

Cabinet (Resources) Panel

2 April 2019

Report title	City East Gateway A454 Phase 1 and 2 Consultation Feedback and Preferred Option	
Decision designation	AMBER	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Steve Evans City Environment	
Key decision	Yes	
In forward plan	Yes	
Wards affected	East Park, Heath Town	
Accountable Director	Ross Cook, City Environment	
Originating service	Transportation	
Accountable employee	Marianne Page	Service Lead - Transport Strategy
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Report to be/has been considered by		

Recommendations for decision:

The Cabinet (Resources) Panel is recommended to:

1. Endorse option D as the preferred principles of a scheme for further development following the public consultation.
2. Approve continued development work to progress the principle of option D to detailed design options and full business case.
3. Approve the submission of bids for potential funding.
4. Delegate authority to the Cabinet Member for City Environment and the Director of Finance to approve submission of funding bids and receive funding related to development activity for the major scheme preferred option D.
5. Agree to the submission of a further report in Autumn 2019 to provide detailed design options, enhanced costing information, funding options and provide feedback on on-going discussions with interested parties and potentially affected land owners.

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 In September 2018 Cabinet (Resources) Panel authorised a public consultation on options to improve the transport facilities along the City East Gateway – A454 Willenhall Road corridor. The consultation made reference to phases 1 and 2, that being the highway area between Bilston Road Island and Hickman Avenue. Future phases relate to the wider extents of the corridor connecting to Willenhall, the Black Country Route and Walsall and will be considered as a separate piece of work.
- 1.2 The purpose of this report is to detail the outcomes of the consultation and make a recommendation as to the preferred route to progress essential improvement works for the corridor.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 City East Gateway - The A454 Willenhall Road is the main route through a strategic growth corridor within the Black Country connecting Wolverhampton and Walsall, serving 34,000 homes and providing access for 75,000 jobs. It forms part of the West Midlands Key Route Network and connects Wolverhampton Ring Road at the western end with Walsall town centre to the east. The A454 also provides connection from Wolverhampton to the Black Country Route for access to the wider Black Country area, and onto the motorway network at M6 junction 10.
- 2.2 The corridor is identified within the Black Country Core Strategy and local area plans as a growth area and the need for improvements along the route have been identified within the West Midlands Strategic Transport Plan. The corridor investment proposals form part of Black Country wide development programmes, aimed at delivering essential infrastructure improvements to enhance and facilitate growth and regeneration across the sub-region. Significant regeneration proposals have been outlined at key locations along the route. Identified investment is expected to provide a further 8,000 homes, and 12,000 new jobs by unlocking regeneration opportunities. These investment activities are heavily dependent upon transport improvements not only to facilitate regeneration and growth, but to mitigate subsequent increases in transport demands.
- 2.3 At a local level, the corridor has been identified as a key arterial route within the City of Wolverhampton and falls within the Southern Growth Corridor. The western end of the road connects directly onto the Wolverhampton Ring Road at Bilston Road Island and provides access to the new Wolverhampton Interchange. On the northern side of the road, adjacent to the Interchange, lies Canalside Quarter regeneration site.
- 2.4 The Canalside proposals together with the Interchange development plans, aim to provide high quality residential and mixed use and office developments, providing around 1000 new homes and approximately 100,000 square feet of commercial space, respectively, for the city. The proposed corridor highway improvement is considered crucial in improving the market viability of these sites.

