

# **HERTFORDSHIRE LOCAL TRANSPORT BODY**

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## **HERTFORDSHIRE'S STRATEGIC ECONOMIC PLAN DELIVERY – MAJOR PROJECTS UPDATE**

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### **1 Purpose of report**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update in relation to the Major Schemes to be delivered as part of the Hertfordshire Strategic Economic Plan (SEP)

### **2 Background**

- 2.1 As part of the current SEP, three projects designated as 'Major Schemes' are programmed for delivery within the period 2015-2019 – Croxley Rail Link; A120 Bypass (Little Hadham) and Flood Alleviation Scheme and A602 Improvements (Stevenage to/from Ware). This report provides a programme update for the A120 and A602 schemes, as well as clarifying the current arrangements between the DfT and Hertfordshire LEP regarding the retention of funding approval for these projects.
- 2.2 An update on the Croxley Rail Link project will be given verbally at the meeting

### **3. Recommendation**

- 3.1 It is requested that the Board note this report.

### **4. DfT Retained Funding Approval**

- 4.1 Following the July 2014 announcement of the first round of the Local Growth Deals the Department of Transport (DfT) indicated to LEPs and local authority scheme promoters that Ministers had decided that the DfT should retain approval oversight of a small number of large and/or complex local schemes. The entire M11/A10 Growth Corridor - Transport Package scheme – one of the three corridor packages with the Herts LEP SEP was identified as one of these. This corridor package includes both the A120 Hadham Bypass and A602 Improvement projects sit within the Corridor package, as well as series of smaller transport improvements, resilience schemes and other projects.
- 4.2 Concern was expressed by the LEP that the timescale for appraisal of the economic case for the 'major scheme' elements of the corridor was likely to extend through 2015/16, which is the first year of delivery for the overall SEP programme. DfT retention of the entire funding package for the corridor until all elements (particular the major schemes) had Ministerial approval would thus delay the commencement of the remaining, smaller schemes within the corridor.

- 4.3 In March of this year, DfT clarified their position. They have stated that having now had the opportunity to consider the package in more detail they confirm that the DfT will only wish to retain approval of funding for the two main elements of the scheme - A120 Little Hadham By-pass and A602 Improvements. The remaining funding which was allocated to the remaining package of smaller schemes, amounting to around £20m, will still sit with DfT but will be approved under the local assurance arrangements, and will be released by DfT as needed.
- 4.4 The HCC Major Projects group, as promoter of the A120 and A602 projects, is now engaging with DfT to progress the necessary steps for approval. It is understood that the appraisal which will be required is to enable Ministers to get an understanding of the Value for Money any scheme will provide. As such, the focus for these 'retained approval' schemes is the Economic Case assessment. The other elements of a traditional Transport Business case (Strategic, Financial Commercial and Management cases) are understood to be subject to a much 'lighter touch' review, having been initially accepted as part of the LEP SEP submission and approval. It is anticipated that completion of the approval process with DfT will be achieved by Autumn 2015.

## **5. Programme Update**

### **A120 Hadham Bypass**

- 5.1 Feedback from the pre-application public exhibition and engagement process has been analysed and collated. Key themes have been identified, and consideration has been given to ways in which it is feasible, appropriate and affordable to refine the design of the scheme ( both in terms of physical design, including proposed mitigation measures and in specification and procurement planning) to address issues raised.
- 5.2 Key physical changes considered as a result of issues raised were:
- alterations to the provision of facilities for Rights of Way crossing the proposed bypass route, and
  - the consideration of an additional junction of the bypass route providing a connection between Albury Road and the new bypass at the point where they will cross, to north of the existing signalised crossroad at the Ash.
- 5.3 An alternate provision for pedestrians using the Rights of Way that cross the bypass at the Albury tributary embankment (Footpaths LH057 and LH058) has been made which allows pedestrians to cross under the bypass rather than at grade, via the spillway underpass structure,
- 5.4 Consideration of a junction between Albury Road and the bypass has been made and it is recommended that on balance, when considering safety, environmental impact, policy and affordability, the proposed design of an overbridge without a junction is retained.
- 5.5 The planning application for the scheme, including the full Statement of Consultation (with the full detail of the pre application consultations) and Environmental and Transport Assessments is to be finalised for submission in late June /early July 2015.

- 5.6 The planning authority will then undertake a statutory consultation on the planning application, providing the public, stakeholders and interested parties a further opportunity to comment. The application will be considered by the Development Control Committee. The current programme anticipates this taking place in the Autumn of 2015.
- 5.7 Should the project be granted planning permission, a procurement process to appoint a contractor will take place during 2016. Construction could commence in Spring 2017 with the scheme operational by 2019.

### **A602 Improvements**

- 5.8 A formal screening opinion was received in March from the Planning Authority which has confirmed that an Environmental Impact Assessment will be required for the entire scheme. Whilst some elements of the scheme in isolation have limited impact, being broadly within existing highway land, the screening opinion seeks to ensure that the cumulative effect of the elements is assessed.
- 5.9 Thus, each element of the scheme will require to be taken through a planning application process. It is likely that the scheme will be split into 3 separate applications. Whilst this does not adversely impact on achieving overall delivery of the scheme within the 2015-2019 period, it may result in a compression of the construction activity along the route into a shorter time frame toward the later years,
- 5.10 Key milestones for the scheme are set out below.
- Pre-planning Consultation – May 2015 (post-election)
  - Submission of planning application – End Aug 2015.
  - Planning Decision – Winter 2015
  - Potential Public Inquiry – Early 2016
  - Procurement – Late 2016
  - Construction in phases starting Spring 2017 (scheme operational by 2019)
- 5.11 Further updates will be provided for both schemes as they reach key milestones.