

Highways Agency Position Statement on the Chichester Local Plan

Introduction

The Highways Agency is responsible to the Secretary of State for Transport for supporting the delivery of the Government's objectives in relation to sustainable development by informing and influencing the pattern of new development through the planning system in respect of the potential impact on the capability of the strategic road network (ie the trunk road and motorway network). Department for Transport (DfT) Circular 02/2007 (Planning and The Strategic Road Network) and our 2012 publication "The Highways Agency and the Planning Application Process. A protocol for dealing with planning applications" explain how we will participate in the planning process.

Our main concern is the safe and efficient operation of the Strategic Road Network (SRN, i.e. the Trunk Road and Motorway network) in England. Maintaining a safe and efficient SRN is important to the viability of existing and proposed development and to the local and national economy. We are also active in facilitating sustainable development through the planning process in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

This letter outlines our current position as of March 2013 in relation to the Chichester Local Plan being prepared by Chichester District Council.

The Highways Agency's Interest in Chichester District

Our interests within and around the District relate to the A27, primarily but not exclusively the section of the A27 adjacent to the existing built up area of the city of Chichester. This section of the A27 is known to experience significant capacity constraints in both morning and evening peak hours, along with evidence of peak spreading due to capacity limitations at these times.

This section of the A27 consists of a dual 2 lane all purpose 70 mph carriageway with six intersections as follows

A27/A285 Portfield Roundabout
A27/B2144 Oving Road
A27/A259 Bognor Roundabout
A27/B2145 Whyke Roundabout
A27/A286 Stockbridge Roundabout
A27/A259 Fishbourne Roundabout

Department for Transport and Highways Agency Schemes in the Area

The Spending Review announcement in October 2010 listed the A27 Chichester Improvement Scheme for potential construction in future spending review periods, subject to the outcome of statutory processes. Currently however the scheme is not being progressed.

Local Plan Development

We have been in regular discussion with Chichester District Council and West Sussex County Council, the local highways authority, during the preparation of the Local Plan to date. This has included providing written comments in response to various consultations undertaken by the District Council and attending meetings with planning and transport officers from the two councils. Most specifically, over the past year we have been working with the District Council, County Council and consultants acting on behalf of three strategic development sites, on a transport study for the Chichester area, the purpose of which has been to examine the potential traffic impacts likely to result from development options under consideration for the Local Plan. This work has involved the preliminary assessment of different levels of housing and employment allocations across the District, in particular housing targets relating to the South East Plan requirements and a higher "South East Maximum" total. These levels of development are outlined in terms of potential location across the District in a report by Jacobs prepared on behalf of Chichester District Council titled "Transport Study of Strategic Development Options and Sustainable Transport Measures".

As part of the consultation process, we have been involved in agreeing scenarios for the Local Plan transport assessment. This has included use of the Chichester Area Transport Model (CATM) to examine 2031 scenarios with and without the Local Plan allocations. We have also agreed to reduced travel demand scenarios for the Local Plan allocations and for the wider city based upon Smarter Choices measures in line with achievable reductions from empirical evidence.

The CATM model results have indicated that further junction capacity along the A27 will be required in order to mitigate the impacts of the development scenarios. One of our responsibilities under Circular 02/2007 is to ensure that development plans and their transport implications do not detrimentally impact upon the SRN in terms of queues and delays from both safety and operational viewpoints. It is similarly a requirement to mitigate the impact of any new development in line with NPPF so that the residual impacts are not severe.

As part of the development of the draft Local Plan, improvements to the six junctions on the Chichester Bypass section of the A27 have been developed to mitigate the impact of the draft Plan proposals. These improvements are the result of discussions between the parties involved in the transport study work, including ourselves. They have been developed to be a deliverable package that fully mitigates the impact of the development proposed in the draft Local Plan and which can be funded by that development.

Drawings of the improvements contained in the mitigation package are shown at Chapters 5 and 7 of the Jacobs Report. Inclusion of an improvement in the package does not necessarily mean that it will be delivered in the form currently envisaged. There will be scope at a later stage to consider alternatives but, in the event that deliverable alternatives are not identified, the improvements may need to be delivered as currently envisaged.

The mitigation package has been developed so that it does not need land outside current highway boundaries. However the designs are of an outline nature and it is not possible at this stage to rule out the need for land to be acquired from outside the highway boundary.

The infrastructure improvements in the mitigation package have been included in the CATM model runs.

Outline Junction Improvements

CATM is a strategic model and cannot adequately assess the operational performance of the junction improvements. We therefore undertook a more detailed assessment of the six junctions along the A27 for 2031 development scenarios. Using traffic flow information from the CATM model runs that included mitigation proposals, this comprised an operational assessment of all six of the junctions listed previously, plus an assessment of DMRB compliance and safety for four of the junctions where major proposals were put forward as follows

- Bognor Roundabout - extra approach capacity from the North, East and West. Vinnetrow Road converted to an exit only arm.
- Whyke Roundabout - a signal-controlled junction, utilising left turn give-way slips.
- Stockbridge Roundabout. - a signal-controlled junction, utilising left turn give-way slips.
- Fishbourne Roundabout - a signal-controlled "hamburger" roundabout, with the mainline A27 being routed through the centre. No signalled NMU facilities.

The assessment surmised that operationally the junction improvements had varying success in their mitigation of the transport impacts of the Local Plan allocations. The designs did not manage to mitigate all of the flows at all of the junctions, but overall it was considered that with further modifications and testing, the proposed designs with amendments were of a magnitude and cost likely to mitigate the impacts of increased demand along the A27.

Alongside the identified need for junction improvements, there is also a need to reduce speed limits along this section of the A27 between the Fishbourne and Bognor roundabouts to 50mph on safety grounds. Sussex Police have advised us that any reduced speed limits should conform with the guidance in Department for Transport Circular Roads 1/2006, that is they should be evidence-led, self-explaining and seek to reinforce people's assessment of what is a safe speed to travel. They should encourage self-compliance and not be seen by drivers as being a target speed at which to drive in all circumstances.

From the perspective of our Design Manual for Roads and Bridges, the designs did not meet all desirable criteria, but it was felt that the designs as shown for all junctions could be modified either to remove any departures from standard or to avoid worsening existing departures. We conclude that there are unlikely to be any 'showstoppers'. The designs raised some safety concerns although there were no serious concerns that would prevent minor design variants from being acceptable.

Our Present Position

Based upon the evidence to date, our assessment concludes that at this stage of the Local Plan, traffic impacts overall have not demonstrably been fully mitigated at every junction. However, we are content with the overall scale of infrastructure mitigation being considered when coupled with the demand management initiatives that have been built into the modelling. It would appear that variants on the junction improvements proposed (of a similar magnitude and cost) are likely to be able to provide sufficient mitigation so that any residual impact is not deemed severe.

On this basis our position at the present time is that there are no apparent showstoppers with respect to the A27 concerning the levels and locations of development considered in the emerging Local Plan. This is subject to assurances that the financial requirements for mitigation (infrastructure and demand management) are viable and that funding sources can be demonstrated.

Ongoing transport assessment work will be required to further develop the mitigation measures in order to better demonstrate that the transport impacts can be properly mitigated from operational, safety and DMRB compliance perspectives.

There will also be a need to discuss the phasing of mitigation works in relation to the delivery of development and this is likely to raise the issue of how forward funding of mitigation measures will be achieved where mitigation needs to be in place in advance of delivery of development.

We will continue to work closely with Chichester District Council and other stakeholders to develop and deliver future transport solutions for the A27.

Highways Agency
March 2013