- 2.5 The Canal and Rivers Trust also own a significant land holding within the Canalside area which currently has very limited vehicular access options. The principles of option D within the consultation, which would see Willenhall Road become one way east bound in the vicinity of the site, delivering improved access options for this area in particular.
- 2.6 There are also significant regeneration land allocations around the Qualcast Road and Hickman Avenue areas that will benefit from improved traffic flow and access. Development of a strategy to maximise the value of this land for commercial and industrial activity is underway.
- 2.7 Against that background four possible improvement options were developed for consultation (see Appendix 3);
- a. **Low cost localised projects** – Incremental corridor improvements have been delivered in the past; this produces a fragmented solution and is not based on a thorough understanding of the whole corridor operation. There remain very limited options for further isolated improvements, none of which support achievement of the desired outcomes.
 - b. **Alternative travel modes** – Encouraging the use of alternative modes of transport is essential, however the level of potential of modal shift within the corridor is unlikely to make a significant enough difference to noticeably improve network conditions. In isolation it also will not provide changes required for access to development sites. The levels of congestion being exhibited currently are significant and with more development this situation will potentially get worse. Even with the best-case scenario of the Walsall to Wolverhampton rail link the percentage reduction in road based trips is unlikely to be noticeable on the highway network. This option represents a small scale and piece-meal approach to infrastructure to support alternative travel modes.
 - c. **Bus priority** – Isolated bus priority elements have been implemented previously but junctions present key pinch points and negate overall benefits unless the bus lanes were given a much greater priority over road space. It must be recognised that this would have a massive impact on other road users. A previous bus lane at Middle Cross has recently been removed which has improved overall journey times for all modes. Rebalancing the overall traffic flow in this area has benefited all traffic modes including buses, validating the fact that for bus lanes to be effective they need to operate over long lengths of road including junctions. If reliable journey times can be delivered for the corridor that is considered the best way to support public transport.
 - d. **Multi modal project** – This includes fundamental re-engineering of the available highway to provide a balanced provision for network users of all modes. The principles of this option represent a significant undertaking but demonstrate delivery of the majority of the desired outcome for the corridor.

3.0 Progress, options, discussion, etc.

- 3.1 Appendix 1 details the responses received to the consultation questionnaire. Where responses have been received from is shown graphically. From this it can be seen that there is a good cluster of responses from people living close to the corridor.

- 3.2 Out of a total 171 responses;
- Most respondents were familiar with the corridor and of those 33% lived on the route.
 - 88% are of the opinion that improvements are needed along the corridor
 - 60% supported Option D with 30% believing that option A was the best option.
- 3.3 Appendix 1 also contains all free format responses that were submitted, with personal or identifying data excluded.
- 3.4 Face to face discussions, mainly with people or properties directly affected by the principles of option D, resulted in mixed views from; 'it won't work' and some strong objections, to support for the need to make a change.
- 3.5 A summary of the concerns raised predominantly around option D included;
- Impact of the construction works on access to and visibility of their business premises.
 - The inability to receive deliveries at their premises if traffic volumes were higher and parking restricted.
 - Impact of potential land take on their operations.
 - Potential safety risks associated with the shared footway / cycleway crossing works entrances.
 - Impact on the occupants of households in Warwick Street, Bath Street and Duke Street.
- 3.6 Whilst further development work to address queries is required, the initial response to the above issues has been:
- **Impact of construction** - If a scheme is approved for construction, then it is anticipated that construction will take place over two years. This is to keep disruption to a minimum with work being planned in small sections with minimal disruption at peak times and undertaken as a rolling programme. Businesses would be supported to ensure that the public was aware of continued access and appropriate advertising deployed. A Construction Management Plan including a communications strategy will be developed jointly with the contractor.
 - **Impact on deliveries** - Some premises, it is anticipated, will only be able to receive deliveries outside of peak traffic periods and parking is likely to be very restricted on both Willenhall Road and Walsall Street. This may result in some difficulties for a couple of businesses. With some companies we have discussed accommodation works that would mitigate any impact and there will be further dialogue if a scheme is approved for further development.

