

Maidstone Joint Transportation Board**12 July
2017****B2163 Leeds and Langley Relief Road**

Decision Making Authority	Kent County Council
Lead Director	Roger Wilkin
Lead Head of Service	Tim Read
Lead Officer and Report Author	John Farmer
Wards and County Divisions affected	Wards: Leeds, Sutton Valence and Langley, North Downs, and Boughton Monchelsea and Chart Sutton County Divisions: Maidstone South East, Maidstone Rural South, and Maidstone Rural East
Which Member(s) requested this report?	Gary Cooke & David Burton

This report makes the following recommendations:

For Information. The Board are asked to note the contents of the Report, the further assessment work being undertaken and the commitments needed to support the delivery of a Relief Road.

Timetable

Meeting	Date
Maidstone Joint Transportation Board	12 July 2017

B2163 Leeds and Langley Relief Road

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Maidstone's draft Local Plan was published in 2016 and Examination in Public has been concluded.

1.2 The Maidstone Borough Council, Local Plan, Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP), May 2016 includes at Paragraph 3.18:

For the longer term the MBLP and ITS confirm the intention to investigate and assess the justification for a Leeds - Langley Relief Road at the first review of the MBLP. KCC have advised that strategic traffic modelling indicates that a link between the A20 and A274 could have a significant beneficial impact upon traffic levels in the south and south east sectors of the urban area. A significant amount of work is required however to develop the detailed case, including full traffic and environmental impact studies, strategic alternatives, a preferred route and funding methods, and progress will be taken into account as the IDP is reviewed in the future.

1.3 The Inspector recognised, "*The Borough Council is generally supportive but funding the road would be a significant challenge unless it were to support further major development*". He has formed a view that its delivery is unlikely until very late in the plan period at the earliest.

1.4 The first review of the Local Plan is planned for 2020/21 although preparatory work will commence earlier as a Local Plan is in practice a continually evolving process. The implication is that at the start of the formal review sufficient work would have been done to establish a preferred route for the Relief Road, a business case prepared and potential sources of funding identified.

1.5 Although the Inspector has dismissed the Relief Road as a pre-review contributor to delivery of the Local Plan housing needs, the severe traffic congestion in south east Maidstone has led to increasing public interest in a Relief Road and regular requests for updates on progress.

2. RELIEF ROAD BENEFITS AND DISADVANTAGES

2.1 A modest standard Relief Road would have the following key benefits:

- Traffic congestion relief and air quality improvement in the south east quadrant of Maidstone including Willington Street.
- Traffic congestion relief and air quality improvement to Leeds & Langley villages
- Environmental benefits to the built heritage of Leeds
- A purpose made route to access the commercial areas at Parkwood.
- Potential opportunities for additional enabling development within Leeds, Langley and Kingswood to support the sustainability of existing villages and offset other allocated sites that may be undeliverable.

2.2 However, any major scheme does have inevitable issues of deliverability that will need to be overcome as follows:

- The area is very attractive with varied topography, with the heritage of Leeds Castle and ancient woodland at Langley.
 - The countryside around any preferred route would need strong policy protection by the Planning Authority (MBC)
 - Based on past consultation local opinion on a route is likely to be strongly divided.
 - There is no current government funding stream to support the scheme. The Planning Authority (MBC) would therefore need to assist in securing developer contributions towards the scheme.
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3. CURRENT SITUATION

Route Standard

3.1 The Relief Road has over recent years been contemplated as a 50mph single carriageway - where the modest design standards would be more sympathetic to the topography, land use and local hamlets - providing environmental benefits by removing through traffic from both villages. This followed the very first consultation in the early 1990's where the severe impact of a high standard dual carriageway on the varied topography was considered unacceptable by the local community - there is no basis for changing this view.

Route Options

3.2 Various routes are theoretically available within an area that is attractive, near to Leeds Castle, in sight of the North Downs AONB, of varied topography and geology and with a range of physical and natural environmental aspects. Identifying a preferred route following public consultation may be difficult as the tensions that existed in the 1990's may be repeated although the evidence of need may be a more compelling factor.

3.3 A route to the east of Leeds is undeliverable because it would encroach into the curtilage of Leeds Castle. A route to the east of Langley may also be increasingly undeliverable as it would affect Abbey Woods as government has indicated its intention to strengthen protection for ancient woodland.

