REGIONAL TRANSPORT FORUM – 9th March 2012

A14 Update - The A14 Wider Study

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Purpose of report:

- To inform Members of the Forum on the current position of the A14 Wider Study.

Recommendation:

1. To note the position and offer any comments.

1 Background

1.1 Members will be aware that the Government withdrew the “A14, Ellington to Fen Ditton” improvement scheme in June 2010. It also announced it would lead a wider study which examined the congestion problems of the A14, taking account of the needs of strategic freight traffic as well as the needs of locally based development traffic within Cambridgeshire.

1.2 Although early discussions were held between Department for Transport (DfT) and local interests to discuss the undertaking of the Study, it was after the Chancellor’s Autumn Statement in November that the Study began in earnest.

2 The 2011 Autumn Statement and the “A14 Challenge”

2.1 In his 2011 Autumn Statement and his accompanying National Infrastructure Report, the Chancellor introduced a new approach to funding infrastructure and began with the following statements:

“Infrastructure networks form the backbone of a modern economy and are a major determinant of growth and productivity”. He also added “historically the UK’s approach to the development of these networks has been fragmented and reactive. Investment has not kept up with the needs of a growing population and opportunities to maximise infrastructure’s potential as a system of networks have not been exploited.”

He further announced that “the Government will take a number of steps to address these shortcomings,

- Bringing new investors into UK infrastructure
- Exploring new sources of revenue to support investment (some £20bn)
- Allowing local authorities more flexibility to support major infrastructure
- Using guarantees when investors cannot accommodate certain risks.”
Indicating the level of determination of the Government to see the A14 situation improved, the Chancellor, in his actual Autumn Statement made several references to the A14 including:

“The Government commits to increasing capacity and improving performance on the A14, which will support housing developments …. The Government will explore innovative ways of financing this work, including tolls, which will also be investigated for other new capacity proposals by spring 2012”

Under the heading of “Encouraging investment and exports as a route to a more balanced economy” the statement continued -

- “Immediate investment of £20m to reduce traffic congestion on the A14 and increase resilience,
- Examine ways of increasing long term capacity and performance with the launch in early December 2011 of a large-scale engagement programme: the “A14 Challenge”.
- By spring 2012, will have developed and assessed proposals including capacity enhancements on the Ellington to Fen Ditton section of road.
- The Government will also look at the scope to relieve congestion by improving other modes including local roads, freight facilities and public transport.
- It will consider whether improvements can be funded through innovative financing mechanisms including tolling….”

The A14 Challenge

2.2 Cambridgeshire County Council for its part was in the company of four of the Cambridgeshire District Councils able to respond and respond with a single voice to the Government on the “Challenge”. This recognised that a new approach to funding may have to be taken to see long awaited action on the A14. The joint response can be accessed via the web links below- see “References”.

2.3 The main thrust of the response was to stress the linkage of the capacity of the route to the economic and financial prosperity of the nation and this is at risk. A radical multi-modal policy for movement in the A14 and adjacent corridors is needed to overcome the risk of failure.

2.4 The approach suggested seeks to address the over-riding public expenditure objection to the previously published A14 scheme by supporting the need for private, as well as public capital investment, including tolling or charging or other financial mechanism to repay as necessary the cost of that investment.

2.5 Additionally the response highlighted:

- The “cross-roads” and bottleneck” characteristics of the Cambridge to Huntingdon section.
- The international designation of A14 as a TEN-T route providing linkage between Felixstowe and much of the UK.
- The mix of traffic including a high proportion of HGVs and daily stop/ start congested conditions.
- The Cambridge Sub-region’s world class economy has further growth potential if issues of A14 could be overcome.
- Whilst much progress has been made with upgrading other modes, ie rail, “Guided Busway” and cycling, the key element of highway upgrading has to be determined and delivered.
- Priorities for upgrading are from Cambridge and Huntingdon, and an off-line section between Fen Drayton and Brampton with the removal of Huntingdon Viaduct.
- Environmental issues, noise, vehicle emissions/ air quality and carbon usage which impact on quality of life need to be addressed, especially for those living close to the A14.
- The likely cost of the upgrade suggests private funding will be necessary.
- Upgrading needs to be treated as a whole package not dealt with in a piecemeal manner.

2.6 The “Challenge” itself resulted in some 200 responses from the general public and these are still being collated and analysed by DfT. These responses will feed into the considerations of the Wider Study.

3 The A14 Wider Study, Progress to Date

3.1 The Study which is being led by Senior DfT Civil Servants, involves Local Authority, LEP, and Highways Agency representation.

3.2 With the clear steer from the Chancellor, the A14 Study has made good progress. It is being undertaken in three phases. Phase 1 (Output1) completed in January 2012, examined the issues and challenges surrounding the A14 and identified the following problems:
- Capacity, and Asset Condition (Huntingdon Viaduct),
- Impact of Growth- background traffic growth, freight and local housing/ employment growth
- Wider Economic, Social and Environmental Challenges- lost productive time, supporting growth, access to labour market
- Quality of Life (Social and Environmental) Challenges- welfare impacts, accidents, air quality issues

The Output 1 Study report can be accessed via the link below.- “see References”.

3.3 The second phase is currently assessing alternative options to address the issues and the third will test packages of options to identify a recommended option to be developed.

3.3 Meetings of A14 Major Stakeholders have been held in Kettering which focused on the strategic importance of the A14 route and in Cambridge where the emphasis was primarily on the Ellington to Fen Ditton length and the issues there, and their ideas for solutions to those issues.

4. The Ring Fenced £20m to Provide Short Term Measures.

4.1 This DfT funding has been allocated to projects to reduce congestion and increase resilience. Measures include:
- Extension of the Guided Busway Park and Ride facilities at St Ives,
- Extra VMS signs to warn of congestion / delays on A14 for traffic leaving Cambridge and Huntingdon
- Measures to improve the flow of traffic at Spittals and Girton Interchanges, and
- Installation of VMS signs between and Ellington and Fen Ditton on A14.
Additionally the Highways Agency is planning to introduce a “Minuteman” service along this length of A14 to assist with the swift removal of breakdowns.

4.2 The intention is that these measures will be undertaken during the next two years.

5. Conclusions

5.1 The A14 Wider Study is progressing to timescale and is due to conclude in June 2012. A wide range of options / solutions are being considered and major stakeholders are involved within the Study process.

5.2 Next steps include working with Government and local partners to explore how an upgrade could be funded. Our aim is to put together a funding package consisting of a ‘four leg approach’; including local, national Government and European funding if possible as well as funding from private sources and may include tolling.

5.3 In this regard we see the Ten-T programme as key to helping us to hopefully deliver the much needed improvements and help ensure A14 can function effectively as part of the Core national and international network. A clogged A14 remains a block to business and hampers the growth of Cambridgeshire’s and the wider economy.

References
Details of the “A14 Challenge” and the Output 1 Study Report can be found at:
http://www.dft.gov.uk/consultations/dft-20111212

The Joint Response to the “A14 Challenge” by the County Council and four of the Cambridgeshire Districts can be found at:

and

http://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/DBCAF02B-417D-4332-9399-055F10D8C0B0/0/120208ResponsestotheA14ChallengeFV.pdf