

Report To/ Decision Making Body: Witham Area Committee	Date of Meeting: 29.11.05	Agenda Item: 6
Title of Report:- A12 Hatfield Peverel to Witham- Proposed Provision of Auxiliary Lanes		
Wards Affected: Witham and Hatfield Peverel Wards directly affected. Residents of other wards affected if they use A12.	Background Papers: Highways Agency leaflet produced in 2000. Letter from GO-East 3.9.03. Correspondence from the Highways Agency.	
Financial Implications: A. Cost of Link Road B. Cost of provision of Auxiliary Lanes C. Maltings Lane S106 Agreement Finance of £750,000 plus interest (£1.1M) contribution to link road.	Policy Implications: As set out in the report.	
Sustainability Implications: Yes	Equalities Implications: No	

1 Purpose of Report

1.1 To consider the Highways Agency proposal for a new scheme, to replace the previous link road scheme and to agree a response to this proposal.

2 Background and Need for a Scheme

2.1 A new link road between the two settlements was originally proposed in the mid 1990's by Essex County Council, as a local road scheme to remove traffic from the A12 and to close the Hatfield Peverel east-facing slip roads. The Highways Agency adopted the scheme in 1998.

2.2 Improvements are needed as the existing five A12 slip roads between Hatfield Peverel and Witham are not to current design standards. They have poor visibility and inadequate merge and diverge lengths. There are also inadequate weaving lengths between the junctions.

2.3 There has been a long-standing peak hour congestion problem between Witham and Hatfield Peverel, which is exacerbated in the morning peak by London-bound and Hatfield Peverel-bound traffic joining the A12 from Witham, causing delays to the main southbound traffic and being itself subject to delays.

2.4 The volume of traffic using the A12 between Hatfield Peverel and Witham was approximately 88,000 vehicles per day in 2004. The estimated capacity of the road is

70,000. Traffic joining and leaving the A12 via the B1137 (at Hatfield Peverel) was in the region of 7,328 vehicles per day in 2003 and via the B1389 (at Witham) was some 18,428 vehicles per day.

2.5 During a five year period between 1999 and 2004 there were 59 injury accidents, of which 10 were serious and 49 slight. This is approximately 1.4 times higher than the expected accident rate for this type of road.

2.6 There are currently unsafe direct accesses onto the A12 northern carriageway from The Terrace.

2.7 The Highways Agency's objectives are;

- To improve safety
- To improve provisions for pedestrians and cyclists
- To minimise adverse environmental effects and maximise beneficial effects on local and wider environment
- To ensure that proposals conform with the Essex Structure Plan and Braintree District Local Plan

2.8 Five options for improvement were initially considered in the late 1990's. These included the proposal now being put forward by the Highways Agency for the widening of the A12 locally between the two junctions. These five options were ranked in terms of traffic, environmental, safety, economic and accessibility criteria and a workshop was held with representatives from Essex County Council and Braintree District Council in 1999. As a result of this consideration, only two options were taken forward for detailed study. These were a route to the north and a route to the south of the A12. (The option of widening the A12 was dropped as it did not resolve all the road problems.) The Secretary of State for Environment, Transport and the Regions considered the studies undertaken and noted the high level of support for improving the A12 between Hatfield Peverel and Witham. On the basis of the assessment work undertaken, the southern route was considered to be the best solution and was the Highways Agency published preferred route for the Link Road in 2000.

3 Public Inquiry and Decision of Secretaries of State

3.1 A Public Inquiry was held in May 2003 to consider objections to draft highway orders, which if made, would authorise a new link road between Hatfield Peverel and Witham on a southerly route.

3.2 The Inspector who heard these objections concluded in September 2003 that the advantages of the alternative northern route were sufficiently overwhelming to warrant further investigation, as to whether it would be the better choice for the Link Road and recommended that none of the published Orders be made.

3.3 The Secretaries of State agreed with the Inspector's conclusions and accepted his recommendation not to make the Orders. The letter from GO-East in 2003 stated that 'In reaching their decision they have taken fully into account the delay that this will cause to providing a link road, but are satisfied on the evidence before them that it is not appropriate to continue with the published southern route. The Secretaries of State will accordingly ask the Highways Agency, in the light of the Inspector's report, to appraise the option of a northern link at the same time as assessing all other possible options.'

4 Options Considered by the Highways Agency

4.1 The Highways Agency stated, in a letter sent to the Council in September 2005, that they have undertaken the work of reviewing all viable options, which was completed in early summer 2005. Plans of these options are included as Appendices to this report. Brief details of the options looked at in more detail are as follows:-

Auxiliary Lane Option

4.2 This follows the existing A12 alignment and provides an additional lane on both the east and westbound A12 carriageways. These auxiliary lanes would enable traffic to flow between Hatfield Peverel and Witham without joining the main A12 traffic. They would also give drivers more time and space to join the main A12 traffic, than they have at present. Estimated cost £2.3 Million (shared with maintenance) or £6 Million as a stand-alone scheme. Estimated opening year 2007.

Southern Route Option

4.3 As presented at the public exhibition in 2001 and Public Inquiry in 2003. A new link road on the south side of the existing A12, with a new junction in the approximate position of the Latneys and Lynfield Junctions. The existing Hatfield Peverel east junction slip roads would be closed as part of this option. Estimated cost £9.1 Million. Estimated opening year 2009/10.

Northern Route Option

4.4 This would comprise a two-way link road on the north side of the A12, with slip road improvements on the southern side. This would also entail the revision of the existing two level junction in the area of Latneys and Lynfield Motors. The existing Hatfield Peverel east junction slip roads would be closed as part of this option. Estimated cost £10.2 Million. Estimated opening year 2009/10.