3.4 Although one cannot prejudge, it is likely that feasibility work, environmental assessment and public consultation would conclude as before that the only realistic scheme would be a western route, with or without a local bypass of the A274 to achieve a connection to an improved Five Wents junction.

3.5 Such a scheme is also the shortest and cheapest but still has an estimated cost of £50m at today's prices - and this will be more like £75m cash terms, allowing for inflation, even if delivered at the earliest opportunity.

Assessment Status

3.6 A significant amount of initial feasibility work was carried out in 2015 . This work included:

- Option drawings showing routes, variations and junction options.
- Environmental constraints desktop assessment.
- Geotechnical desktop study.
- Surface water drainage strategy.
- Initial high level traffic assessment
- Land referencing and acquisition estimates.
- Overall scheme options estimates

4. FURTHER FEASIBILITY WORK

4.1 While considerable work has been done on route options the most important next step is to carry out traffic surveys and scheme specific traffic modelling. This will establish the benefits of the scheme, the most critical element of the business case. The VISUM modelling for the Local Plan provided a helpful high level view but more detailed work is required to fully assess the relief road options and treatment of side road junctions. Such aspects would consider and identify:

- Traffic that would use the Relief Road.
- Impact on the A274 between Five Wents and Horseshoes Lane.
- What interventions would be required on B2163 to maximise use of the Relief Road and relief to both villages.
- Should scheme include an intermediate link from the Relief Road to the B2163.
- Changes to the wider network such as the A274, Willington Street and B2163 westwards towards Linton.

4.2 Such modelling is vital to fully understand the traffic benefits and calculate the benefits to cost ration (BCR) which is a fundamental pre-cursor to attracting funding support and where central Government typically expect a minimum threshold BCR value of 2.

4.3 The traffic modelling will also inform the development of the route and junction options. Some of the current outline design work will also need to be reviewed and refined to ensure that route and junction options are fully feasible and environmental aspects are fully understood so that there is confidence in options that might be offered for future public consultation.

5. COMMENTARY

5.1 The proposed traffic modelling and feasibility work are practical steps in the next stage of scheme development, but there are wider aspects to be considered

that are all required to contribute to the successful and acceptable delivery of a Relief Road.

5.2 There are many who are frustrated by an apparent lack of progress. Having public consultation on the work done to date would be premature as supporting information is not yet available on route options. Expectations will be raised and informal blight created.

5.3 All major schemes are a balance of advantage over disadvantage. It is important that the feasibility work is thorough and is fully explained to the local community as strong local support from the local community, their Parish Councils and the Borough Council is a vital factor in influencing government support. Without these, the scheme will fail.

5.4 A major fear of the local community is that a new road will have unintended consequences and facilitate inappropriate or unplanned development. It will be important that the Borough Council as planning authority put in place strong and enforceable policies that will stop urban sprawl.

5.5 There is currently no obvious source of government funding available. Within the SELEP, the County Council receives significant funding for smaller, lower cost schemes. However, Kent is not alone in requiring larger major infrastructure improvements and such schemes do feature in other LEP programmes around the country. Government also recognises this need exists and introduced a Major Scheme Funding stream in 2016 (although it is currently low in quantum and spread thinly over the country). There are obvious hurdles but a scheme with significant benefits and widespread public and political support has the potential to attract funding.

5.6 Making successful Government funding bids requires a significant level of third party contributions. As planning authority the Borough Council can play a major role in securing and maximising s106 contributions towards a Relief Road and seeking to renegotiate any existing infrastructure contributions so that they can be redirected towards the Relief Road.

5.7 Some housing development in Leeds, Langley and Kingswood could also make a contribution which would greatly assist the business case for a Relief Road, as well as the benefits some housing would make towards maintaining vibrant sustainable communities for their villages.

6. FINANCE AND PROGRAMME

6.1 County Council has made an appropriate level of revenue funding available in 2017/18 to support the traffic modelling and feasibility work. Consultants will be commissioned. Traffic surveys are most sensibly undertaken in neutral months and these will be planned for autumn 2017. Traffic data assessment, building and validating a traffic model and option testing will take several months and a report back to this Board is anticipated in spring 2018. It would be the intention to brief the parish councils and local Members, on a confidential basis, as this work progresses.

7. RECOMMENDATION

For Information. The Board are asked to note the contents of the Report and the further assessment work being undertaken and the contribution that others can help make towards supporting the delivery of a Relief Road.

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None