

Road Investment Strategy 2020 - 2025

A1 East of England Strategic Road Study

Report of the fourth meeting of the Stakeholder Reference Group March 2017

The fourth meeting of the A1 Stakeholder Reference Group, held on 1st March in Milton Keynes, 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 launched a formal consultation** on route options on 6th March at Wyboston Lakes.

This report attempts to cover the **key points on all three schemes**. They are closely linked and the whole report needs to be read for a complete picture.

Please note that there are still no 'lines on the map' for possible new routes (i.e. no actual planned layouts) and some solutions will not involve re-routing.

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 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 A, B, and C (Options 1, 2 and 3, with Options 4 and 5 common to all three). I reported in detail on these in my last report.

At the latest stakeholder meeting, it was confirmed that the Stage 3 process was completed in November 2016 and the report published.

The presentation then went on to assess the three packages and the following is written specific to the A1 through Bedfordshire:

Option A	New road between Junctions 10 – 14	Highest benefit
Option B	Junction improvements	Medium benefit
Option C	Modest improvements	Low benefit

The estimated overall costs of the options are as follows:

Option A	£1.69 billion	These figures do not include the costs of the public transport and active transport measures considered in 5 above.
Option B	£1.14 billion	
Option C	£0.63 billion	

For packages A and B, the benefits are notably lower than the cost.

For package C, both costs and benefits are lower and these could be considered as complementary measures to both A and B.

The presenters were unwilling to give any further details of the cost/benefit analysis at this stage but the indication was that it is not looking good.

It was also said that the A1 is now being considered in the changing context of the A14 Cambridge to Huntingdon upgrade, together with the A428 scheme; East/West Rail and Oxford/Cambridge Expressway. Freight patterns will change with these other developments and the impact of that will be modelled.

Where to now? There is currently a tender process to identify a study team to take this forward. They will be asked to de-construct the three packages identified and look at how to get most benefits out of a future scheme. The presenters admitted that the A1 is very complex and will take much longer.

RIS2 will still be published in 2019, with delivery post 2020. It is not clear whether improvements to the Bedfordshire section of the A1 will be able to be included although this is still the preference and aim.

Meanwhile, it was announced that smart motorway will be introduced between Junctions 6 – 8, Welwyn GC and Stevenage, anyway, and the work on the A14 will include widening of the A1 between Brampton and Alconbury.

For the Bedfordshire section, Highways England are looking at the possibility of average speed cameras on some sections, as they have already introduced south of Buckden. They will also investigate mitigation of other safety issues.

The above is factual. My comment is that our bit of the A1 in Bedfordshire has rather been put on the back burner because the cost/benefit analysis is negative and therefore other schemes are a better use of public money.

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 have also done further work on possible changes to freight movement and access to urban centres.

The section of A421 between Junction 13 and the Black Cat is already up to current 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? However, Highways England are currently looking at the definition of an expressway and may want to introduce some of the smart motorway technology to expressways so there may be some work in Bedfordshire.

The presentation focussed on the fact that the Government sees Oxford, Cambridge and Milton Keynes as fast growth cities and gateways for foreign investment, particularly in the knowledge economy and high value, highly skilled, advanced manufacturing. There are other issues to address – affordable housing and a skills shortage – but unlocking growth in this corridor needs significant investment in transport.

The Oxford/Cambridge Expressway, being an east/west route, gives far higher benefits to the wider road network than improvements to the A1, benefits as far afield as the M25, A12 and A34. The benefits will be increased with integration with East-West Rail, with maximum integration between the two modes of transport.

In view of this, the Government allocated a further £27 million in the Autumn Statement for the work on options development to continue. The next document to be produced will be a Strategic Outline Business Case to be ready for Autumn 2017.

The Expressway will increase the catchment areas of the three cities and it is expected that road and rail investment will lead to 1 million new homes and 700,000 new jobs by 2051. Housing numbers are only currently predicted to 2031 but these estimates are based on land use modelling. All the relevant Local Plans have been taken into consideration and the DfT is working closely with DCLG and the National Infrastructure Commission, which has a wider strategic view.

It was actually said that RIS2 is focussing on housing and economic growth with roads attached!

The most problematic section of the Expressway is that between Oxford and Milton Keynes, as noted above, and this is the focus of the Study Team's attention.

