

SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Neighbourhood and Community Services Scrutiny Panel

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PART I **FOR COMMENT & CONSIDERATION**

SLOUGH ROAD NETWORK - ALTERNATIVE PROVISIONS TO MARKET LANE

1 Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to provide information on an 'alternative to Market Lane' in the context of the closure at Hollow Hill Lane/Mansion Lane and a relief road.

This report is designed to provide the Committee with information relating to the following issues:

- The current and future demand issues from congestion and major schemes in the Langley area.
- The constraints of the alternative and the cost uncertainty of a relief road.
- The balance of priorities for/against a package of mitigation or a relief road, and the anticipated impact on congestion, diversions, including opportunity cost and risk ownership.

2 Recommendation(s)/Proposed Action

That the Committee note the factors that have contributed to the decision to pursue a package of mitigating measures and/or support the pursuing of such proposals in the interests of Slough's community.

3 The Sustainable Community Strategy, the JSNA and the Corporate Plan

3a Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy (SJWS) Priorities

- Health: Improving wellbeing by improving transport and considering the most viable options to alleviate congestion.
- Economy and Skills: Improving journeys between work, home, leisure, school and exploring road infrastructure when linked to development or housing needs.
- Regeneration and Environment: Improving transport facilities, increasing sustainable transport and providing deliverable solutions.
- Housing: Ensuring road infrastructure is linked to housing growth.
- Safer Communities: Working towards reducing traffic congestion at key locations to improve the environment and safety for residents.

3b **Five Year Plan Outcomes**

- Slough will be the premier location in the south east for businesses of all sizes to locate, start, grow, and stay: By improving traffic flow and congestion in key areas in Langley and working towards future proofing the local road network.

4 **Other Implications**

(a) Financial

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

(b) Risk Management

Risk	Mitigating action	Opportunities
None	None	There are no risks, threats or opportunities arising from the report.

(c) Human Rights Act and Other Legal Implications

There are no legal or Human Rights Act implications relating to the content of this report.

(d) Equalities Impact Assessment

There is no identified need for the completion of EIA relating to this report.

5 **Supporting Information**

- 5.1 Road congestion is an ongoing issue that will continue to be a problem that people experience due to the increasing trend in the number of journeys that individuals make. The base cause around daily economic activity is further propagated and compounded by planned and forecast economic growth. Congestion is particularly experienced during peak times due in general to increased travel demand for daily economic activity, single occupancy car use and journeys due to the school run.
- 5.2 As common in most urban areas, road capacity is limited due to geographic constraints and the physical limits of the built environment. The current severity of the problem is forecast to continue to deteriorate due to population growth, increased car use, private car ownership and the demands from commercial and residential development.
- 5.3 In addition, there are major infrastructure plans in and around Slough both planned and likely to come forward in the future. There are also pipeline projects and those that have not been conceived to date but may come forward from developers as part of general economic and development movement. Within perspective should also be the central drivers for growth which means; demand will continually increase unless there is a global paradigm shift or innovation in the way society travel or transport goods.

Hollow Hill Lane

- 5.4 There are a number of known major transport and development schemes in the area. The Heathrow Express depot relocation to Langley as part of HS2's plans followed by the WRLtH, means there are both planned temporary closures of Hollow Hill Lane followed by the expectation of a permanent closure at Hollow Hill Lane (under the railway bridge).
- 5.5 The closures would undoubtedly have an immediate impact on the surrounding road network in comparison to the expected staged effect of future demand and growth.
- 5.6 Slough Borough Council took the decision to close the road under an experimental order to aide in quantifying not only the immediate impact on the network but also the threat from future growth and increasing demand.
- 5.7 The effect of the closure is currently being studied including flow and volume data, diversions and demand responses in order to develop an evidence base to inform negotiations, as well as understand and address future demand and growth concerns.
- 5.8 The experiment is a pro-active response to turning an impending threat into an opportunity; as it serves and provides the possibility to future proof the network to the emerging demands on capacity alongside that of the immediate impact from the threat of a closure.
- 5.9 The data collected and being collated is helping to design a package of mitigation measures. Such mitigation proposals would help address pinch-points, flow/capacity and congestion issues in and around Langley and Colnbrook. These issues, in part, are already in existence and would become further apparent in the future irrespective of a closure or if a relief road is built.

