

Army and Navy Sustainable Task Force - Meeting Minutes

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| Project: | Army and Navy Sustainable Transport Package | | |
| Meeting title: | Army and Navy Task Force meeting #15 | | |
| Date: | 30/09/22 | Location: | Microsoft Teams virtual meeting |
| Attendees | Cllr Lesley Wagland | LW | |
| | Cllr John Spence | JS | |
| | Cllr Marie Goldman | MG | |
| | Cllr Stephen Robinson | SR | |
| | Cllr Anthony McQuiggan | AM | |
| | Vicky Ford MP | VF | |

| Agenda Item | Item |
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| 1. | <p>Introduction</p> <p>LW opened the meeting and welcomed attendees before handing to the project team to run through a presentation.</p> |
| 2. | <p>OBC submission</p> <p>The presentation began with an update on the Outline Business Case, with the project manager explaining the proposals which were being put forward in relation to the junction itself, Park and Ride and walking and cycling improvements. He then proceeded to outline the costs, totalling £68.75 million from the DfT out of a total £80.8 million. However, there was a substantial cost risk (circa £9.75 million) because of increasing inflation. The bid still had a high cost-benefit ratio.</p> <p>VF questioned the potential cost increases and urged careful management of the expense to come in under budget if possible. VF pointed out how good it was to have reached this stage.</p> <p>LW agreed, describing the work as ‘astonishingly good’. LW did point out the difficulties with tenders given inflation uncertainty and the resulting difficulties for the supply chain. This resulted in inflated costs and inflated contingency for risk over and above.</p> <p>JS said he believed you had to build in cost on the basis of the current situation. However, it was important to try to manage the spending of any contingency. He said there was a wider problem with the government’s risk model and the collective level of financial risk facing the council when considered across all major infrastructure projects.</p> <p>LW said the council could not be seen as the ‘lender of last resort’.</p> <p>The project manager explained it was important for the scheme to have enough financial headroom, while also looking at areas to save costs.</p> |

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| <p>3.</p> | <p>Local Partnerships review</p> <p>The Task Force was told an independent review of the project had recently been completed by Local Partnerships. Among various factors, this reviewed the robustness of the Outline Business Case, the alignment of the project with the local, regional and national policies and objectives, risk identification and management and project governance. The review was conducted through interviews and examination of documents. This generated an overall amber/green rating, which was viewed as a good result. The review acknowledged there was strong support for the scheme, good communications, strong alignment with Transport East's regional policies and a well-established team with a strong track record of delivery. The review made some recommendations which were being taken on board.</p> |
| <p>4.</p> | <p>Design changes update</p> <p>The Task Force was updated on the latest design changes to the scheme following public consultation, specifically the introduction of a signalised crossing on Baddow Road and changes to the layout of Van Diemens Road. As a result of the changes and refinements to traffic signal timings, the performance of the junction improved further with faster average journey times for buses, cyclists and general traffic.</p> <p>It was explained that two main options were being considered for the Lady Lane junction – an improved give-way arrangement and a signalised option – and that the project team was recommending the give-way option was taken forward as the preferred option. There was little difference between the two options in terms of operational performance or capacity, but the give way option catered for all movements, was slightly better from a noise perspective, considered more favourable for residents and would reduce journey times for people walking and cycling across Lady Lane.</p> <p>The project team next updated on the Sandon Park and Ride proposals and, notably, a new legal requirement to bring about a 10% biodiversity net gain. This could be problematic for the current plans which would result in a loss of biodiversity to create the proposed 360 additional parking spaces. Meeting the requirement was made more difficult because of the constraints of the safeguarded area for the Park and Ride expansion. Therefore, the project team was looking at how else to address this issue, including potentially relocating the terminal building to retain more of the existing screening bund.</p> <p>The project manager described a similar issue at Chelmer Valley. Again, the project team was looking at options to overcome this and looking to retain as much of existing hedgerow as possible.</p> <p>SR said there was a useful conversation to be had with the developers and agreed to email further information on this. LW asked to also be kept informed.</p> <p>MG said she had residents chasing her about what was happening at Van Diemens Road. MG was keen for residents to be updated as soon as possible and wanted to know a timescale for talking to residents and sharing current thinking. She was told the project team was looking to arrange a residents' meeting. However, it was agreed that one particular resident could be updated straight away about the give-way option being chosen for Lady Lane.</p> |

