

CABINET – 21 JULY 2015

A40 – SCIENCE TRANSIT PUBLIC TRANSPORT SCHEME AND LONG-TERM STRATEGY

Report by Director for Environment & Economy

Introduction

1. This paper gives an overview of the on-going and planned investment in the A40 corridor. Cabinet is **recommended** to:
 - (a) Approve the inclusion of the A40 Science Transit Public Transport Scheme to the capital programme;
 - (b) note the context of a wider delivery programme of schemes currently underway which will improve congestion along the A40 corridor;
 - (c) and agree that the proposal to schedule a public consultation as part of 'Connecting Oxfordshire' on the options for a long term strategy approach for further A40 access improvements be undertaken in Autumn 2015.

Background

2. The A40 is a single carriageway Primary Route linking the M40, Oxford, Cheltenham and South Wales. On the section between Witney and Oxford it carries a daily flow of between 23,000 and 30,000 vehicles per day – well above the road's link capacity. The situation is exacerbated by junction capacity issues at Eynsham/Cassington and Wolvercote/North Oxford. This results in congestion on the route for much of the day, including at weekends.
3. The current bus services have achieved a notable success in attracting people who are travelling from Witney and Carterton to Oxford city centre, but there is still considerable scope for increasing bus use on journeys to the rest of the city, particularly the Eastern Arc, including Headington and Cowley - which is now the largest employment area in the city.
4. Witney and Carterton are the two largest towns in West Oxfordshire. They have both seen considerable growth over the last 30 years and this is expected to continue in the future. The A40 forms the main route between both of these towns and Oxford. It is used by most of the bus routes as well as general traffic. There is no direct rail connection for Witney or Carterton, the nearest stations are at Hanborough or Oxford.
5. OCC has taken a 'strategic corridor' approach to developing solutions to the existing (and projected) congestion issues for the A40 which is in two parts:
 - (a) A number of identified schemes to deliver some capacity and efficiencies on the network in the short term;

- (b) And an assessment of the scale and approach for a full 'access solution' to the A40 corridor (likely to be costly and delivered on a much longer timeframe).
6. A public transport scheme for the A40 was included in the Oxfordshire Strategic Economic Plan and was successful in provisionally being allocated funding from the Local Growth Fund (LGF) for a scheme from 2017/18.
 7. A Stage 0b Business case (Annex 1) has been prepared for approval setting out the preferred scheme for this allocation.
 8. In addition to the assessment of this scheme, work has been commissioned to review the options for a long term strategy for the A40 corridor. There is a need to identify and agree a medium to long term strategy for the corridor in order to guide development, and provide a basis for which funding applications can be made as future opportunities allow.

Current and Proposed Schemes for Improving the A40 Corridor

9. Wider Context – The LGF funded scheme under consideration in this paper is only part of a wider investment package Oxfordshire County Council is taking forward for the A40 corridor. This particular scheme looks at a small section of the A40 – the western end of the Witney through to the Wolvercote roundabout in North Oxford. However, this scheme needs to be considered within the context of a number of improvement schemes along the wider length of the A40 in Oxfordshire. From West to East these include the following:
 - Access to Carterton (improvements to the B4477 and western facing slips on the A40 at Minster Lovell)
 - New Downs Road at grade roundabout on the A40 (in Witney)
 - Western facing slips at Shore's Green junction (Witney)
 - A new Strategic Link road joining the A40 to the A44 (just east of the Wolvercote roundabout)
 - Northern Gateway Access Road and associated bus priority improvements along the A40 corridor between Wolvercote viaduct and Wolvercote roundabout.
 - Wolvercote Roundabout improvements
 - Cutteslowe Roundabout improvements
 - 'Access to Headington' programmed improvements
 - Green Road Roundabout bus priority measures (completed March 2015)
10. The full complement of the above schemes (in addition to the proposed LGF scheme) constitutes 'Phase 1' of the council's programme of initial A40 corridor improvements and is illustrated in Annex 2.

Local Growth Fund Scheme Recommendation

11. In the Oxfordshire Growth Deal (July 2014) the Government agreed a provisional allocation of £35 million to "expand the integrated public transport

system along the Knowledge Spine, delivering major enhancements to the A40 strategic route between Oxford, Northern Gateway and Witney”.

12. The recommended programme for this funding, as outlined in the Stage 0b Business case includes the following:
- An eastbound bus lane between Eynsham Roundabout and the Duke’s Cut, Wolvercote;
 - Westbound bus priority lane on the approaches to Cassington traffic signals and Eynsham Roundabout;
 - A Park and Ride facility adjacent to the A40 in Eynsham;
 - Junction improvements on the A40 corridor including those at Witney, Eynsham, and Cassington;
 - A bus priority scheme on the approach to Swinford Toll Bridge.
13. Although it is early in the development of these schemes the current best estimate of the cost for these schemes, as outlined in the business case, is as follows:

Component	
Bus Lane	£29m
Park and Ride (at Eynsham)	£6m
Junction Improvements (at Eynsham and Cassington)	£3m
Bus Priority at the Swinford Toll bridge (Eynsham)	£0.4m
Total	£38m

14. This would be supplemented by the purchase of vehicles by the operator, to a minimum estimated value of £2 million.
15. Initial investigation suggest that the A40 bus lanes will be able to be accommodated, for the most part, within the current highway boundary and that the footway/cycleway located in the northern verge will be able to be retained, and perhaps improved. The details of this will be explored as part of a detailed design process to be undertaken over the next 12 months.
16. The scheme should deliver substantial travel time savings for existing public transport users but also for current car users who switch to public transport and for remaining road users from reduced vehicle numbers. Success criteria for reduced congestion (journey times, queue lengths) and modal transfer will be defined as part of the scheme development process.

