

**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 – 20 March 2018

**Subject:** Kent County Council's response to the Department for Transport's '*Proposals for the creation of a Major Road Network*' consultation.

**Classification:** Unrestricted

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

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

**Electoral Division:** All divisions

**Summary:**

This report outlines Kent County Council's (KCC) proposed response to the Department for Transport's (DfT) consultation on '*Proposals for the creation of a Major Road Network*', which closed on 19 March 2018.

Inclusion in the Major Road Network (MRN) enables access to additional funding from the National Roads Fund for significant investments that offer transformative solutions to the most economically important local authority 'A' roads. Local Highway Authorities, including KCC, will retain responsibility for these roads. Sub-national Transport Bodies will formulate a Regional Evidence Base to identify priorities and create an investment programme. Government will make investment decisions based on value for money. The DfT is expected to launch the MRN Programme in summer 2018.

In general, KCC is supportive of the MRN proposals but has suggested a number of amendments to the indicative MRN routes. The proposed response strongly insists that MRN status should enable additional maintenance funding, which will improve traffic flow on these important routes.

An officer response has been made to the DfT pending Cabinet Committee consideration and endorsement or recommendations to the Cabinet Member. An endorsed or amended response will be sent to the DfT after Cabinet Committee.

**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 proposed Kent County Council response to the consultation.

## 1. Background

- 1.1 Currently there are two tiers of roads in England: The Strategic Road Network (SRN) comprising motorways and trunk roads carrying the highest volumes of traffic and managed by Highways England; and the Local Road Network (LRN) consisting of 184,100 miles of road. The LRN is 98% of the entire road network, and in Kent, Kent County Council (KCC) is the Highway Authority for the LRN within its boundary, totalling over 5,400 miles.
- 1.2 Currently, the LRN is funded by a range of grant funding and competitive schemes. These are:
  - Highways Maintenance Fund
  - Pothole Action Fund
  - Integrated Transport Block
  - Local Growth Fund
  - Large Local Majors Fund
  - National Productivity Investment Fund
  - Transforming Cities Fund
- 1.3 The SRN is vital to the economy of the country, being made up of 2% of all roads but carrying 33% of all traffic. For this reason, its funding was stabilised by the application of a five-year funding cycle through the Road Investment Strategy (RIS) process<sup>1</sup>.
- 1.4 The Rees Jeffreys Road Fund Report, '*A Major Road Network for England*'<sup>2</sup>, identified that there is a further set of economically important roads that deserved a similar level of attention to the SRN – the Major Road Network (MRN).
- 1.5 Subsequently, as part of the Transport Investment Strategy, the Government committed to creating a MRN. Funding from the National Roads Fund (from Vehicle Excise Duty from 2020/21) will be used to not only improve the existing SRN but also to improve the middle tier of England's busiest and most economically important Local Authority 'A' roads, i.e. the MRN. The Transport Investment Strategy (and the MRN) is a means to deliver the Industrial Strategy, including boosting productivity through transport infrastructure investment. The foundation of productivity is connecting people and businesses, and moving goods efficiently to their market, and ultimately to improving quality of life.
- 1.6 This report summarises the Department for Transport's (DfT) consultation document '*Proposals for the creation of a Major Road Network*' which includes a map of the DfT's indicative MRN across England (Figure 1), and

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<sup>1</sup> The 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*' was presented to Cabinet Committee on 31 January 2018.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.reesjeffreys.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/A-Major-Road-Network-for-England-David-Quarmby-and-Phil-Carey-Rees-Jeffreys-Road-Fund-October-2016.pdf>

KCC's proposed response to the consultation questions (the full response is attached in **Appendix A**) which includes a map of KCC's proposed MRN in Kent (Figure 2).

- 1.7 The consultation closed on 19 March 2018 and an officer response (the proposed response to the consultation questions as in Appendix A) was submitted in time before the deadline. Following the Cabinet Committee's consideration and endorsement or recommendations to the Cabinet Member, an endorsed or amended response will be sent to the DfT.
- 1.8 The shadow Sub-national Transport Body (STB) – Transport for the South East (TfSE) has also submitted a response to the DfT as agreed at its shadow Board meeting on 6 March. KCC is a member of TfSE along with Medway Council, East Sussex, West Sussex, Surrey, Hampshire, Brighton & Hove, Portsmouth, Southampton, the Isle of Wight, the six Berkshire unitary authorities (Reading, Bracknell, Wokingham, Slough, Windsor & Maidenhead and West Berkshire) and the Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) within this area. KCC officers commented on the draft TfSE response to ensure alignment with the emerging proposed KCC response. As well as the input from the constituent authorities, TfSE's response is also based on work they commissioned consultants Atkins to undertake in relation to the evidence for the criteria of the roads to be included in the MRN.

