

Road Investment Strategy 2020 - 2025

A1 East of England Strategic Road Study

Report of the third meeting of the Stakeholder Reference Group July 2016

The third meeting of the A1 Stakeholder Reference Group was combined with that of the Oxford/Cambridge Expressway Stakeholder Group and included an update on the improvements to the A428 from the A1 to Caxton Gibbett.

In addition, the A428 team held a separate meeting at Tempsford Village Hall attended by parish councillors from Tempsford, Great Barford, Roxton, Wyboston and Staploe, together with Little Barford Parish Meeting.

This report attempts to cover the key points on all three schemes. There are still no 'lines on the map' for possible new routes and some solutions will not involve re-routing. If study timetables are adhered to, there should be a firmer indication of preferred options at the next stakeholder meetings.

Some of the background to RIS2 is covered in Appendix A. Apologies for the jargon, which inevitably creeps in – some definitions are in the appendix.

A1 East of England

The initial stakeholder meeting produced a list of more than 100 suggestions to help meet the transport objectives of the study. These were then grouped into a 'long, long' list of more than 50 options and a sifting exercise was undertaken against the study transport objectives.

This led to a long list of 8 options, covering a range of categories and including a 'do minimum':

- Physical – upgrades, downgrades, new road alignments, junction improvements
- Regulatory/Legal – restrictions by user type, lanes, hours, etc.
- Policy/Strategy – incentives, programmes, modal shift
- Behavioural/Technological – smart motorway, limit single occupancy, etc.

Finally, the following options shortlist was produced:

1. Section of new motorway in the middle section (i.e. Bedfordshire)
2. Local improvements, e.g. grade separated junctions, in the middle section
3. Upgrade the east-west connectivity of the A1 to avoid 'hop on, hop off' behaviour (using the A1 for short sections)
4. All lane running and smart motorway management in the northern and southern sections

5. Local public transport and active transport measures, including some behavioural change measures

These five options were then formed into three packages (Options 1, 2 and 3), with Options 4 and 5 common to all three.

At the July meeting, the stakeholder group was asked to discuss these three packages to inform the:

- Strategic Outline Business Case
- Environmental Assessment Report
- Appraisal Specification Report (approach to modelling)
- Order of Magnitude Estimate (estimated costs)
- Value Management Workshop Report
- Investment Submission
- Appraisal Summary Table

The above documents are programmed for submission to the Dept. for Transport in Autumn 2016.

Stakeholders made many comments about the three options, some of them contradictory. Key points for our 'middle' section in Bedfordshire were:

Package A – 'Middle Bypass'

- If bypass options are chosen, what will happen to the existing A1?
- How does the Black Cat relate to any offline (bypass) option? Essential to integrate the package with other schemes
- Key bit is the Wyboston/Tempsford severance
- Need to make sure severance is not increased by adding an offline route
- Priority is to deal with existing problems – future traffic growth is less important
- An east or west offline route (bypass) will not be popular with residents, depending on which side of the A1 they live
- East route may inconvenience fewer residents but would have environmental/habitat implications
- Given environmental considerations, a new route might need to switch from east to west of current alignment several times and use the existing route in parts
- Going offline might provide opportunity for (infill) growth
- Early engagement on detailed options will be critical (given potential impact on residents and habitats)
- Long term commitment to delivery of mitigation and enhancement is very important
- Might local and smaller bypasses be better?

Package B – 'Improve Existing Junctions'

- Grade separation benefits cyclists and other non-motorised users
- Keeping traffic on the move is the most important thing
- Reduce access for local traffic
- If there are local bypasses, need to downgrade the roads they are relieving (reduce capacity) to lock in the benefits
- Opportunities for targeted improvements
- Opportunities for better flood protection

- What about east/west connectivity? How would this work with East-West Rail?
- Public transport – both buses and East Coast Main Line – should be improved

Package C – ‘Modest Improvements’

- Does not address road issues, particularly around Buckden and Sandy
- Not satisfied – scheme doesn’t go far enough
- Middle section should have smart traffic management, including variable speed limits
- Need segregation for non-motorised users and also crossings
- Would need better local links to the East Coast Main Line (as an alternative to the A1)

There will be a further Stakeholder Reference Group meeting in the autumn when we should, at last, see where the thinking is going.