Northern Route Option with Central At Grade (single level) Junction

4.5 This would involve the north and south traffic movements being separated on a link road north of the existing A12. This option would involve the construction of a large junction midway between Hatfield Peverel and Witham. This would also entail the revision of the existing two level junction in the area of the Latneys and Lynfield junctions. The existing Hatfield Peverel east junction slip roads and the Witham west junction on and off slip roads to the East bound A12 would also be closed as part of this option. Estimated cost £10.4 Million. Estimated opening year 2009/10.

5 Highways Agency Preference

5.1 Following the completion of work on reviewing these options, the Highways Agency concluded that the Auxiliary Lanes Option offered the best value solution and should be proceeded with and that they would not therefore proceed with the Link Road option.

5.2 The Auxiliary Lane Option does not extend beyond the existing highway boundary and would therefore not require some of the statutory processes required for the link road scheme, such as the route options exhibition and Public Inquiry, as it is unlikely that there will be any draft orders needed.

5.3 Subject to funding being available and a full detail design, it may therefore be possible to implement this option in a much shorter timescale and at a much lower cost.

There is also the opportunity to combine this option with major maintenance work, which is planned in the next 2-3 years.

5.4 The Highways Agency held a meeting in June 2005 to inform representatives of the Hatfield Peverel Parish Council, Witham Town Council, Essex County Council and Braintree District of their current proposal. They intend to publish an information leaflet shortly to inform the local communities of these proposals. The Highways Agency is also planning to distribute a newsletter locally and is considering the need for an exhibition of the proposals for the construction of the combined auxiliary lanes and maintenance scheme, nearer the time that construction would take place.

6 Maltings Lane S106 Agreement

6.1 The Maltings Lane Development S106 Agreement provides a contribution of £750,000 plus interest, which now equates to £1.1million, towards the Witham to Hatfield Peverel Link Road. The agreement indicates that if at the earlier of 5 years from the grant of the planning permission and the development traffic reaching certain generation limits, a contract has not been let for the Link Road 'then the County Council shall in consultation with the Council and the developer apply the contribution in or towards any or all of the following:-

- a) improvements to bus/rail interchange facilities at Witham railway station
- b) improvements to Witham railway station generally (including modification of the railway track layout to accommodate additional trains to operate on the Witham to Braintree branch line.)
- c) Subsidy for improved bus services in or around Witham
- d) Any other measures or schemes contained within the current version of the Local Transport Plan for Witham area, for the time when the contribution is to be applied.'

6.2 Members of this Committee noted on 9.8.05 that as the contract for the Link Road would not be let by the relevant date, that this S106 Agreement finance would be available for the alternative schemes set out above. Members agreed a number of schemes which they wished to include in the measures in Section d and Essex County Council have been notified of these schemes so that they can be listed in the new Local Transport Plan and therefore be eligible for the S106 funding. The first date that this S106 finance can be requested from the Maltings Lane Consortium is 30.12.05.

7 Comments upon Auxiliary Lane Proposal

7.1 The advantages of this proposal are:-

- It will improve road safety by allowing greater space and time for traffic, from Witham and Hatfield Peverel, to join the A12.
- It does not require land acquisition, or order making.
- It is the cheapest option to construct.
- The scheme may be constructed as part of funded scheduled maintenance work, within the next two to three years time.

7.2 The disadvantages are that:-

- It will not fully address the substandard weaving length.
- It will not reduce congestion on the A12.
- It will not segregate local, (including slow moving traffic) and strategic road movements by providing a separate link for local traffic.

- It will not close the Hatfield Peverel A12 off slip road, where traffic 'driving the wrong way onto the A12' has previously given rise to fatalities.
- The width of the A12 central reservation is reduced.
- There is no cycleway proposed on the northern side of the A12.
- The sub-standard Colchester-bound slip road onto the A12, adjacent to Lynfield Motors will not be improved.

8 Comments upon not Proceeding with either the Auxiliary Lane or the Link Road Proposal

8.1 There is currently opposition by some residents of Hatfield Peverel to either option going ahead. This seems to be related to concerns that either proposal might lead to an increase in traffic driving through the village. If neither scheme is progressed, the existing road safety problems will remain, which are primarily the five substandard slip roads onto the A12 and unsafe accesses directly onto the A12 from The Terrace. There would continue to be accidents associated with the slip roads and weaving movements between Witham and Hatfield Peverel. The option of doing nothing is therefore considered to be unacceptable.

9 Conclusion

9.1 That the Auxiliary Lane Proposal should be supported as an interim measure, as it will improve road safety in the short-term, by extending the length of carriageway, which can be used for traffic joining the A12 from both settlements. However, the Auxiliary Lane proposal does not meet several of the Highways Agency objectives for their scheme; as it does not improve provisions for cyclists and the proposals do not comply with the Essex Structure Plan or Braintree District Local Plan, both of which support a separate link road. The Highways Agency should therefore be requested to continue to progress the Link Road proposal, as a longer-term solution, in order that it improve safety by removing the problem of inadequate junctions and weaving traffic movements and providing a separate route for local traffic and cyclists between the two settlements, which will reduce congestion on the A12.

Recommendation

To support the Highways Agency proposal for provision of Auxiliary Lanes between Hatfield Peverel and Witham as an interim measure, but to continue to press for the provision of a separate Link Road in order to remove the problem of weaving traffic movements and to provide a safe separate route for local traffic and cyclists between the two settlements.

Date report prepared: 11.11.05

Author(s): Eleanor Dash

Designation: Planning Policy Manager

Ext. No: 2563

E Mail Address: eleda@braintree.gov.uk