

To: Maidstone Joint Transportation Board
By: KCC Highways, Transportation & Waste
Date: 06 October 2021
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.

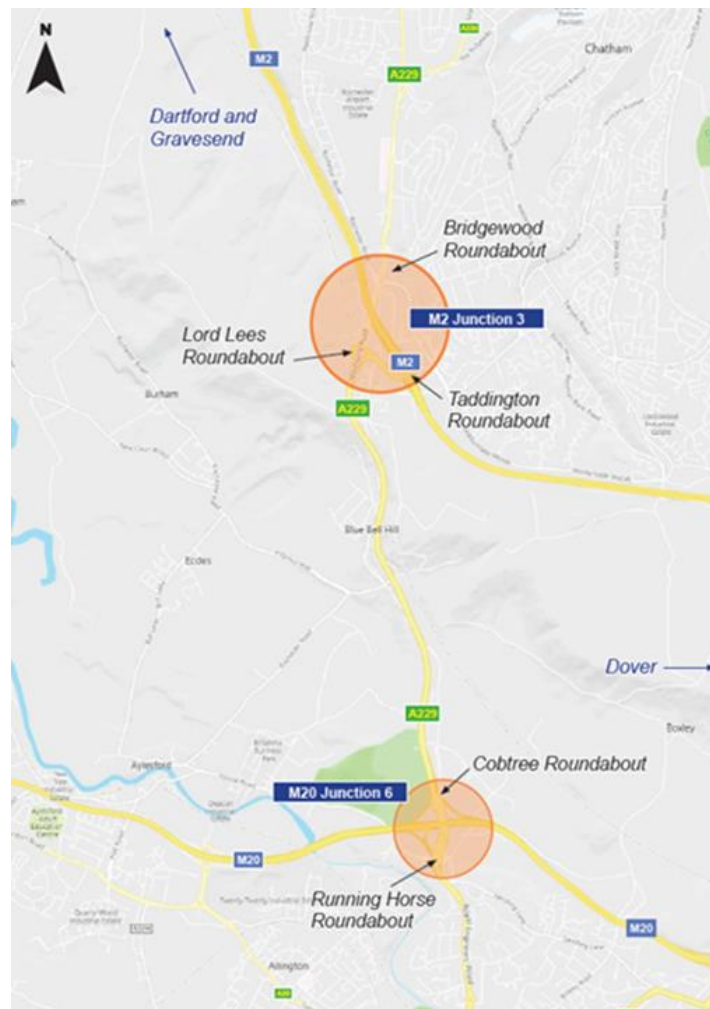


Figure 1 - Plan showing the location of the proposals

- 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.
- 1.5 A bid has been submitted to the Department for Transport at Strategic Outline Business Case stage for funding from the Large Local Majors programme.

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, 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 has been followed to establish the two options 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).
- 2.4 The ideas that scored best against the criteria were combined into three options which were taken through to a public consultation exercise. Further details of the consultation results can be found on the KCC website at www.kent.gov.uk/a229bluebellhill.

- 2.5 As a result of further work and the results of the public consultation option 3 was dropped from further development. Whilst option 3 provided a number of benefits, these were outweighed by the significant impacts on the M20 and the local area.
- 2.6 The remaining options 1 and 2 can be viewed on drawing numbers [60633526-ACM-HML-A229_SW_ZZ_ZZ-DR-CH-0025_P04.2](#) and [60633526-ACM-HML-A229_SW_ZZ_ZZ-DR-CH-0026_P04.2](#) and a summary and comparison of the options is provided below:

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	✓	✓
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)	✓	✓

- 2.7 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.
- 2.8 The scheme is still at a very early stage and the options will need to be developed further through more detailed modelling and additional design work to determine a preferred option.
- 2.9 The preferred scheme would then be progressed in more detail followed by further public consultation and Statutory Consents and Orders.
- 2.10 KCC will work very closely with National Highways (formerly Highways England) to meet their requirements to allow for the sections of the scheme on the Strategic Road Network to be progressed.

- 2.11 KCC plan to deliver the Improvement Scheme prior to the opening of Lower Thames Crossing.
- 2.12 The scheme is expected to cost a maximum of £199m (based on estimations within the Strategic Outline Business Case). The current funding request from the DfT is for £169m (85%) with the remaining £30m (15%) due to come from developer contributions (s106) and other external funding sources. Opportunities for these additional funding sources are being pursued.

3. Current Position

- 3.1 There has been no further work developing the design of the options presented at consultation 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 Following the submission of the business case, KCC have been responding to queries from DfT. In July 2021, DfT requested that additional modelling work be carried out to support the Value for Money case. This work is currently being undertaken and will be presented to DfT around Christmas 2021.
- 3.3 KCC are also making preparations for the next work stage required to develop the scheme. However, this next stage of work cannot take place until a funding agreement is in place with DfT. The original programme expected that a funding agreement would be in place in Summer 2021, but this is now expected to follow the spending review and come forward in 2022.
- 3.4 Once DfT have confirmed that the SOBC has been accepted and a funding agreement is in place, the programme for delivery will be updated. Based on the current expectations the key dates are:
- Funding agreement – Late Spring 2022
 - Submission of the next stage of the business case to the Department of Transport including details of the preferred scheme – Summer 2023
 - Submit planning permission and consents – Spring 2024
 - Further detailed design – Summer 2023 to Summer 2025
 - Submission of full business case to the DfT – Autumn 2025
 - Construction to begin – Spring 2026
 - Completion of scheme – Summer 2028 (aim to be completed before the Lower Thames Crossing opens to traffic)
- 3.5 Further rounds of consultation will be included in the updated programme.

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 providing further capacity for future growth.
- 4.3 The current delivery programme is reliant on confirmation of funding. If successful, the DfT grant will cover 85% of the project costs with the remaining 15% being sourced from developer contributions or other external funding sources.

- 4.4 The scheme is at an early stage and further work needs to be carried out with key stakeholders and other parties to develop a preferred option.
- 4.5 It is expected that this scheme will be in place prior to the opening of Lower Thames Crossing.

Contact Officers:

The following contact officers can be contacted on **03000 418181** or **a229bluebellhill@kent.gov.uk**

Victoria Soames	Project Manager, Major Capital Programme Team
Lee Burchill	Programme Manager, Major Capital Programme Team