## **2. Summary of 'Proposals for the creation of a Major Road Network', DfT, December 2017**

- 2.1 Highways England is heavily investing in the SRN and Network Rail is investing to improve journeys for rail passengers and freight operators. However, Government want to give the economy a stronger boost by investing in the most important roads that are currently managed by Local Authorities. They also want to unlock housing and relieve communities that are overwhelmed by traffic.
- 2.2 Government are proposing a MRN of approximately the same mileage as the SRN, and a new dedicated funding stream for investment in this network to raise its performance standards. The aims of this investment are to enable more reliable journeys, more certainty for freight deliveries, and more capacity on the network. This will in turn unlock land for development, and deliver bypasses to remove intrusive through-traffic from communities.
- 2.3 Therefore, the Government has five central policy objectives for the MRN:
  1. **Reduce congestion** – alleviating local and regional congestion, reducing traffic jams and bottlenecks.
  2. **Support economic growth and rebalancing** – supporting the delivery of the Industrial Strategy, contributing to a positive economic impact that is felt across the regions.
  3. **Support housing delivery** – unlocking land for new housing developments.

4. **Support all road users** – recognising the needs of all users, including cyclists, pedestrians and disabled people.
5. **Support the Strategic Road Network** – complementing and supporting the existing SRN by creating a more resilient road network in England.

2.4 The consultation asks for views on:

- How to define the MRN;
- The role the local, regional and national bodies will play in the MRN investment programme;
- Which schemes will be eligible for MRN funding.

### Defining the Network

2.5 The Government is proposing to shape the MRN using both an objective analytical basis, and local knowledge and requirements. The map (Figure 1) provided as part of the consultation is indicative to help respondents provide their views.

2.6 The Government has proposed a number of criteria to be used in defining the MRN, but are asking for views on them. These are:

- To use current traffic data as the starting point to identify roads that should be considered for inclusion.
- To use qualitative criteria to create a coherent and consistent network.
- To take into account evidence from local and regional partners.
- To include, where appropriate, previously de-trunked roads.
- To review the MRN every five years in line with the existing RIS cycle (Highways England's planning cycle for the SRN).

2.7 A map of the indicative MRN has been provided as part of the consultation (Figure 1). The indicative MRN is shown in red and the SRN in blue. In Kent, the DfT's proposed MRN includes:

- Former trunk roads –
  - A20 between Hollingbourne and Harrietsham;
  - A292 between M20 Junction (J) 10 and its junction with Canterbury Road in Ashford; and
  - A259 from Folkestone to Brenzett.
- A228 between M2 J2 and Tunbridge Wells
- A289 from M2 J1 to the A228 and A278 in Medway
- A229 Bluebell Hill (between M20 J6 and M2 J3)
- A249 Detling Hill (between M20 J7 and M2 J5)
- A299 from the M2 to Ramsgate
- A256 from the A2 to the A299
- A25 from Surrey to the A21 near Sevenoaks

- A206 from M25 J1a (Dartford Crossing) into the London Borough of Bexley.



**Figure 1: Indicative Major Road Network as proposed in the DfT's consultation**

### Investment Planning

2.8 The Government is proposing roles for local, regional and national bodies to support long-term strategic thinking about the needs of the MRN. Ministers will be the ultimate decision-makers in respect of the MRN Programme, but they will look to local and regional bodies to develop and prioritise packages of interventions for consideration.

2.9 DfT proposes that Local Authorities and Sub-national Transport Bodies (here, Transport for the South East – TfSE), or other regional groups, will develop Regional Evidence Bases, including an assessment of the network and identification of priority corridors. These will inform the development of the MRN Investment Programme, with both being updated every two years.

2.10 Highways England will also have a role in supporting local, regional and national bodies in this process so that there can be coordinated planning between the networks. The consultation seeks views on what this role should be.

### Eligibility and Investment Assessment Criteria

2.11 The Government sets out that MRN investment should target significant interventions, offering transformative solutions to the most economically important Local Authority 'A' roads. The funding should also offer value for

money to the taxpayer. Examples of the types of interventions that would be funded are: bypasses, major renewal work, major junction improvements, use of technology, and road widening.

