

To: Maidstone Joint Transportation Board
By: KCC Highways and Transportation
Date: 30 July 2024
Subject: A229 Blue Bell Hill Improvement Scheme
Classification: Information Only

Summary: This report updates Members on the current position of the A229 Blue Bell Hill Improvement Scheme

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The A229 Blue Bell Hill is a section of dual carriageway which runs between Junction 6 of the M20 in Maidstone and Junction 3 of the M2 at Blue Bell Hill village. This section of road is a key link between the M20 and M2, and between Maidstone and Medway.

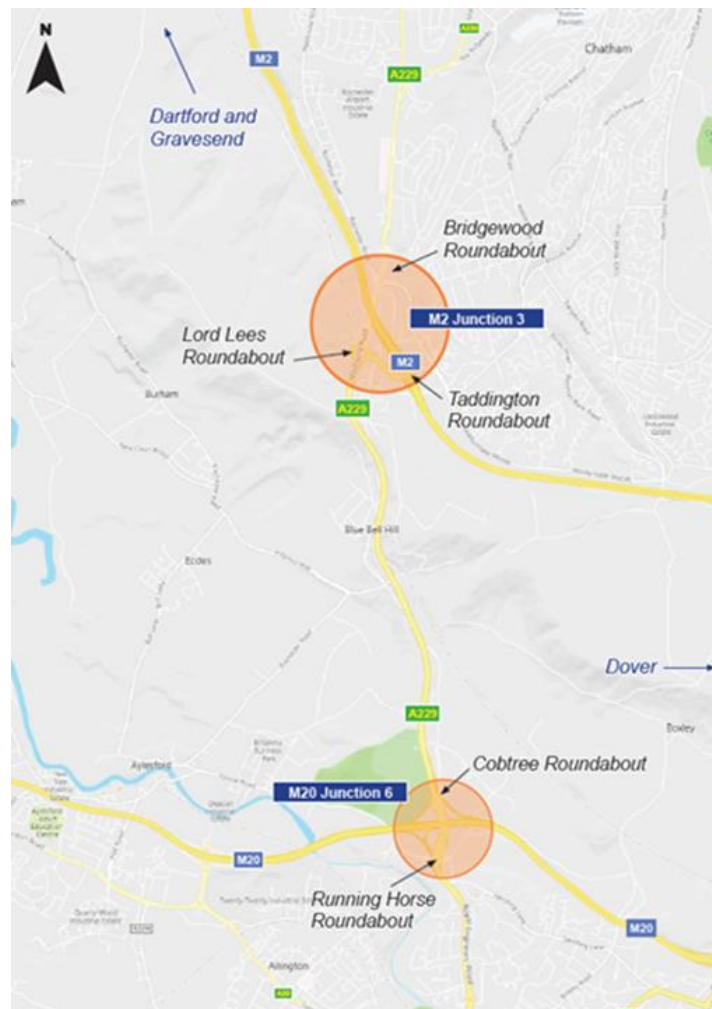


Figure 1 - Plan showing the location of the proposals

- 1.2 A feasibility study was undertaken to assess the key routes in Kent against the objectives of the Major Road Network. This study ranked the A229 as the second worst section of A road in the county against criteria of traffic levels, delays, collisions and journey time

reliability. It also determined that the M20 and M2 junctions have a significant role in the delays and collisions on Blue Bell Hill.

- 1.3 Road users of Blue Bell Hill have long experienced high volumes of traffic which result in significant congestion issues and concerns about road safety. These congestion issues are likely to be made worse by future housing developments in the surrounding area and the new Lower Thames Crossing, which will both generate additional traffic.
- 1.4 Proposals that have been developed previously have not been sufficient to impact on the existing issues and therefore more significant improvements to Blue Bell Hill are required to improve journey time reliability, reduce delays and improve road safety across this section of the road network.

2. Scheme Description and Delivery

- 2.1 The overall aim of the scheme is to improve journey time reliability and road safety. This will allow the road to accommodate an increase in future traffic, expected as a result of the Lower Thames Crossing and proposed local developments and Local Plans, while providing suitable routes and facilities for public transport, pedestrians and cyclists.
- 2.2 The aim of the scheme is supported by a set of objectives, agreed by the key stakeholders which will develop as the project progresses:
 - To improve journey time reliability at M2 Junction 3 and M20 Junction 6 interchanges of the A229
 - To reduce congestion along the route
 - To enable the local area to develop in accordance with population and housing growth predicated under Local Plans
 - To reduce the impact of additional traffic from the Lower Thames Crossing (LTC) and allow LTC to maximise potential benefits it can provide for the Kent area
 - To improve road safety and address known collision hotspots
 - To make best use of existing assets including land and highways
 - To provide suitable routes and facilities for public transport
 - To provide safe and improved routes for pedestrians and cyclists
 - To improve air quality, particularly in the Air Quality Management Area (AQMA)
 - To protect and enhance the local environment.
- 2.3 An optioneering process was followed to establish the two options (summarised in Table 1) that were submitted as part of the Strategic Outline Business Case. The process involved ideas generation workshops with stakeholders followed by a sifting process (making use of traffic modelling) to determine the potential impact of these different ideas on traffic levels. The works were also assessed against a number of criteria as laid out by the Department for Transport (DfT).

