

From: **Matthew Balfour, Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport**

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To: **Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee (Jan 2017)**

Subject: **KCC draft response to Highways England's discussion paper "The Road to Growth"**

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 draft response to Highways England's discussion paper '*Roads to Growth: Maximising the economic contribution of Highways England and the strategic road network*' which sets out what will be covered in the Strategic Economic Growth Plan when published in 2017.

**Recommendation:**

The Cabinet Committee is asked to note the draft response to the consultation.

**1. Background**

- 1.1 Highways England made a public commitment to produce a Strategic Economic Growth Plan. To inform this emerging plan, the discussion paper '*Roads to Growth: Maximising the economic contribution of Highways England and the strategic road network*' outlines what is to be covered in the Strategic Economic Growth Plan when published in 2017. The discussion paper is attached at **Appendix A**. The consultation closes on Friday 20 January.
- 1.2 The Strategic Economic Growth Plan will influence the way Highways England work and invest, and will inform Route Strategies and their advice to Government for the Road Investment Strategy 2 (RIS 2) 2020-25 as well as their 2050 vision for the Strategic Road Network (SRN). It is therefore important that Kent County Council (KCC) gives a comprehensive response to this consultation and comments on Highways England's approach to supporting economic growth through the SRN.

1.3 Summarised in this report and attached in full in **Appendix B** is the proposed draft response from KCC to the consultation on this discussion paper. The draft response sets out KCC's position on each of the main discussion points that will be included in the plan and outlines Kent-specific projects on the SRN needed to support economic growth. Examples include a new Lower Thames Crossing, a solution to Operation Stack and various motorway junction improvements, as aligned with existing transport policies in the *Local Transport Plan (LTP) for Kent (2011-16)*, *Growth without Gridlock: A Transport Delivery Plan for Kent (2010)* and the emerging new *LTP4: Delivering Growth without Gridlock (2016-31)* that underwent a public consultation between August and October 2016 and is progressing towards adoption as KCC policy in 2017.

## **2. Summary of the discussion paper and the proposed response from KCC**

2.1 The discussion paper questions and KCC's draft responses are summarised below. The full draft response in **Appendix B** provides further detail on each point and sets out Kent's priorities regarding the SRN.

### **2.2 Areas of research to better understand the relationship between the strategic road network and economic growth:**

**Freight:** KCC's draft response includes current and predicted freight volumes through Kent and the associated improvements needed to facilitate this growth including dualling the A2 to Dover and improvements to M2 Junction 7; the need for a solution to Operation Stack to be delivered by Highways England; and the need for further overnight lorry parking provision in the county.

**Lower Thames Crossing:** The draft response outlines KCC's support for a new Lower Thames Crossing as the limited capacity and severe congestion at the existing crossing, along with the lack of an alternative route, is limiting economic growth.

**Housing growth:** The draft response outlines Kent and Medway's growth forecasts for the next 20 years and how this will affect the SRN in Kent. The response lists each district's priorities for Highways England's network based on the pre-consultation engagement with each district/borough council in preparing the draft LTP4 for consultation. This includes schemes that will open up land for development such as M20 Junction 10a at Ashford.

### **2.3. The vision of the Strategic Economic Growth Plan:**

The draft response highlights high car ownership and dependency levels in Kent putting greater strain on the SRN. It also highlights road freight volumes through Kent and the need for improvements to facilitate the predicted growth through the Channel Ports.

## 2.4 The strategic economic roles for Highways England:

This section of the draft response highlights road freight statistics that reinforce the need for improvements on the SRN in Kent for port-bound traffic. This includes junction improvements and road schemes as well as an alternative solution to Operation Stack. The proposed rail freight interchange at Howbury on the Bexley/Dartford border is cited as this will encourage modal shift of freight from road to rail.

Journey time reliability is identified as a priority for Kent and improvements to congested parts of the SRN are needed such as M20 junctions 3-5 smart motorway, dualling the A21 from Kippings Cross to Lamberhurst and a new Lower Thames Crossing.