The timetable has not changed in that the A1 Strategic Study should be completed by the end of October 2016 and will be submitted to ministers in 2017. Full, formal consultation will take place in 2017/2018.

Oxford to Cambridge Expressway

The strategic aim of this study is to investigate the case for linking existing roads and creating a strategic east-west link between Oxford and Cambridge via Bedford and Milton Keynes (the towns and cities of the ‘Brain Belt’. The aim is to improve east-west connectivity, build network resilience and support economic growth. The Study Team are working closely with the East-West Rail consortium.

An earlier stakeholder meeting developed a long list of forty multi modal options which have led to three possible road-based options emerging, with various sub-options around Oxford and Milton Keynes.

- Option A – a southern approach to connecting Oxford to Milton Keynes, north of Aylesbury
- Option B – Broadly follows the East-West Rail alignment
- Option C – takes a more northern approach connecting Oxford to Milton Keynes south of Bicester and Buckingham

The Study Team intend to investigate further the relationship between east-west road and rail travel and have commissioned freight modelling to understand the effects of freight movement. Initial results indicate that there would be significant changes to freight movement as a result of improved east-west connectivity.

Another aspect to be considered is access to urban centres and also to existing north-south routes such as the A5.

The section of A421 between Junction 13 and the Black Cat is already up to expressway standard and improvements from J13 to Milton Keynes are planned. The important issues for Bedfordshire are: what happens to the Black Cat; and how will this integrate with East-West Rail?

Key points made by stakeholders were:

Option A - southern

- Most housing growth is planned closest to this route
- Near Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (Chilterns) so environmental challenges
- If this does not become expressway, the route should still be enhanced
- Would objectives be better met by providing improvements to more than one route?

Option B – east-west rail

- This would do most to facilitate shorter local road trips and potential integration with rail
- HS2 interface may have the potential to unlock growth
- Junctions need to support EWR stations – parkway stations?
- Sub-options around Oxford are crucial to deciding a route
- This appears to run through the key flood and water basin areas
- Spread funding across more than one route

Option C - northern

- More rural and longer route, so less attractive
- Need consistency of route through on A421
- Potential for fewer environmental challenges
- Route via Buckingham may encourage car based development – Aylesbury has better public transport links
- Park and Ride as a possible integration to urban areas

The issue of how the expressway will circumnavigate Milton Keynes has not yet been addressed.

Again, there will be a further Stakeholder Reference Group in the autumn. No date yet.

A428 Black Cat to Caxton Gibbet

This scheme was put forward as part of the first Road Investment Strategy (RIS1). However the construction timetable – Spring 2020 to 2023 – brings it in line with the RIS2 studies.

The A428 is the strategic diversion when there are issues on the A14.

Public engagement has begun. The forum of parish councillors at Tempsford on 21st July was part of this engagement and a further meeting is planned towards the end of September.

Scheme options should be developed by January/March 2017, with formal consultation on the preferred scheme in the autumn of 2017.

The main challenges for the project are:

- the Black Cat
- Wyboston

- the East Coast Main Line
- the River Ouse
- the planned development at Cambourne, Bourne Airfield and St. Neots
- existing environmental issues around St. Neots
- improving the reliability/resilience of the road network

Detail of the A428 scheme is very dependent on the decision on whether to re-route the A1 so that the intersection with the A421 is not at the Black Cat. One option is that the A428 will form an eastern exit from the Black Cat – where the quarry is at present.

The Study Team is looking at a series of options such as offline (a bypass), online widening or junction improvements.

This first meeting with councillors was for the Study Team to ensure that they understood the constraints. There was some dissatisfaction that possible routes were not being discussed – ‘the road will be built so what are the options given the constraints?’

Councillors were requested to go back to their parishes and consider three concerns and three opportunities from the upgrading of the A428 and to let the Study Team have their input by the end of August. (Not easy with summer holidays and quarterly meetings.)

I have now had an email to say that the interim reports for both the A1 East of England and the Oxford to Cambridge Expressway Strategic Study are available to read on [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk).

