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| CITY OF WOLVERHAMPTON COUNCIL | Cabinet (Resources) Panel 1 October 2019 |
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| Report title | City East Gateway A454 Phase 3 Improvement Options | |
| Decision designation | AMBER | |
| Cabinet member with lead responsibility | Councillor Steve Evans City Environment | |
| Key decision | Yes | |
| In forward plan | Yes | |
| Wards affected | East Park, Wednesfield South and Bilston North | |
| Accountable Director | Ross Cook, City Environment | |
| Originating service | Transportation | |
| Accountable employee | Marianne Page Tel Email | Service Manager - Transport Strategy 01902 551798 Marianne.page@wolverhampton.gov.uk |
| Report to be/has been considered by | City Environment Leadership Team Strategic Executive Board | 20 August 2019 10 September 2019 |

Recommendations for decision:

The Cabinet (Resources) Panel is recommended to:

1. Endorse the approach to identifying improvements to the eastern section of the Willenhall Road A454 transport corridor.
2. Approve the identified schemes in principle for public consultation.

Recommendation for noting:

The Cabinet (Resources) Panel is asked to note:

1. That a future report will be submitted detailing the outcomes of the consultation and to establish next steps.

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 The report outlines the investigation that has taken place into options to improve network conditions, improve journey time reliability for all modes and enhance walking and cycling facilities along the eastern sections of the Willenhall Road (A454) corridor. The corridor forms the eastern gateway to the City from M6 J10, Walsall and the wider West Midlands. The section of network under consideration is referred to as City East Gateway Phase 3 (between Deans Road junction and the Keyway junction in Walsall) as it represents a continuation of improvement works to the wider corridor.
- 1.2 The report presents the evaluation of the issues within the Phase 3 area alongside an options assessment for potential improvement schemes. Two primary improvement options are proposed for approval to undertake public consultation. The options appraisal also includes consideration of the combined impact of any improvements alongside those previously endorsed by Cabinet (Resources) Panel for City East Gateway Phases 1 and 2.
- 1.3 On 2 April 2019 Cabinet (Resources) Panel approved the development of a specific design option for Phases 1 and 2 and to submit speculative funding bids, in order to present a complete assessment of the impacts for this scheme within the business case, Phase 3 option impacts will need to be included and therefore publicised.
- 1.4 If approval to consult is granted it is proposed that it take place through winter 2019 and that a report detailing the outcomes of the consultation be presented in early 2020.

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 that runs between Wolverhampton and Walsall, serving 34,000 homes and 75,000 jobs. It forms part of the West Midlands Key Route Network (KRN) and the national Major Road Network (MRN) 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 the Black Country wide pipeline programme, 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, therefore transport improvements are required not only to facilitate regeneration and growth, but to mitigate subsequent increases in transport demands.

- 2.3 Improvements at M6 Junction 10 are planned to commence late-2019, subject to final approvals. When completed this has the potential to increase traffic flows on the A454 corridor.
- 2.4 Being developed in parallel is the proposed introduction of the Wolverhampton to Walsall rail service which seeks to provide a direct passenger services between the two centres and thereby increase the number of rail journeys in the transport corridor. Details of these proposals will be reported separately when developed.
- 2.5 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 access. The eastern end of the corridor provides essential existing and future business access through the Neachells Lane junction.
- 2.6 The City East Gateway corridor programme represents an evidence based approach to identifying long term multi modal improvements that facilitate network improvement, access to regeneration opportunities, reliable journey times and improved options for use of more sustainable travel modes. A plan of the whole route is included at Appendix 4. Phases 1 and 2 (Ring Road to East Park) are more advanced and have been subject to previous Cabinet (resources) Panel consideration on both 4 September 2018 and 2 April 2019.
- 2.7 City East Gateway Phase 3 focuses on the eastern area and the heavily congested junction of Neachells Lane, with consideration of its interdependency with the adjacent junctions.

3.0 Progress and options.

- 3.1 In 2018 the Council commissioned an Issues and Options Report for the City East Gateway Phase 3 area. The commission delivered by transport consultants Aecom included:

- A gap analysis of data and identification of the main transportation issues,
- Exploration and development of options, exploring key issues,
- Initial sifting of options to establish viability and prioritisation.

The development of the options and the viability sifting included input from across the transportation service and wider City Environment directorate, along with external partners including Transport for West Midlands and the West Midlands Combined Authority. The full Issues and Options Report is included at Appendix 3.

- 3.2 In assessing options, the approach taken has been to look at a solution that tries to impose the minimum delays on road traffic whilst keeping the whole corridor in balance. Taking into account the physical limitations imposed on the Willenhall Road corridor by third party land ownerships, buildings and the existing railway line.