Finally, this section of the response outlines Kent's predicted housing growth over the next 20 years and infrastructure needed on the SRN to facilitate this growth with schemes such as M20 Junction 10a, off-slips at the A2 Wincheap, A2 improvements around Ebbsfleet and A249 corridor improvements near Sittingbourne.

## 2.5 The categorisation and definition of economic opportunity areas:

This section details the three categorisations of developments and their demand on the SRN. These were broken down into:

**Fundamentally dependent** – Ports, distribution centres and developments with large HGV movements. In Kent this includes the Channel Ports and the Port of Sheerness which has high freight traffic volumes and are therefore fundamentally dependent on the SRN.

**Reliant** – Employment centres, tourism destinations and large housing schemes. In Kent there is the proposal for a Paramount Park development in Gravesend which will attract major visitor numbers and commuter trips. Also shopping centres at Bluewater and Ashford Outlet are also located close to the SRN.

**Interdependent** – cluster developments of solely housing, especially where there are alternative transport modes. The major of large settlements in Kent are located close to the strategic road network mainly along the M2/A2 and M20 corridors.

## 2.6 The two-perspective approach to prioritising economic growth locations around the strategic road network:

The draft response considers the Port of Dover, Eurotunnel, Dartford Crossing/new Lower Thames Crossing and the Port of Sheerness as being of economic significance to the SRN. The county's dependency on the SRN is demonstrated by the negative effects of Operation Stack suffered across Kent.

## **2.7 Highways England's emerging approach:**

In the draft response KCC agrees with Highways England's approach to:

- Strengthen inter-modal transport connectivity to better manage transport demand and supply. Examples are given of Ebbsfleet and Ashford being located on HS1 and the proposed rail freight interchange at Howbury.
- Improve movements to and from international gateways. Examples given include all of the improvements needed on the M2/A2 corridor to improve resilience and enable 'bifurcation' (splitting) of traffic between the M20/A20 and M2/2 corridors.
- Increase joint working and partnership with bodies such as Network Rail, High Speed Two and local transport authorities.

## **2.8 How Highways England can work differently to better enable economic growth:**

In this section of the draft response KCC outlines the following roads for Highways England to consider for adoption to be transferred over to Highways England as key strategic links between the M2 and M20. These links are:

A229 Blue Bell Hill (M2-M20 link)  
A249 Detling Hill (M2-M20 link)  
A228 Medway Valley (M2-M20 link)

## **3. Conclusions**

- 3.1 This discussion paper will influence the Strategy Economic Growth Plan, which will determine the way Highways England work and invest, and will inform Route Strategies and their advice to Government for the RIS2 (2020-25) as well as their 2050 vision for the SRN. KCC will therefore respond to the consultation as outlined in Section 2 of this report and the full draft response as attached in Appendix B.

## **4. Financial Implications**

- 4.1 N/A.

## **5. Legal Implications**

- 5.1 N/A.

## **6. Equalities Implications**

- 6.1 The draft response to this consultation is based on KCC's priorities in the draft LTP4 which has been subject to an Equalities Impact Assessment

(EqIA) prior to its consultation. This demonstrated that the schemes promoted within the draft LTP4 will not have an adverse impact on any group with protected characteristics.

## 7. Other Corporate Implications

7.1 The draft response to this consultation is based on KCC's priorities in the draft LTP4. The draft content of KCC's Local Transport Plan 4: Delivering Growth without Gridlock (2016-2031) 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.

## 8. Governance

8.1 N/A.

## 9. Recommendation:

9.1 The Cabinet Committee is asked to note the draft response to the consultation.

## 10. Background Documents

- Appendix A: *Roads to Growth: Maximising the economic contribution of Highways England and the strategic road network: A discussion paper on Highways England's emerging strategic economic growth plan*
- Appendix B: Highways England's 'The Road to Growth' discussion paper on the emerging Strategic Economic Growth Plan - Draft Response from Kent County Council.
- Consultation Draft Local Transport Plan 4: Delivering Growth without Gridlock (2016-31) [www.kent.gov.uk/localtransportplan](http://www.kent.gov.uk/localtransportplan)

## 11. Contact details

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