2.12 The consultation seeks views on the criteria for investment. The criteria states that schemes:

- Will only be considered if they seek funding in excess of £20m up to a maximum of £100m, plus are supported by a local contribution.
- Must be based on the MRN objectives (see paragraph 2.3).

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

#### Core principles

- 3.1 Whilst KCC agrees with the overall aim of the MRN, the proposed response asks for a strengthening of the core principles. It asks for MRN funding to be extended to highway maintenance (other than major renewals) because this can provide real economic benefits by improving traffic flow and reducing return maintenance visits (for example carriageway resurfacing rather than patch repairs). The highway network is KCC's most valuable asset at around £25 billion but the maintenance backlog on KCC's roads is estimated to be around £630m. This could rise to around £1 billion in the next 10 years if the current level of investment is maintained, which really highlights the struggling position of England's Local Highway Authorities.
- 3.2 It is anticipated that access to MRN funding will be reliant on a full transport business case but currently the DfT has not allocated any additional revenue funding for scheme development. The proposed response therefore recommends that a proportion of the MRN funding is revenue rather than capital.
- 3.3 The consultation plans to create a MRN of approximately the same mileage as the SRN. KCC's proposed response asks that a seemingly arbitrary limit should not preclude the inclusion of regionally important roads. The proposed response also asks the DfT to acknowledge the key strategic links in Kent that are not currently part of the SRN (A229 Bluebell Hill, A249 Detling Hill and A299) and references the response to the SRN Initial Report consultation (reported to the Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee on 31 January) that asks for these to be added to the SRN and become the responsibility of Highways England. Should these not be trunked, then it is imperative that they are MRN as per the DfT's indicative network.

#### Criteria for inclusion in the MRN

- 3.4 The proposed response disagrees with the quantitative criteria, which are primarily based on traffic volumes. The proposed response argues for the value of local knowledge and the need to be flexible about which roads are

included where they are below the threshold of traffic flow that the DfT adopt. For example, an average traffic flow would fail to identify the importance of routes in times of disruption, such as Operation Stack.

- 3.5 The proposed response also expresses concern about the lack of consideration given to future traffic flows resulting from the large scale of housing and employment growth expected in the county. The final quantitative criterion is to automatically include de-trunked roads. This results in spurious links of no economic importance and therefore the proposed response recommends this criterion is removed.
- 3.6 The qualitative criteria put forward in the consultation focus on ensuring a coherent network, linking economic centres and providing access to/resilience for the SRN. The proposed response agrees with this and also suggests links between vital community facilities (such as hospitals) should be recognised.

