

## **A417 MISSING LINK PROPOSAL UPDATE**

**Summary:** An update on the identification of options for the A417 Missing Link.

**Recommendation: To note the progress since the March 2018 Board meeting and the end of Highway England's consultation on options for the A417 Missing Link**

**Author:** Martin Lane, Director

### **Introduction**

1. Further to the Board's discussion at its March meeting, as agreed, a formal response was made to Highways England's (HE) consultation on options for the A417 Missing Link.
2. Following the end of the consultation period HE restructured its engagement with partner organisations.
3. The Board now has two seats on a Strategic Stakeholder Panel (replacing the earlier Steering Group). It is also a member of the Landscape, Environmental and Heritage Technical Working Group and a member of a Communications Technical Working Group. These Working Groups sit alongside an Engineering Working Group and a Traffic and Economic Working Group.
4. The Strategic Stakeholder Group met for the first time at the end of June and should receive reports from, oversee and review the work of the technical working groups. It did not receive reports from the technical working groups at its first meeting and meets for the second time on 26<sup>th</sup> September.
5. To date the meetings of the Stakeholder Panel and Landscape, Environmental and Heritage technical working group have been disappointing;
  - HE is still to release the full results of the consultation exercise.
  - Papers for various meetings have been released late or been tabled at meetings and the information shared has not been substantive.
  - The agenda of the Landscape technical working group has had a disproportionate focus on potential improvement projects outside the scope of the main A417 scheme, known as a designated funds scheme.
6. In Autumn 2017 the Board was invited to make a series of suggestions for projects related to the Strategic Road Network that could be funded by HE from their Designated Funds. In early Summer 2018 HE announced that they had funding for A417 specific Designated Fund projects. The Board advanced some of its earlier suggestions and HE is now exploring two suggestions: improving the view from The Peak viewpoint, just off the Cotswold Way near Birdlip and improving the Cotswold Way National Trail route and road crossing near the Star Centre / Crickley Hill Country Park.

7. In late June the Board's Chairman was interviewed by an Independent Assurance Review Panel on the process to date, with the Panel reporting their findings to HE. The Board does not receive a copy of the report.
8. At the first meeting of the Strategic Stakeholder Panel in June HE announced that the A417 Missing Link scheme had moved from a Tier 2 to a Tier 1 scheme. This was the result of greater interest from the Department of Transport (DfT) and the Treasury in the scheme. The scheme was close to the £500m threshold whereby HE would require agreements from DfT and the Treasury. As a result the timetable for HEs announcement of the preferred route had slipped from November 2018 to Spring 2019.
9. The subsequent timetable is now:
  - a. Statutory consultation on preferred route: Summer 2019
  - b. Development Consent Order Submission: Late 2019 / early 2020
  - c. Development Consent Order Decision: Summer 2021
  - d. Work starts on site: Late 2021
  - e. Scheme opens: Spring 2024
10. HE continues to evaluate both Option 12 and 30, but is clear that its preferred option remains 30.
11. At the second Landscape technical working group in mid July HE shared potential locations and technical challenges for land bridges along route options 12 and 30. The HE/ Mott MacDonald led discussion questioned whether a land bridge was necessary and if resources might be better allocated to "green" other grey structures. These land bridge suggestions were only 50m wide and HE signalled that walkers, cyclists and horse riders may not be fully accommodated on the land bridge.
12. The A417 Missing Link Task & Finish Group has been considering the feedback from the various meetings and the ongoing consideration of options. In late June it undertook a study tour of tunnels and land bridges on the M25, the route of HS1 and on the A21. It has also sought independent external advice from an engineer with extensive road and rail experience.
13. As a result of these considerations it was agreed to send a series of letters to HE in August, (Appendix 1-3).
14. The letters seek to outline:
  - a. The Board's concern as to the lack of detailed information provided by HE and to request specific information,
  - b. Concerns over the adequacy of the land bridges suggested by HE and to review them against the agreed Vision and Design Principles for any scheme,
  - c. Offer suggestions for improvements to HEs Option 30 proposal.
15. HE have acknowledged receipt of the letters, but a considered reply is awaited.

**Supporting papers:**

**Appendix 'A' - Letter to HE dated 15<sup>th</sup> August; A417 Missing Link: Information request and Reasonable Alternatives**

**Appendix 'B' - Letter to HE dated 13 August; A417 Missing Link: Comments on Land Bridge options**

**Appendix 'C' - Letter to HE dated 3<sup>rd</sup> September; A417 Missing Link: Potential Improvements to Option 30**