - Environment – tackle the negative external impacts of the SRN, and aim for RIS2 to make a positive contribution to the environment and air quality.
- 2.11 Highways England's Initial Report, which is the focus of this consultation, provides more detail about the activities that have been undertaken as part of the research phase in developing RIS2 and draws on the publications that have emerged. Those publications continue to form part of the DfT's overall evidence base which, together with the Initial Report and the responses to this consultation, will be used to inform the decision-making for RIS2.
- 3. Summary of '*Strategic Road Network Initial Report*', Highways England, December 2017**
- 3.1 The *Initial Report* provides an informative statement of Highways England's priorities (safety, customer service and delivery) and the progress it has made

to date in delivering these priorities. It also describes how the government-owned company has thought about future investment needs, listening to its customers, stakeholders and the Secretary of State for Transport as shareholder, as well as improving its understanding of the SRN infrastructure, performance and future challenges.

3.2 The DfT welcomes views on each part of Highways England's *Initial Report* as set out in the paragraphs 3.3 to 3.11.

3.3 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)

3.4 Highways England's proposed investment priorities for RIS2 cover operational, infrastructure and enhancement priorities. Within these priority areas they make a number of important proposals, for example:

- Greater freedom of action for Highways England regarding messages that can be displayed on variable message signs (VMS).
- For road surfaces, make investment choices that favour lower whole life costs and invest in improved drainage to increase both road and flood resilience.
- Proceed with smart motorway upgrades as a continuous programme rather than individual schemes to minimise disruption to road users.

3.5 Last year, the Government provided an additional £220m for Highways England to increase capacity, reduce journey times and improve safety on the SRN. This fund is for smaller schemes at existing junctions, roundabouts and slip roads, and is bringing benefits to communities, the economy and housing developments across the country. Highways England proposes that a similar fund, which can be delivered at regional level responding to local priorities, be included in RP2.

3.6 Highways England proposes a range of studies that could begin during RP2 and in particular, to address connectivity and resilience issues facing the SRN. 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.

3.7 The current RIS provides five Designated Funds to help tackle specific issues affecting the SRN. Highways England proposes this approach should continue in RIS2 but that the scope of the five funds should be altered to cover:

- Growth and Housing: the current fund helps support schemes required to unlock growth and Highways England recommend that it continues in RIS2.
- 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 of the SRN.
- Roadside facilities: Highways England supports a recommendation by Transport Focus for a roadside facilities fund in RIS2, and suggests this could be used in partnership with motorway service area operators.

3.8 Highways England also suggests a number of changes to the management of the funds, in particular adopting the model of the Growth and Housing Fund for other designated funds, spreading the use of joint working with interested groups to help determine allocation of funds.

3.9 Highways England proposes changes to the way in which its performance is measured and targets set. It suggests that the RIS2 performance framework should be in two parts: one a set of data on which Highways England must report that will be of interest to its customers and wider stakeholders; the other, a set of performance measures and targets monitored by the ORR to incentivise the performance of Highways England in the actions that it has direct control over.

3.10 Sub-national Transport Bodies (STB) are acknowledged for the work that they are doing in identifying priorities for the SRN. It is acknowledged that whilst Transport for the South East (TfSE) currently exists in 'shadow' form (KCC is a member of the Shadow Board), it has produced an early prioritisation of schemes for consideration in RIS2. These include responses to the development of the Lower Thames Crossing and the M25 South West Quadrant strategic study, as well as improving the performance of the M23/A23, A27/M27, A21 and A3.

3.11 Alongside the Initial Report, Highways England has published a paper setting out its analytical platform, the assurance framework it is applying to the analysis and planned future developments. The DfT's analysts are working

closely with colleagues in Highways England to ensure there is a sound, well-understood evidence base available for both organisations to draw on through the decision-making process. Alongside this consultation, DfT has also published a strategic outline of the approach it is taking on analysis for RIS2.