Next Steps for Further Improvement for the A40 Corridor

17. Oxfordshire County Council is committed to the on-going development of a long term strategy to tackle the current and projected congestion issues on the A40.

18. The objectives for the strategy to improve travel in the A40 corridor are:
- To improve travel times and/or journey reliability along the A40 corridor, in particular between Witney/Carterton and Oxford, taking account of future travel needs;
 - To stimulate economic development in line with the Oxfordshire Strategic Economic Plan;
 - To reduce the environmental impacts and safety issues along the A40 corridor.
19. Long term strategy options – A Baseline Statement setting out the current and future conditions on the A40 route and potential options for dealing with the scheme was prepared in September 2014 and is available on the County Council website.
20. A number of possible main options were identified and tested including rail network re-instating, a guided bus system, a light rail system, two way priority bus lanes, and widening to a dual carriageway.
21. In addition, assessment included options around people movers, monorail systems or automatic guidance systems (which generally have a similar or identical footprint to one or more of the main options).
22. The estimated costs for these long term options, including land, contingencies and optimism bias allowance far exceed the current available funding. As a reference point, initial estimates are as follows:
- | | |
|---|----------|
| Re-instatement of railway (Witney – Yarnton) | £289m |
| Light rail (Witney – Yarnton) | £244m |
| Guided Bus (Witney – Cassington – Wolvercote) | £187m |
| Bus Lanes (Witney-Wolvercote) | £172m |
| Dualling | Estimate |
| pending | |
23. The current work programme for A40 improvements (in particular the new LGF scheme discussed above) is compatible with these longer term solutions.

A40 Strategy Consultation on the Long-Term Options

24. The next step in the development of the long term strategy is to consult on the above schemes as part of the process for deciding which strategy should be chosen as the county's preferred way forward.
25. The A40 improvements are an important step to connect Oxfordshire, OCC's long term strategic aim to improve the county's transport network. 'Connecting Oxfordshire' is also the name of OCC's draft Local Transport Plan (LTP), which sets out proposed transport solutions for the county up to 2031, with ambitions beyond that in some cases. It has been informed by public feedback received in response to a series of public meetings and a public consultation in summer 2014, as well as detailed discussions with a wide range of stakeholders.

26. The county faces a huge challenge to enable people to make the journeys they need to as the population grows, and avoid damage to the economy caused by severe congestion, as well as to protect the environment. Therefore a significant shift away from dependence on private cars, towards more people using forms of transport that use less road capacity and damage the environment less is needed – where possible walking, cycling, or using public transport.
27. 'Connecting Oxfordshire', which is expected to be formally adopted in autumn 2015, sets how projects such as the A40 schemes will help meet these challenges. Thus, as part of 'Connecting Oxfordshire', OCC will run a public consultation on 'The 'Future of the A40' in the autumn. This will include exhibitions, public meetings as well as an on-line and digital medial materials and engagement.
28. The outcomes of this consultation (in conjunction with the assessment work already completed) would culminate in a further cabinet decision on a preferred strategic approach.
29. Once this decision has been made OCC will be in a position to seek contributions for schemes through which the preferred strategic approach will be implemented, or to put schemes forward as and when funding opportunities become available.

Financial and Staff Implications

30. Initial work on developing options for the scheme and the long term strategy has been through the E&E revenue budget. This funding will continue the commencement of design work following public consultation.
31. The £40 million budget for the scheme will be comprised of the following:

Local Growth Fund grant	£35 million
Vehicles (additional & upgrades)	£2 million (estimated, non-OCC spend)
Developer contributions (secured)	£3 million
32. Because the LGF grant is fixed in its time for delivery it is suggested that if the full developer contribution is not available at the time that implementation starts then the county council should borrow the outstanding amount against future contributions in West Oxfordshire and/or North Oxford.
33. Revenue implications of the LGF scheme will be determined in detail through the preliminary design and will be incorporated into the stage 1 business case for the scheme.

Risk Management

34. There is a risk that the scheme will not be accepted for LGF by the Department for Transport and that therefore any money borrowed against its acceptance to pay for design fees would need to be re-financed.

35. A risk assessment and risk management strategy will be developed as part of the project management process for the LGF project design.

Communications

36. The release of the Local Growth Fund funding will be dependent upon our producing a business case in line with Department for Transport/Treasury requirements. An important part of this is to show that there is local and public support for the scheme. As part of this a public engagement activity should be held to garner local opinion on these proposals.
37. The report proposes a public engagement on the proposed LGF funded scheme as well as a public consultation on options for long term improvements to the route. A Communications Plan will form part of the project management process of the LGF project design. A stakeholder groups has been set up to assist in the development of the LGF scheme and long term strategy.

Equalities Implications

38. A Service & Communities Impacts Assessment will be part of the scheme's detailed design.

RECOMMENDATION

39. **The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to**
- (a) Approve the inclusion of the A40 Science Transit Public Transport Scheme to the capital programme;
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 - (c) agree that the proposal to schedule a public consultation as part of 'Connecting Oxfordshire' on the options for a long term strategy approach for further A40 access improvements be undertaken in Autumn 2015.

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Director for Environment & Economy

Background document: A40 Witney to Oxford Corridor Engineering Feasibility Study' by URS, March 2015

Annexes:

Annex 1: A40 Public Transport Scheme - 0B Business Case

Annex 2: Map of A40 corridor improvement schemes

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