- **Impact of land take** - Land take discussions have been initiated. Again, the responses have varied from strong objection to agreement in principle subject to price and conditions being agreed. If a scheme is ultimately approved for implementation it should be anticipated that Compulsory Purchase Order powers would need to be used for some plots if agreement cannot be reached.
- **Safety** - The scheme design is only concept at this stage and requires detailed development. It will also be subject to the normal Safety Audit requirements.
- **Warwick Street, Bath Street and Duke Street** - Because Warwick Street needs to be made one-way from Lower Walsall Street and Bath Street opened up to traffic there would be an impact on some properties from increased traffic movements. Accommodation works including double glazing which will help to mitigate any noise impact and enhanced driveways. A number of the properties in the area are owned by Wolverhampton Homes and they have undertaken to look at their investment programme so that they can undertake works to support the Councils objective to improve the area. A further concern is traffic exiting the Oxford Street car park through the residential area. Options to route this traffic directly to Bilston Street will be explored without creating a through route short cut.

3.7 Other responses received from key public bodies and organisations;

Campaign for Better Transport	Option D appears to provide most long-lasting solution to alleviate congestion, improve air quality and improve provision for pedestrians and cyclists and improve bus priority. Would not support any scheme that removed bus priority as this would lead to extended bus journey times and make services less attractive
Canal and Rivers Trust	Recognises the benefits of option D as opposed to other options. Stresses the need for good cycling and walking links. Advocates use of strategic park and ride sites
Cycling Forum	Positive comments about the scheme
Director of Public Health	Preference for more sustainable modes of transport but if Option D taken forward then a greater level of priority should be given to sustainable modes of travel. Need for further understanding of the health impact but stresses the need to reduce vehicle emissions.
Hackney Carriage Working Group	No comments
Private Hire Working Group	No comments

Transport for West Midlands	<p>Letter of support received for Option D and welcomed the continued joint working to address the transport issues on the A454 corridor.</p> <p>A454 is a key part of the Key Route Network. Also commends the Council to recognise the changes that the Wolverhampton to Walsall rail link will bring</p>
Walsall Council	<p>Letter of support for option D and continued joint working to address transport issues on this key corridor.</p>
Wolverhampton Homes	<p>Expressed support for the strategic objectives delivered by option D</p> <p>Need to work jointly to assess noise impact on their properties but all properties already have double glazing. Looking to own investment programme to improve the curtilage of their properties to support the overall regeneration objectives</p>

- 3.8 Alongside the concerns that have been expressed, a number of business and land owners could see the potential benefits of bring forward a scheme like option D and welcomed the opportunity for further discussion with the Council.
- 3.9 Some of the comments received related to the remaining section of the Willenhall Road corridor east of Hickman Avenue. The corridor is being studied holistically although this report only focusses on the western end, the comments will be reviewed at the appropriate time when a scheme for the eastern end is brought forward.
- 3.10 Given the responses received and the issues raised it is considered that the principles of option D, subject to further development work, represent the best option to meet the Council's aspirations for the corridor.

4.0 Evaluation of alternative options

- 4.1 The consultation undertaken considered four alternative options. 60 % of the responses received favoured option D. This is the option that meets the Council's and Black Country objectives for the corridor so it is being recommended for further development.
- 4.2 The study work that has been undertaken to date into option D has shown a potential cost benefit ratio of circa 2.5 for a scheme of this scale. It is not realistically possible to establish a cost benefit ratio of the other options but it is estimated that they would be much lower.

5.0 Reasons for decision(s)

- 5.1 Options for improving travel conditions and supporting the regeneration objectives for the Willenhall Road have been considered and four options developed. The public have been

consulted on these options and 60 percent of respondents supported the multi-modal option D.

- 5.2 Option D has been established to have a cost benefit ratio of circa 2.5. Initial bids for funding based on a cost of £25-30 million with this cost benefit ratio have been well received and the scheme given a high ranking against the Major Roads Network funding.
- 5.3 In view of the importance of this transport corridor to the city and the proposed regeneration schemes, combined with the indication that funding is possible it is considered appropriate to further develop designs related to the principles of Option D to a stage where a detailed design can be progressed, a full business case developed and the scheme could be implemented if funding is secured.

