

**A417 UPDATE**

**Summary:** To provide a progress update on the A417 Missing Link

**Recommendation:** That the latest progress report be noted.

**Office Ref:** Martin Lane, Director

**General Update**

1. As reported in the April Monthly Update for Board members Highways England made their Preferred Route Announcement on 14<sup>th</sup> March 2019, confirming option 30 as their preferred route, which did not come as a surprise;  
<https://highwaysengland.citizenspace.com/he/a417-missing-link/>
2. The Board subsequently issued a letter to local MPs on 25<sup>th</sup> March 2019, **Appendix 'A'**. The Board also wrote to Highways England on 9<sup>th</sup> April 2019, **Appendix 'B'**.
3. As indicated to MPs, Option 30 still presents a series of significant challenges, these include:
  - the cutting through the escarpment; approximately 1.37 km long, up to 28 metres deep and requiring significant retaining walls for around 700 metres;
  - the 5 lane highway plus 2 or 3 lanes of access roads at/above the Air Balloon;
  - the challenges of disposing of large quantities of surplus spoil from cuttings;
  - the need to safeguard aquifers, water quality and respect the challenging geology;
  - the need to enhance landscape, wildlife and heritage settings;
  - the need to enhance the experience of those wanting to explore the area on foot, horse or bike e.g. the Cotswold Way National Trail.
4. These points were developed and expanded upon in correspondence with Highways England. The Board expressed concern:
  - that no further consideration had been given to how a tunnel might improve Option 30, Highways England appeared to be only considering a 50m land bridge;
  - there was a lack of consideration of Government's policy in regard to natural capital and environmental net gain;
  - Highways England proposed to link Birdlip to a new Shab Hill junction via a new / upgraded road, rather than take the Birdlip traffic to the Cowley junction.

**Next steps**

5. Highways England plan to submit their Environmental Scoping Report to the Planning Inspectorate (PINS) on 29<sup>th</sup> April 2019 and envisage that PINS will commence a 28 day consultation period shortly afterwards. The Board will be expected to respond within this period.

6. Thereafter Officers envisage Highways England's timetable will be:
  - Preliminary design
  - Statement of Community Consultation (assessed by Local Authorities)
  - Preliminary Environmental Information
  - Statutory Consultation and Review (the Board is a Statutory Consultee on National Infrastructure Projects); summer / autumn 2019
  - Finalised Designs
  - Submission of application to the Development Consent Order (DCO) process in early 2020.
7. Highways England has been awarded sufficient funds to advance the scheme design and make the DCO submission. However the overall scheme is still subject to an allocation of funds in the Roads Investment Strategy 2 (RIS2) settlement due in November 2019, to enable any agreed construction to proceed.
8. The Development Consent Order timetable after submission of the application is envisaged as follows
  - 1 month: PINS review to accept or reject application
  - 3 months: Pre examination stage
  - 6 months: Examination
  - 6 months: Report and decision; Summer 2021
  - (+ 2 month challenge window about the process)
9. Highways England (HE) responded to the Board's letter of 9<sup>th</sup> April 2019 on 15<sup>th</sup> April 2019. HEs response is currently being considered.

**Supporting Paper(s):**

**Appendix 'A' - Letter to local MPs on 25<sup>th</sup> March 2019 concerning Highways England's Preferred Route announcement for the A417.**

**Appendix 'B' - Letter to Highways England on 9<sup>th</sup> April 2019 concerning their A417 Preferred Route announcement.**