#### KCC-suggested amendments to the indicative MRN (Figure 2)

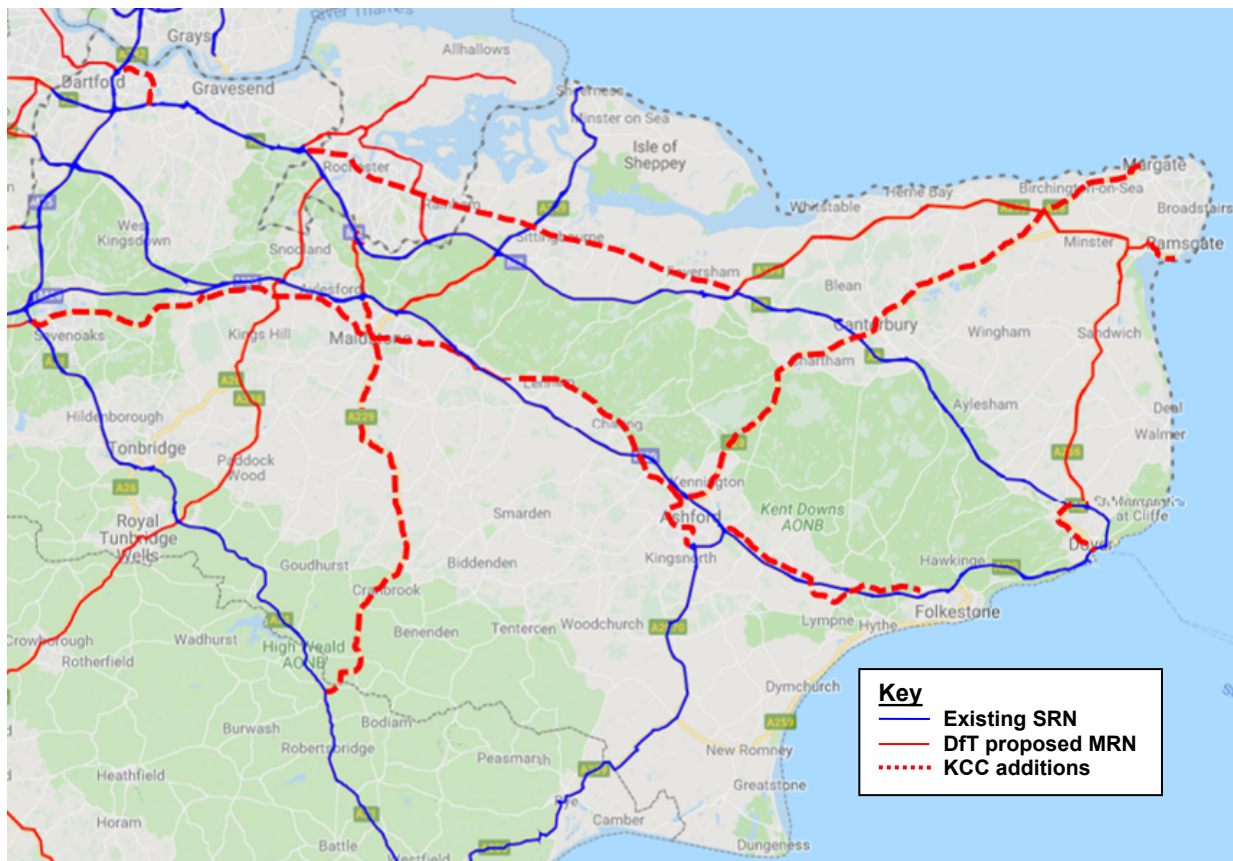
- 3.7 KCC's proposed response asks for the following sections of road to be added to the DfT's initial MRN network (described in paragraph 2.7), with the MRN policy objective(s) (see paragraph 2.3) they meet underlined:
- Extension of the A25 to M26 Junction 2a at Wrotham Heath - this continues the already identified section of the A25 in Surrey, supporting the SRN (M25 and M26) and providing access to the M20 both London bound and coastbound. The lack of east-facing slips at M25 Junction 5 means this is the main route from the M20 to the A21.
  - A20 from Wrotham Heath through to Folkestone – only the Hollingbourne and Ashford central sections have been identified as potential MRN on the DfT indicative map (as former trunk road). This route runs parallel to the M20 and is routinely affected when there are issues on the M20. As a result of Brexit there will likely be significant delays on the M20 if it is used to queue port-bound freight vehicles due to increased border and customs checks, therefore the A20 will once again take on more of a strategic role and become a major route across the county between London and the coast. This will affect all the communities along its route and require major upgrades to cope with this new demand. The A20 therefore needs to be included as MRN to support to the SRN and provide resilience. Improvements on this route may also reduce congestion when there is disruption.
  - The A2042, Chart Road and Templer Way in Ashford are used as the diversionary route for Operation Stack to connect the A20 from M20 J9 to M20 J10 via the A2070 (existing SRN). This continues the route of the A20 section and therefore supports the SRN.

- A256 from Dover docks to the A2 at Whitfield – this provides connectivity between the A2 and the A20, and is vital when the Dover Traffic Assessment Project (Dover TAP) is in use on the A20 (a complementary Dover TAP on the A2 is also needed). This supports the SRN.
- A28 linking Ashford, Canterbury and Margate – this provides cross-regional connectivity and links the three major urban areas of Thanet, Canterbury and Ashford. It then completes the link via the A2070/A259 to Hastings. It therefore supports economic growth and rebalancing and improvements will reduce congestion.
- Extension of the A299 to complete indicative network's connection to Ramsgate Port and support economic growth and rebalancing.
- A2 from Brenley Corner to Rainham (Medway) – this is a heavily used route between Sittingbourne and the Medway area. This is a key area for future growth and the A2 suffers serious congestion particularly if there is a problem on the M2. It therefore supports economic growth and rebalancing, supports housing delivery, and will reduce congestion.
- Extension of A206 to Greenhithe and B255 to A2 as this is heavily used during disruption at the Dartford Crossing. Improvements will therefore reduce congestion, and given the capacity of the Thames Gateway Kent area for growth it will also support housing delivery.
- Extension of the A229 from M20 Junction 6 through to its junction with the A21. This is an important north-south route in the area and rural service centres on the route are earmarked for growth. Improvements will support housing delivery and reduce congestion.