#### **4. Summary of KCC's draft response to the consultation** *(full draft response to the consultation questionnaire is provided in Appendix A)*

##### Housing growth

4.1 KCC supports Highways England's proposals in general, but expresses significant concern about the lack of recognition afforded to demand growth from the substantial requirement for delivery of new homes. KCC and Medway's Growth and Infrastructure Framework (GIF) outlines the housing and economic growth planned to 2031 in Kent and Medway and the infrastructure needed to support this growth. This GIF projects 158,500 housing units across Kent and Medway between 2011 and 2031 ([www.kent.gov.uk/gif](http://www.kent.gov.uk/gif)), however the refreshed GIF, due to be published this year, indicates accelerated growth with an emerging figure of 178,600 new homes by 2031. This illustrates that growth expected in Kent is already high, but if the New Objectively Assessed Needs consultation goes through then it will be proportionally even higher in both Kent and the South East as a region.

##### Maintenance Funding

4.2 KCC's response makes reference to the reduced funding given to the Local Road Network (i.e. roads maintained by KCC). The Local Road Network vital to the overall journey experience of the travelling public, freight operators and businesses as all SRN journeys begin and end on the Local Road Network. However, maintenance funding is insufficient to maintain the standard of Kent's roads to the extent that without an increase in funding the network will deteriorate significantly over the coming years. The response asks the Government to increase maintenance funding to ensure there is a coherent road network (both local and strategic) as there has been under investment by Government in roads for many years.

##### Business needs

4.3 The majority of large settlements in Kent are located on or close to the SRN and therefore businesses rely heavily on the SRN – to transport products or produce, to receive deliveries, and for their employees to reliably get to work. Our position as a strategic gateway to Europe means that the SRN in Kent carries a disproportionately high volume of freight compared to other parts of the SRN. This gateway role will continue to be vital even with the UK's exit from the European Union. Brexit will require infrastructure investment to maintain freight fluidity through this international gateway. Further, the delivery of the new Lower Thames Crossing will create a new strategic freight route from the Midlands to Dover via the M2/A2, with consequently higher freight volumes than this route sees today. The current situation at the

Dartford Crossing unacceptably stifles growth and restricts trade between the South East and Midlands and North, as well as locally between Kent and Essex. Approximately 70,000 freight vehicles a day cross at Dartford, and 70% of all HGVs from Dover and Eurotunnel use the Dartford Crossing.

- 4.4 When disruption to cross-Channel services is experienced then Operation Stack may be called. This effectively shuts down large segments of the M20 and saturates the alternative routes on the Local Road Network. The cost of Operation Stack to businesses, freight and the travelling public is significant, at £1.45m to the Kent and Medway economy and £250m to the UK economy as a whole for each day it is in force. Operation Stack also impacts on the Local Road Network in terms of damage to the road surface and accelerated asset deterioration which adds to the growing pressure on reducing maintenance budgets.
- 4.5 It is imperative for businesses that the SRN is reliable, not just in day-to-day circumstances but also in exceptional circumstances. For this reason, a permanent solution to Operation Stack must be delivered.

#### People affected by SRN

- 4.6 The impact of the SRN has been given consideration in the Initial Report, particularly noise, visual and air quality impacts. However, KCC has made the point that severance (i.e. the SRN dissecting communities) needs to be included as an impact in relation to existing roads and new schemes. For example, KCC has consistently asked for more of the Lower Thames Crossing route to be in tunnel to minimise such impacts on the local communities.
- 4.7 KCC also recommends that SRN enhancements are considered alongside the Local Road Network (managed by Local Highway Authorities, such as KCC) so that overall door-to-door journey times can be improved. All SRN journeys begin and end on the Local Road Network.

#### Highways England's proposals

- 4.8 The *Initial Report* shows an indicative medium term network utilising the new four categories of road. KCC's response welcomes the investment in increasing the length of the smart motorway network in Kent (including the M26, which was a local priority in *Local Transport Plan 4: Delivery Growth without Gridlock*), and also in improving some of the county's trunk roads to expressway standard. The response recommends that the current two-lane section of the M2 (junctions 4 to 7) is upgraded to smart motorway as well as upgrading the remaining section of the A2 (Canterbury to Dover) to expressway to complete a high quality strategic link from the Midlands/North to Dover via the Lower Thames Crossing. The response also asks for further consideration to improving the A21 south of Tonbridge. The A259 (Brenzett to Hasting) is of markedly lower quality than most all-purpose trunk roads and should be improved.