These reports outline the high level case for improvements within each study corridor and will inform further work being carried out to develop the options for intervention.

A1 East of England Strategic Study:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/road-investment-strategy-post-2020#research-phase-a1-east-of-england>

Oxford to Cambridge Expressway Strategic Study:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/road-investment-strategy-post-2020#research-phase-oxford-to-cambridge-expressway>

If there is particular feedback you wish to give on any of these issues, please email madeline.russell@biggleswadetowncouncil.gov.uk.

Madeline Russell
August 2016

Appendix A - Background to the Report

The Road Investment Strategy 2020-25 (RIS2) commissioned a series of six strategic studies to address some of the biggest challenges facing the roads network in England.

- A1 East of England
- Oxford/Cambridge Expressway
- Trans Pennine North of Manchester
- Manchester/Sheffield Tunnel
- Manchester NW Quadrant
- M25 SW Quadrant, J10-J16

RIS2 is planning for Road Period 2, which begins in April 2020. This is also when the National Roads Fund comes on stream. Construction is planned to start later in 2020. Infrastructure is considered to be key to the Government's economic plans.

Meanwhile, there are other schemes underway which affect Bedfordshire residents:

A5-M1 Link – Under construction and due to open in June 2017

A1 Junctions 6-8 – Introduction of smart motorway starting in 2019

M1 Junctions 13-16 – Smart motorway management to start in 2018

A421 J13 to Milton Keynes – Improvements to be completed 2018/19

A14 Huntingdon to Cambridge – Improvements to start December 2016

A1 East of England

The A1 is one of our oldest trunk roads and also one of the least consistent. With more than fifty years of local upgrades, the road today is a patchwork of different standards, ranging from four-lane motorway to elderly dual carriageway.

Major upgrade work will improve the road to motorway standard in Yorkshire and to Expressway standard north of Newcastle. This A1 Strategic Road Study is looking at bringing consistency to the southern section of the route, from the junction with the M25 to Peterborough. In particular, it is looking at the case for improving the non-motorway section linking the two parts of the A1(M) to motorway standard. The study is also examining whether improvements, including changing the alignment of the road, could reduce the environmental impact of the existing route and benefit local communities.

Objectives of the A1 East of England Strategic Study

- Review previous study work, other relevant data and current investment plans to understand the current performance and constraints of the existing road infrastructure and confirm the strategic case for further investment.
- Identify the options for improving the A1. Understand the operational and technical feasibility and user benefits and challenges, including weather-related

resilience, of the different options. The benefits assessment will encompass analysis of the congestion relief, reliability, safety and environmental outcomes.

- Understand how the options impact on the local and regional economy – jobs; reduced costs of supply; land use changes, increased investment.
- Understand how different options impact on (or are impacted by) other transport schemes in the area such as the Oxford to Cambridge Expressway study; East/West Rail Link and East Coast Mainline (including the effect of HS2)

- **Definitions**

Smart Motorway	Technology, including variable speed limits, and use of the hard shoulder as a permanent running lane, combine to reduce congestion and ease traffic flow. Removes the need to take further land for widening. Gantries hold infra-red CCTV cameras and overhead signals, enabling permanent monitoring and management of the carriageways from a control centre. There are refuges instead of the hard shoulder. The first installation of a smart motorway was on a section of the M25, controlled from South Mimms.
Expressway	One level below a motorway. A dual carriageway with few junctions and a hard central reservation, removing slower traffic and adding entrance and exit lanes.
RIS1 and RIS2	This refers to the Road Investment Strategies for 2015-2020 (currently being implemented) and 2020-2025 (to be implemented from April 2020).

[I was appointed by the Bedfordshire Association of Town & Parish Councils to attend the Stakeholder Reference Group meetings for the A1 Study and to report back.

(Because of the breadth of other stakeholders to be consulted, the DfT felt unable to invite individual local councils to send representatives to the Reference Group. Instead, they invited representatives from the three county associations, Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire and Cambridgeshire.)

The brief has now widened to include the Oxford/Cambridge Expressway and the upgrading of the A428.

MR]