6.0 Financial implications

- 6.1 The current estimated cost of the project is in the region of £25-30 million with a potential cost benefit ratio of circa 2.5. Without detailed design it is not possible to refine the accuracy of the capital estimate.
- 6.2 Indicative expressions of interest have been made for Major Roads Network funding. Midlands Connect have given the scheme a high ranking for a potential start around 2021.
- 6.3 The Major Roads Network funding does require a local contribution of 15% and options to fund this are being explored. Further details of capital cost for scheme delivery and match funding options will be detailed in a subsequent Cabinet (Resources) Panel report in Autumn 2019.
- 6.4 At this stage it will be necessary to secure additional scheme development funding and it is requested that delegated authority be granted to the Cabinet Member City Environment and the Director of Finance to approve submission of bids and accept any subsequent funding awards. To date the scheme has been developed jointly funded by the Black Country LEP and the Council but that funding concludes at the end of the 2018-2019 financial year.
[MK/06032019/U]

7.0 Legal implications

- 7.1 If approved for further development it should be noted that the proposed project involves the acquisition of third party land and property. If this project is approved for implementation it will require a further resolution to acquire third-party interests in land affected.
- 7.2 Any highway improvement project that is subsequently approved for implementation will also require Traffic Regulation Orders. Any orders for the control of traffic and parking will be subject to statutory legal procedures and further public consultation.

- 7.3 Formal approval of a project in the future could cause blight and a legal entitlement from land and property owners for the acquisition of affected properties by the Council and compensation.
- 7.4 When a road layout is changed and assessed noise thresholds are broken there is also the potential for claims under Part 1 of the Land Compensation Act 1973. This Act provides that compensation can be claimed for residential property that has been reduced in value due to physical factors such as noise and pollution caused by public works, even though no land is acquired. The potential for noise thresholds to be broken on Walsall / Lower Walsall Streets is being investigated. It is currently assessed that there are a small number of domestic properties that could be affected with increased noise pollution which may require double glazing to be installed.
- 7.5 An initial review of the current scheme against Planning Regulations has been undertaken and concluded that planning permission will not be required as the proposals fall within Permitted Development for the Council as Highway Authority.
[RR/04032019/B]

8.0 Equalities implications

- 8.1 Detailed assessment is yet to be undertaken but if a project is taken forward to construction it will be designed to ensure accessibility to all members of the community and an Equalities Impact Assessment undertaken to formally review the design.

9.0 Socio Economic Implications

- 9.1 A summary of the key impacts and assumptions of the multi-modal option D, which are detailed within this report, are outlined below:
- a. During the 20 month construction phase the Proposed Development is likely to generate an estimated 141 net jobs per annum in total, estimated at £8.8 million that construction workers will spend locally during this period which will have a beneficial effect on the local economy.
 - b. A total loss of 2,200 sq.metres of land currently associated with employment uses to accommodate the Proposed Development, there will be a negative impact through the loss of two businesses and supporting employment land required to accommodate the project. Whilst this loss of employment land may be considered to have a negative effect, given the scale and in the context of the local economy, this is not considered to be significant in the context of the local or regional economy. More importantly is the ability of any transportation improvements and congestion measures to assist in bringing forward much wider regeneration benefits.
 - c. Improved connectivity and reduced congestion will offer regeneration impacts through access to a wider labour market, particularly through the improved connectivity between Wolverhampton and Walsall, and enhanced access to the Black Country Route, M6 at Junction 10 and the surrounding residential and industrial areas.

- d. Localised regeneration benefits, including boosting local investor confidence and access to sites, which can assist in bringing forward local regeneration sites forward for development.