The section between the Black Cat and Caxton Gibbet completes the eastern end of the Expressway and is being dealt with separately as it was included in RIS1, which is currently being implemented. See below.

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.

As well as being part of the Oxford/Cambridge Expressway, the A428 is the strategic diversion when there are issues on the A14. The work on the A14 is due to be completed in 2020 and will include widening of the A1 between Brampton and Alconbury.

The A428 Study Team have just launched a formal public consultation on route options for a new section of road between the Black Cat and Caxton Gibbet to bypass St. Neots and which will involve extensive remodelling of the Black Cat.

The consultation closes on 23rd April and the consultation brochure and questionnaire can be found at:

<https://highwaysengland.citizenspace.com/he/a428-black-cat-to-caxton-gibbet/>

There will be various public events, listed in the brochure, including:

St. Neots Priory Centre Monday 27th March 2pm – 8pm

Stuart Memorial Hall, Tempsford Friday 31st March 2pm – 8pm

There are three routes being consulted on and three proposals for the Black Cat. The lines on the map are indicative. Much more work will be needed to develop the actual line of the chosen route.

The map of the routes in the brochure has an error in that what is labelled Wyboston is, in fact, Tempsford.

The routes all follow a similar line east south east of the Black Cat to the south of Little Barford until the mainline railway is crossed. Two then go north of Abbotsley and one to the south.

The most northerly route would have a junction with the B1428, otherwise there would be no junctions until Caxton Gibbet. Since this will be an expressway, these junctions would be grade separated.

The options for the Black Cat all include grade separation – either two or three levels.

Option A is three levels and involves removal of the current roundabout with the construction of two roundabouts to the west.

Option B is two levels. The current roundabout would be retained with a flyover for the A428.

Option C is three levels with an enlarged Black Cat, with the A1 as a continuous free-flow road under the Black Cat and with an A428 flyover.

In each option, the Oxford/Cambridge Expressway takes precedence and is at the highest level. This is another clear message about the government's priorities.

Two absolutely key issues were raised at the consultation launch. The first was that, without knowing what the plans are likely to be for the A1 – i.e. whether the A1 may be re-routed – it was difficult to know how to react to the proposals for the Black Cat.

The second issue is that Option B for the Black Cat does not allow access to the Expressway for traffic coming from the south on the A1. This is unacceptable for local traffic from East Bedfordshire wanting to get to Cambridge.

After the consultation, the next steps are:

Announcement of Preferred Route	Summer 2017
Statutory Consultation	Autumn 2017
Development Consent Application	Summer 2018
Secretary of State Decision	Winter 2019
Work to start	March 2020

It is likely that the work will start with the Black Cat improvements and the overall project will take four years. It is a committed scheme so the funding is assured. The formal process of Development Consent leading to a SoS decision will have started before it is known what will happen with the A1.

Other Information

- Junctions 13 to 16 of the M1 will be converted to Smart Motorway with the work due to start in 2018.
- The widening of the A421 from Junction 13 to Milton Keynes, which will be undertaken by Central Bedfordshire Council, is still subject to funding but it is hoped it will be completed in 2018/2019.

- RIS2 will be published in 2019. It will cover: the money available; the list of schemes; and the expected network performance. RIS2 will include some schemes that are not finalised at that stage. It will also look at potential impact across the whole road network.
- Route Strategies – The Road to Growth – have just been published for consultation:
 - https://highwaysengland.citizenspace.com/he/strategic-economic-growth-plan/supporting_documents/The_Road_to_Growth_discussion_paper_FINAL_high_res.pdf

Highways England published the first set of Route Strategies in 2015. They described the condition and performance of roads nationally, the issues affecting them and the investment priorities for the period 2015-2020.

This new set of Route Strategies brings together information from many sources to indicate road conditions and give an evidence base for investment for RIS2. After the consultation, Highways England will produce an initial report later in the year.

The Route Strategies are one of the key steps of research for developing RIS2, alongside the six strategic studies.

The above is all the information I have gleaned from two consultation meetings in the last week. It is not clear yet what further consultations will be held but I will attend as invited and report back on future progress.

Please do respond to the A428 consultation and have a look at The Road to Growth.

If there are particular points you would like me to be aware of, please email:

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Bedfordshire Association of Town & Parish Councils

March 2017

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]