Table 1 - Summary and Comparison of works for Options 1 and 2

	Option 1	Option 2
Northern end of Blue Bell Hill		
Improvements to the slip road onto the A229 southbound at Lord Lees Roundabout	✓	✓

	Option 1	Option 2
Increase the road width between Taddington and Lord Lees Roundabouts to four lanes	✓	
A new slip road onto the M2 (westbound) from the A229 immediately after Lord Lees Roundabout	✓	✓
Upgrade of the current signalised junction at Taddington Roundabout allowing traffic travelling from the M2 eastbound to A229 via a new bridge over the M2	✓	
A new separate left turn lane from the M2 westbound to the A229 at Taddington Roundabout	✓	✓
A new slip road from the M2 eastbound to a new junction arrangement at Bridgewood Roundabout		✓
Southern end of Blue Bell Hill		
Enlarge the Running Horse Roundabout to the west	✓	✓
Improve the slip road onto the M20 eastbound from Cobtree Roundabout	✓	✓
A new grade separated junction, where the existing Forstal Road bridge is currently located		
Along the length of Blue Bell Hill		
Widen the A229 to three lanes when travelling southbound towards Maidstone (between Lord Lees and Cobtree Roundabouts)	✓	✓

- 2.4 An assessment of the options at this stage has not demonstrated that either would be more preferable to the other. Benefits and disbenefits have been reviewed against a number of criteria to make the assessment.
- 2.5 The scheme is still at an early stage and the options are being developed further through more detailed modelling and additional design work to determine a preferred option.
- 2.6 The preferred scheme will then be progressed in more detail followed by further public consultation and Statutory Consents and Orders.
- 2.7 KCC will work very closely with National Highways to meet their requirements to allow for the sections of the scheme on the Strategic Road Network to be progressed.
- 2.8 KCC plan to deliver the Improvement Scheme prior to the opening of Lower Thames Crossing.

3. Current Position

- 3.1 There has been no further work developing the design of the options presented at consultation in September 2020 and commented on by MBC. Work carried out following the consultation concentrated on developing the Strategic Outline Business Case (SOBC) which was submitted to the DfT on 23 December 2020.
- 3.2 The Strategic Outline Business Case was approved by Government on 27 October 2023 and work has commenced on the Outline Design and Outline Business Case.

- 3.3 KCC's consultant, AECOM, is currently undertaking the option development and is starting to complete the surveys and data gathering that is required at this stage.
- 3.4 There is currently a funding gap for the next stage of the project (Outline Design and Outline Business Case). DfT has indicated that they will only provide 2/3 of the development costs leaving a shortfall at this stage of around £3.5m.
- 3.5 KCC has already funded the development of the scheme to date and are not in a position to further fund the project. KCC is therefore in the process of approaching possible funding sources to contribute to the shortfall. Without contributions, KCC will not be able to complete and submit the Outline Business Case.
- 3.6 Based on the current expectations the indicative programme is:
- Submission of the Outline Business Case to the Department of Transport including details of the preferred scheme – Early 2026
 - Submit planning permission and consents – Early 2026
 - Further detailed design – Spring 2026 to Summer 2027
 - Submission of full business case to the DfT – Autumn 2027
 - Construction to begin – Spring 2028
 - Completion of scheme – Summer 2030 (aim to be completed before the Lower Thames Crossing opens to traffic)
- 3.7 Following the [earlier consultation](#), a further round of consultation is being planned alongside the Outline Design and Outline Business Case stage.

4. Conclusion

- 4.1 This report is for Members' information.
- 4.2 The DfT Large Local Majors funding programme offers KCC an opportunity to undertake a significant major project that addresses existing congestion and safety issues on the A229 Blue Bell Hill and its key junctions while accommodating future growth.
- 4.3 The current programme is reliant on confirmation of funding. If the OBC is approved, the recent Network North announcement (04 October 2023) indicated that up to 100% of funding could be provided through the Large Local Majors programme for delivery, although this has not been confirmed and the recent general election adds additional uncertainty. However, additional funding is required to ensure that the Outline Business Case can be completed to unlock the Large Local Major funding.
- 4.4 It is expected that this scheme will be in place prior to the opening of Lower Thames Crossing.

Contact Officers:

Project webpage <http://www.kent.gov.uk/a229bluebellhill>

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