Relief Road

- 5.10 A relief road is not a silver bullet option for Slough as may have been perceived by a few individuals who represent some of the community groups in the area. Though this should not be seen as an exhaustive appraisal, there are many issues and concerns with this option for Langley and Slough, some of which has been highlighted as follows;
 - i. A relief road would not unequivocally serve the expected function of relieving existing Slough or Langley congestion, though conversely it is expected to serve some of the existing HGV and congestion issues experienced in Iver. Iver currently experience significant HGV issues due to the proximity of the M25 and HGV parks. A relief road is likely to release this movement through Slough and Langley, inadvertently making the route a viable alternative to queuing on/onto/off the M25.
 - ii. In transport planning terms a new road is generally expected to attract more traffic due to improved flow, leading to additional cars on the road network. In built up areas this can add to existing problems in congested areas such as Langley, Colnbrook or displacement onto other areas in Slough. Additionally, the proximity of the M25 and M4 motorway means traffic is likely to divert onto the local road network in Slough, in order to avoid delays

experienced on the motorway. A relief road means that a diversion via Slough onto the M4/M25 and vice versa becomes a realistic and viable alternative.

- iii. A relief road would attract a far greater volume of traffic than the pre-closure traffic volumes observed at Hollow Hill Lane/Market Lane of approximately 8000 vehicles. A new road needs to be built to set design standards in the DMRB. As greater capacity and flow attracts greater volumes of traffic, this would only serve to compound the issues in Slough and Langley. i.e. a greater volume of traffic would be drawn towards pinch points and junctions in the area.
- iv. Regardless of the experimental road closure or any associated relief road there are existing pre-closure issues with congestion in several places in the borough. The planned closure of Hollow Hill Lane/Mansion Lane has provided an opportunity to address these congestion areas. Therefore the opportunity to simultaneously mitigate a HHL closure, but also against the future forecasted demand and congestion issues arising from growth, increasing economic activity and density in the region. Pursuing a relief road could compromise this opportunity by focussing effort to a solution that may not be viable either due to cost or other constraints. It may also be a counter-productive option as smaller packages serve to address localised congestion without a negative influence on demand changes (i.e. encouraging increase traffic flows and volume) whereas a new road enables greater volumes to access the town as a through route.
- v. Estimating the cost of a new road and structure is an extremely involving and complex process due to multiple issues and unknowns, such as cost of land purchases, compensation for adjoining land owners, asset protection, numerous stakeholder interests and public enquiry outcomes.
- vi. In addition to technical viability there are financial and economic feasibility concerns which would also need to be overcome for a project such as a relief road to commence. For example, an asset protection requirement by Network Rail is considered to be very high risk to the council with unknown value or underwriting costs. There are also costs associated with operation and maintenance and the cost for road and rail closures during such operation, including the management of structure damage and any associated cost for operational and remedial work that follows. *(Additional background information in this area can be found in publically available documents published by HM Treasury such as the Green Book and also by the National Audit Office that validate the complex project risks and uncertainty with infrastructure schemes).*
- vii. The length of negotiation with the scheme sponsors and the associated clawback agreement. The implication being that complicated negotiations regarding a relief road at this stage could mean the opportunity for mitigation passes altogether. In addition, if a relief road does not come to realisation at some date in the future, funds would need to be returned and therefore the opportunity cost of not having pursued a package of mitigation proposals.

- viii. A new road classed as a major infrastructure scheme would need to pass the DFT WebTAG process which could become a significant barrier to such a proposal at this stage. From a professional standpoint, Slough Borough Council would support a relief road proposal on the back of significant development or where large benefits are forecast for the economy or community, such as; where proposals are underpinned by the significant unlocking of land for housing development or economic growth and activity.

6 **Conclusion**

- 6.1 The interest of Langley and Slough residents are of primary concern to Slough Borough Council and any associated dis-benefit of a relief road must be highlighted alongside such a proposal. Slough Borough Council will continue to share information with Buckinghamshire County and District Councils and explore potential benefits of a relief road.
- 6.2 The likelihood of further impacting on Langley and Slough junctions, pinch points and congested areas through increased volume and traffic must be reflected as part of a proper consideration, as well as the opportunity costs of a relief road option, asset protection requirements and cost uncertainty.
- 6.3 Under the existing context and highlighted concerns, a relief road is not proposed to be a suitable intervention for consideration at this juncture. Primarily, due to the inability to effectively address localised capacity issues independent of other areas (e.g. Slough/Langley vs Iver) and also the enabling of through routes for M25/M4 diversions.
- 6.4 A relief road option is appropriate and relevant to consider as part of a significant unlocking of land for housing, development or other economic activity.

Recommendations

- 6.5 The practical course of action is the pursuing of a package of mitigation proposals. The need for a mitigation package is further enhanced if a relief road is built in the future due to the anticipated outcome of greater traffic volumes and diversions.
- 6.6 A relief road as a possible future solution should address wider economic growth and development needs. It is not a recommended course of action due to the implications on diversions and enabling through routes through Langley and Slough.
- 6.7 The Panel is therefore asked to support the development of a mitigation package.

7 **Background Papers**

None.