10.0 Environmental implications

- 10.1 An environmental study has been undertaken of the multi-modal option D covering varied Aspects.
- 10.2 Noise impact summary is; traffic noise levels on the A41 (Bilston Road) and Stow Heath Lane decrease due to traffic diverted on to the project. Traffic noise levels on Willenhall Road decrease as this becomes one-way thus reducing the volume of traffic, with increases in traffic noise levels on Walsall Street and Lower Walsall Street which form part of the project.
- 10.3 The modelling work undertaken has shown that during the daytime period there are 271 households which move into a higher (3 dB) traffic noise band in the Forecast Year and 303 households which move into a lower (3 dB) traffic noise band. 3984 households remain in the same traffic noise band in the Forecast Year.
- 10.4 For the night-time period there are 159 households which move into a higher 3 dB traffic noise band and 203 households which move into a lower traffic noise band, in the Forecast Year. 4030 households remain in the same traffic noise band in the Forecast Year.
- 10.5 The monetary valuations with respect to change in noise levels and associated health impacts show a net benefit as a result of the project.
- 10.6 Traffic noise levels on the A41 (Bilston Road) and Stow Heath Lane decrease due to traffic diverted on to the project. Traffic noise levels on Willenhall Road decrease as this becomes one-way thus reducing the volume of traffic, with increases in traffic noise levels on Walsall Street and Lower Walsall Street which form part of the project.
- 10.7 Air Quality summary:
 - Regional emissions of PM10 are predicted to increase by 0.1 tonnes/ year in the proposed project opening year.
 - Regional emissions of NOX are predicted to increase by 1.1 tonnes/ year.
 - A total of 4636 properties are located within 200 metres from the affected road network.
 - For the opening year for 2020, 1957 properties would experience an improvement in air quality.
 - 2665 properties would experience a worsening in PM10 pollutant concentrations. NO2, air quality would be improved at 2,873 properties, stay the same at 117 properties and worsen at 1,632 properties
 - For the opening year 2020, PM10 pollutant concentrations would be improved at 1957 properties and worsen at 2665 properties
 - For the opening year 2020, NO2 air quality would be improved at 2,873 properties,

stay the same at 117 properties and worsen at 1,632 properties

- 10.8 The existing Willenhall Road is identified as needing action on air quality which the multimodal project would deliver. The study demonstrates that air quality and noise pollution will improve on Willenhall Road which was anticipated as the road effectively carries half the current level of traffic. Lower Walsall/Walsall Street will experience increased levels of noise and air pollution but anticipated to be below threshold levels. There may be a requirement to address increased noise experienced by some properties close to Walsall / Lower Walsall Street.
- 10.9 Greenhouse gases over the next 60 years studied are set to increase but in reality changes in vehicle propulsion systems and fuels is likely to, at least in part, address this increase.
- 10.10 Other environmental issues:
- a. Landscape and Townscape; The overall impact is assessed as slightly adverse. At this stage no landscaping proposals have been developed so it hoped that any approved project can be designed to have a neutral impact.
 - b. Historic environment; The impact has been assessed as slightly adverse largely as a result of the impact on the conservation areas during the construction period.
 - c. Biodiversity; The impact has been assessed as slightly adverse largely because of the impact common bird nesting habitats. Again, it is hoped that any project implemented could be designed to be impact neutral.
 - d. Water Environment; Provided any surface water drainage systems are designed to avoid pollution to the canal from sediment and small quantities of oil and grease. There would remain a risk of pollution from a major spillage but this is a very low threat.
 - e. Arboriculture; There are no trees subject to a tree preservation order or of particular note within the area of the project. Where possible trees would be retained or compensation planting undertaken

11.0 Human resources implications

- 11.1 No human resource implications have been identified associated with the matters in this report.

12.0 Corporate landlord implications

- 12.1 The project presents benefits to Council land holdings in Canalside and East Park Gateway area by providing improved access and improving the marketability of identified development sites.
- 12.2 Some of the land required to be acquired for the project will result in residual plots being available for redevelopment. These are being reviewed for the potential to bring them

back to the market at the earliest opportunity to reduce the overall net project cost and support the regeneration objectives.

13.0 Schedule of background papers

13.1 Report to Cabinet (Resources) Panel. 4 September 2018.

City East Gateway A454 Phase 1 and 2 Improvement Options

14.0 Appendices

14.1 Appendix 1 – Consultation responses.

14.2 Appendix 2 – Option D scheme plan Version 2.

14.3 Appendix 3 – Initial consultation leaflet.