- 4.9 KCC's response welcomes significant investment in flagship schemes, particularly the Lower Thames Crossing. However, such flagship schemes will increase pressure on the existing road network. Not only must this pressure on the local network be addressed but, critically, it must be addressed **within the same time scale** as those major schemes. For the Lower Thames Crossing, KCC (and Transport for the South East) are campaigning for a series of wider network improvements to support the new crossing. These improvements include an upgrade to M2 Junction 7 (Brenley Corner), dualling the A2 from Lydden to Dover, consideration to widening/all lane running along the M2 Junctions 4 to 7, an upgrade of the A229 and its junctions with the M2 and M20, improvements to the A249 and its junctions with the M2 and M20. These schemes would improve the resilience and capacity of the SRN to the Channel Ports and support the bifurcation of port-bound traffic between both strategic corridors (M20/A20 and M2/A2).
- 4.10 Given the strategic importance of these routes, they often carry large volumes of freight traffic and as a result require regular maintenance. The cost of maintaining these roads are substantial and add to the increasing pressure on KCC's budgets, and result in the authority being dependent upon government funds (such as the Challenge Fund) to maintain these important elements of the network.
- 4.11 The report includes a reference to undertaking a future study into free-flow connections at key SRN-SRN junctions. Therefore, KCC has taken the opportunity to reiterate that the preferred option for M2 Junction 5 (a RIS1 scheme) should be revisited to include free-flow because the current proposals do not align to the *Initial Report's* proposals. Similarly, the knock-on effects from making improvements must be considered simultaneously. For this reason, M20 Junction 7 needs to be improved at the same time as M2 Junction 5 otherwise queues will just be moved along the A249.
- 4.12 A new designated fund is proposed for roadside facilities. KCC welcomes this and believes that it should include provision for lorry parking to help local authorities and the private sector build new facilities. This would help to overcome one of the barriers to their delivery, which is high initial capital investment requiring a longer-term view than the typical five to ten year return that private investors seek. The damaging impacts of inappropriate lorry parking – noise, anti-social behaviour, road safety, verge and kerb damage – are highlighted in the response.
- 4.13 KCC also asks that the Growth and Housing Fund is extended to facilitate new housing that is currently constrained by capacity on the SRN. This will also enable accelerated house building. The Growth and Housing Fund is one of HE's Designated Funds (for activities beyond 'business as usual') and supports network improvements that unlock housing and jobs. KCC also asks that all designated funds are administered in the same way as the Growth and Housing Fund so that external bodies can make bids rather than the fund allocation remaining internal to Highways England.

## Future needs

4.14 KCC considers that the future needs assessment does not sufficiently explain how Highways England will facilitate and accelerate housing growth. The *Initial Report* should give more attention to local authority housing targets and how SRN improvements can unlock and accelerate housing growth. This is not just a local issue to Kent but one of national importance. For example, a new M2 Junction 5a near Sittingbourne, M20 Junction 11 for Otterpool Park, the Duke of York Roundabout on the A2 at Whitfield, the Dartford Crossing, and various other junctions are all examples that would benefit housing and economic growth in Kent. KCC and Medway's Growth and Infrastructure Framework (GIF) is forecasting an emerging figure of 178, 600 new homes required across Kent and Medway by 2031. It is vital the SRN is capable of meeting the needs of not just existing users but also those as a result of future growth.

## Roads – shape of the SRN

4.15 The consultation asks for views on the future shape of the SRN. In line with our consultation response to *Road to Growth* in 2017, the draft response recommends that the A229 Bluebell Hill (M2 Junction 3 – M20 Junction 6) and the A249 Detling Hill (M2 Junction 5 to M20 Junction 7) are included in the SRN as key links between major population centres, especially as their importance as links between the motorway corridors will increase with the opening of the Lower Thames Crossing. Additionally, KCC asks Highways England to include the A299 Thanet Way from M2 Junction 7 (Brenley Corner) to the Port of Ramsgate. This is a major road that carries large volumes of traffic, links to the port, and connects the Thanet towns to the SRN (population of around 140,000).