3.8 However, KCC's proposed response also asks that the following de-trunked roads are removed from the DfT's indicative MRN network:

- A259 Folkestone to Brenzett - This is now a local route with some high seasonal flows due to holiday traffic. The A2070 has replaced it on the SRN.
- A292 Hythe Road in Ashford - This section of previously de-trunked road should also be removed, although an alternative diversionary route for Operation Stack has been proposed for inclusion through Ashford (see paragraph 3.7, third bullet point).





**Figure 2: KCC Proposed Major Road Network**

### Roles and responsibilities

3.9 The consultation explains that Local Highway Authorities will remain responsible for roads included on the MRN. The proposed response agrees with this but again makes the point that additional maintenance funding is required for all Local Authority roads. However, the consultation documents do not clearly identify if the Sub-national Transport Bodies or Local Highway Authorities will hold the funding for the MRN programme, or which body will submit funding bids to Government. The proposed response asks for clarity on these points, and notes the benefits of flexibility in managing a programme to offset cost increases on individual schemes against cost decreases across a number of schemes, as has been successfully the case with Local Growth Fund programme.

3.10 The proposed response supports Highways England having a role in setting guidance and ensuring a consistent approach across the country. However, this will require the DfT to ensure that Highways England have sufficient capacity to carry out this role, and regardless of their input the overall responsibility for schemes should sit with Local Highway Authorities.

## Funding and eligibility

- 3.11 The proposed response states that the suggested funding range of £20m to £100m fails to recognise that small scale junction improvements can substantially improve road network performance. The point is made that it may not always be possible to create a package of improvements on a link to achieve the minimum MRN funding threshold.
- 3.12 Public transport schemes are ineligible for MRN funding but could improve traffic flow and journey time reliability on an MRN link where they generate modal shift. Therefore, the proposed response asks the DfT to reconsider.
- 3.13 Local contributions to schemes are requested and will be taken into account when MRN schemes are assessed. The proposed response highlights that there are a number of situations where local contributions may be small or not possible (for example in areas where development viability is compromised) and so this should not exclude schemes where they have a great potential benefit to the MRN.
- 3.14 The proposed response also suggests that assessment criteria should consider carbon and climate change impacts and environmental mitigation, especially given the UK's commitment to reduce carbon emissions.

## **4. Conclusions**

- 4.1 The Government's proposal for the creation of a Major Road Network (MRN) will enable additional funding opportunities for major improvement schemes in the range of £20m to £100m on designated MRN roads. Funding will be from the National Roads Fund from Vehicle Excise Duty post 2020/21. The region's shadow Sub-national Transport Body, Transport for the South East (TfSE), will be required to formulate a Regional Evidence Base that will assess the current state of the MRN, propose priority corridors, and then develop and prioritise packages of improvements in the area to create an investment programme. The Regional Evidence Base and investment programme will be reviewed every two years, and the extent of the MRN will be refreshed every five years. Ultimately Government will decide which schemes are funded.
- 4.2 Local Highway Authorities, including KCC, will retain responsibility for the MRN and day-to-day maintenance budgets are not proposed to be increased. This is very disappointing considering the emphasis of the MRN is on creating a quality network of the second most important tier of roads in England (the most important tier being the SRN). However, MRN designation is not public-facing so there should be no perceptible difference to drivers.
- 4.3 The DfT will analyse consultation responses following closure of the consultation and a formal consultation response is expected to be published during summer 2018. The DfT will continue to engage with both local and

regional bodies to support the finalisation of an MRN Programme to be launched in summer 2018.

## **5. Financial Implications**

5.1 N/A.

## **6. Legal Implications**

6.1 N/A.

## **7. Equalities Implications**

7.1 There are not considered to be any equalities implications with the response to this consultation, and the DfT specify that they wish to consider all road users in their proposals. Any scheme put forward as an intervention on the MRN in future will require its own Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) by the promoter.

## **8. Other Corporate Implications**

8.1 Transport for the South East (TfSE) is the relevant Sub-national Transport Body in this area; currently operating in shadow form. They will be commissioning a Transport Strategy for the region and would be contributing to a Regional Evidence Base in the proposals as set out in this consultation. KCC will therefore continue to engage in the formation and operation of TfSE to coordinate an approach to investment in the region.

## **9. Governance**

9.1 N/A.

## **10. Recommendation:**

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

## **11. Background Documents**

*Appendix A: Proposed Response by Kent County Council to the Department for Transport (DfT) Consultation: Proposals for the creation of a Major Road Network*

*Proposals for the creation of a Major Road Network, Department for Transport (DfT), December 2017*

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/670527/major-road-network-consultation.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/670527/major-road-network-consultation.pdf)

## 12. Contact details

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