- 3.3 Issues identification included data relating to traffic flows and delays, accidents, public transport use, existing cycling and walking facilities and the future demand likely to be experienced. A detailed evidence base, stakeholder engagement and previous corridor work has been used to assist in defining the issues. In response to these issues and considering the network objectives and regeneration aspirations, objectives for improvement as previously outlined for the wider corridor were agreed; improving journey time reliability, providing improved facilities for all modes, encouraging the increased use of sustainable transport modes and improving access to development opportunities.
- 3.4 Option development included a long list of fourteen improvements which had the potential to deliver against the established objectives. All fourteen options have been subject to the Department for Transport (DfT) standard Early Assessment and Sifting Tool (EAST). This not only looks at cost but also buildability, impact in terms of environment, social and economics and the fit with the strategic transport objectives to establish their likelihood of successfully delivering value for money against objectives.
- 3.5 From the sifting process there were three viable options which delivered significantly better early indications than all others. Indicative scheme plans for the three options can be found in Appendix 2:
- Option 1 – Widening of Neachells Lane to the west side,
 - Option 3 – A new Link Road from Neachells Lane to Willenhall Road,
 - Option 5 – A new Link Road and ‘hamburger’ island at Neachells Lane.
- 3.6 Option 3 forms an element of Option 5, therefore only two primary options have been recommended for public consultation. Option 1 and 5. Both have been subject to a further review for operational efficiency and projected financial benefits and initially show positive results. The current cost estimate (upon which the positive indication of value for money is based) for Option 1 is £6 million and for Option 5 is £16 million.
- 3.7 A Strategic Outline Business Case (SOBC) for a future Phase 3 major scheme has been submitted to the Major Road Networks programme through Midlands Connect. The SOBC is at Appendix 1 and outlines the strategic rationale for continuing investment in the corridor. The SOBC will not secure any offer of funding at this stage but may improve chances of a favourable submission by establishing a position within a long list of potential regional schemes.

4.0 Evaluation of alternative options

- 4.1 It is considered that the evidence based approach to assessment undertaken represents an appropriate evaluation of all options.
- 4.2 Based on the output of the objective assessment, the remaining 12 schemes within the sifting process are not being included as viable proposals at this time as they either do not represent value for money, do not deliver the desired outcomes or are considered to have too higher environmental or social impact.

4.3 The constraints and issues at Neachells Lane junction have been on-going for many years and have a considerable impact upon businesses and residents across the city. The option to 'do nothing' is therefore not considered appropriate.

5.0 Reasons for decision(s):

5.1 The Council has already agreed that there is a clear need to improve the transport infrastructure in the Willenhall Road corridor to meet current travel demand when considering Phases 1 and 2.

5.2 The objective assessment process has been extended to look at the options for Phase 3 and an extensive number of options reviewed to determine the potential optimum way forward. The approach being recommended is consistent with the approach already considered for Phase 1 and 2 and caters for current issues identified and supports the regeneration objectives for the corridor.

5.3 To compliment the approach already being considered for Phases 1 and 2 and address the major identified delay and air quality issues experienced at Neachells Lane it is necessary to identify a scheme for this section of the corridor.

5.4 This report seeks approval to consult the public after which a decision on how to address the identified issues can be taken forward.

6.0 Financial implications

6.1 This report seeks approval to consult on scheme proposals, for phase 3 of the A454 Willenhall Road improvement plan, with a total capital cost estimated between £6.0 and £16.0 million dependent upon the improvement option that is adopted.

6.2 Consultation costs totalling £4,000 are anticipated and accommodated within existing budgets for Transportation.

6.3 The Outline Strategic Business case has been reviewed by the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and the Black Country Director of Transport. The LEP have allocated scheme development funding thereby indicating support for the scheme at the regional level. There is a potential that the Council will be required to provide some match funding.

6.4 Project implementation will be subject to consultation outcomes, successful grant application with secured grant funding and budget approval. All of which will be subject of future reports to Councillors.

[KP/11092019/F]

7.0 Legal implications

7.1 If approved for consultation it should be noted that one of the proposed schemes involve the acquisition of third-party land and property. If, following consultation, this scheme is approved for implementation it will require a further resolution to acquire third-party

interests in land affected which may be acquired by the Council using its Compulsory Purchase powers.

- 7.2 Any highway improvement scheme 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 scheme 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. 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.
[RR/04092019/S]

8.0 Equalities implications

- 8.1 Detailed assessment is yet to be undertaken but if a scheme 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 Climate change and environmental implications

- 9.1 These will be assessed following determination of the most appropriate solution. If it is determined to develop a detailed scheme design then it will be a multi modal solution including quality facilities for cycling and walking and explore options for electric vehicle charging facilities and other positive impacts on the environment and public safety.

10.0 Human resources implications

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

11.0 Corporate landlord implications

- 11.1 The scheme presents benefits to council land holdings in Willenhall Road corridor especially Canalside and East Park Gateway area by providing improved conditions on the corridor and improving the marketability of identified development sites.

12.0 Health and wellbeing implications

- 12.1 There are no health implications specifically associated with the recommendations in this report. If it is determined to implement a scheme in the future it has the potential to improve air quality around the Neachells Lane as a result of reduced traffic queues.

13.0 Schedule of background papers

- 13.1 Cabinet (Resources) Panel report – City East Gateway Phase 1 and 2 Improvement Options, 2 April 2019 and 4 September 2018.

14.0 Appendices

- 14.1 Appendix 1. Strategic Outline Business Case
- 14.2 Appendix 2. Scheme option plans
- 14.3 Appendix 3. Issues and Options Report
- 14.4 Appendix 4. City East Gateway Plan (Phases 1, 2 and 3)