## Other factors – investment decisions

4.16 KCC's draft response recommends that an alternative solution to Operation Stack is an urgent priority for Government when making decisions about investment in the SRN. The response also stresses the high demand for overnight lorry parking within the county. KCC calls on Government and Highways England to further investigate the potential for constructing a network of lorry parks and to consider incorporating overnight parking capacity within the new plans for an Operation Stack lorry area. Furthermore, the draft response suggests that investment is made in major infrastructure enhancements to facilitate growth at the Channel Ports, including the new Lower Thames Crossing, and the wider network improvements outlined in paragraph 4.8.

## Analysis balance

4.17 The consultation seeks views on the Department's analytical approach to which KCC's draft response articulates general support. It is felt that this

approach takes the right balance between ambition, robustness and proportionality. However, KCC would ask for the DfT to ensure the approach takes into account future housing growth and traffic demand, and that future modelling considers the additional traffic flow from other SRN schemes.

### Network capability

4.18 One of the DfT's aims for the SRN is in improving network capability, including the ability for connected and autonomous vehicles to use the network. The draft response says that KCC would welcome an opportunity for a pilot of connected and autonomous freight vehicles on the M20 corridor. Such a trial would assess how platooning of freight vehicles might increase fluidity of traffic at the port, and complement the existing A2/M2 connected corridor pilot, which focuses on in-vehicle messaging.

## **5. Conclusions**

5.1 This public consultation represents the final part of the evidence-gathering Research Phase for RIS2. The consultation closes on 7 February 2018, after which the DfT will analyse all responses received and publish a summary of responses together with an indication on how they will take them into account in the development of RIS2. This is expected to be published in May 2018. Subject to the responses received, DfT may choose to investigate specific issues raised by the consultation in more detail with interested parties.

5.2 DfT will use all the evidence gathered during the Research Phase and this consultation to inform decisions on the content of RIS2. This is a statutory process, involving the Department, Highways England and the Office of Road and Rail (ORR). DfT intends to announce the result of this process in 2019, after which Highways England will engage with interested parties on mobilisation and implementation, prior to the start of RP2 on 1 April 2020.

## **6. Financial Implications**

6.1 N/A.

## **7. Legal Implications**

7.1 N/A.

## **8. Equalities Implications**

8.1 The draft response to this consultation is based on KCC's priorities in LTP4, which has been subject to an Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA). This demonstrated that in their current outline stage the schemes promoted within LTP4 are not anticipated to have an adverse impact on any group with protected characteristics. However, as individual schemes are progressed they will require their own EqIA by the promotor, which for SRN schemes is Highways England.

## **9. Other Corporate Implications**

9.1 The draft response to this consultation is based on KCC's priorities in *LTP4: Delivering Growth without Gridlock (2016-2031)* which meets the objectives of '*Increasing Opportunities, Improving Outcomes: Kent County Council's Strategic Statement (2015-2020)*' in that it helps to achieve a number of the supporting outcomes:

- Supporting Kent business growth by enabling access to jobs through improved transport;
- Supporting well planned housing growth;
- Protecting and enhancing Kent's physical and natural environment;
- Helping children and young people have better physical and mental health; and
- Giving young people access to work, education and training opportunities.

## **10. Governance**

10.1 N/A.

## **11. Recommendation:**

11.1 The Cabinet Committee is asked to consider and endorse or make recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Planning, Highways, Transport and Waste on the draft Kent County Council response to the consultation.

## **12. Background Documents**

*Appendix A: Draft Response by Kent County Council to the Department for Transport (DfT) Consultation: Shaping the Future of England's Strategic Roads (RIS2)*

*Shaping the Future of England's Strategic Roads: Consultation on Highways England's Initial Report*, Department for Transport (DfT), December 2017  
[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/666965/shaping-the-future-of-englands-strategic-roads.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/666965/shaping-the-future-of-englands-strategic-roads.pdf)

*Analysis to inform RIS2 – DfT's Strategy*, Department for Transport (DfT)  
[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/666839/analysis-to-inform-ris2-dft-strategy.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/666839/analysis-to-inform-ris2-dft-strategy.pdf)

*Strategic Road Network Initial Report*, Highways England, December 2017  
[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/666884/Highways\\_England\\_Strategic\\_Road\\_Network\\_Initial\\_Report\\_-\\_WEB.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/666884/Highways_England_Strategic_Road_Network_Initial_Report_-_WEB.pdf)

### 13. Contact details

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