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| | <p>VF suggested a press release update, but it was suggested a newsletter update might be more appropriate at this stage. VF was concerned there was a feeling from people that not a lot was happening and was keen to see some positive messages released, describing this as really important.</p> <p>A member of the project team said they were always looking for opportunities to provide public updates, through press releases or newsletters. He said there had been recent publicity about the site surveys and ECC approval of the outline business case. He said he was happy to look at a potential press release about the Van Diemens Road update after the latest meeting with residents. He also said he would contact MG about the residents' meeting.</p> <p>LW emphasised the intention for the meeting with residents, the newsletter and potential press release. VF said she felt that the team could not do too much in this regard.</p> <p>AM requested for information about how congestion would be improved to be included in any communications, having received feedback from residents about how long it is taking to travel through the junction currently.</p> <p>JS pointed to queues more generally with traffic volumes returning to normal so agreed that an update on easing congestion would be helpful.</p> <p>The project manager described the huge amount of work involved in producing the business case, as a key part of his progress update. It was estimated the business case document totalled some 1,000 pages.</p> |
| <p>5.</p> | <p>Progress update</p> <p>The Task Force was told site surveys had been taking place, including ground penetrating radar investigations to pinpoint utilities at all points of the scheme. Other surveys included topographical and drainage. Some had been completed, while others were ongoing, along with ground investigation work. Subsequent trial holes might also need to be drilled and this would take place with appropriate communication.</p> <p>Addressing wider drainage issues, the project manager described how investigations had shown flood water from a wide area funnelled towards the Army and Navy – a reason for rainwater flooding seen at the junction previously. He said the sustainable transport package would improve the situation but may not resolve it completely without further upstream drainage improvements and a separate drainage project. He suggested there was a need to manage expectation about the capability of the scheme to address all future flooding issues.</p> <p>Land acquisition was described as another risk for the project. The team now had land interest plans, based on areas ECC may need to purchase. These would give land agents the opportunity to open discussions with landowners. Some landowner discussions were already under way and ongoing. However, compulsory purchase preparations would take place in parallel in the event agreements could not be reached.</p> |

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| <p>6.</p> | <p>Next steps and programme</p> <p>The project manager addressed next steps for the project, including updated highways alignment, drainage design and flood modelling, which were imperative to completing other aspects of the scheme ahead of a planning application, which would include environmental impact screening. The current intention was to submit all three required applications at the same time and in parallel. This was part of pre-application discussions with planners.</p> <p>Ahead of planning, it was now considered additional public consultation may be required for the Park and Ride proposals, specifically Chelmer Valley, in early 2023. This would de-risk the planning application by ensuring the public had ample opportunity to comment, including since changes were made to the overall sustainable transport package. A brief update was given about latest communication about the project.</p> <p>The project manager then addressed the final business case submission and the requirements of the DfT, specifically a need to update traffic modelling. Surveys were planned for Spring 2023, to represent the situation at the time of submission and, significantly, the way in which traffic levels had largely returned to pre-Covid levels. However, with regard to Park and Ride, there was concern about levels of demand being sufficient to warrant expansion of the sites. The project team would focus on this risk, with additional studies of use, including over the traditionally busy next few months, before submission to help present the strongest possible strategic case for the future. A decision on how best to proceed would be made in the coming months.</p> <p>The Task Force was told the project team was taking action to try to mitigate the risk of utility diversions delaying the construction programme. There was an aim to undertake any advanced utility diversions in 2024/25.</p> <p>The project team closed the presentation by updating on the current programme and timescales for key activities, including planning submission, final business case and construction.</p> <p>VF requested slides were issued in advance for the next meeting. VF pointed to the Government's desire for schemes to happen faster and urged the team to look at how the Army and Navy scheme could be delivered faster. VF was keen to understand the situation at the Park and Ride sites and whether use was returning to pre-pandemic levels. If the extra spaces were not required because of the way people shop and work, that needed to be recognised.</p> <p>LW said she believed the Army and Navy scheme was on an 'express-track'. Officers said they were aware of the desire to fast-track projects and VF said she was happy to raise at ministerial level. Officers said the government had recently published its growth plan and a discussion with DfT was planned. Army and Navy would be included in this. VF confirmed she had already asked for a meeting with the new minister.</p> <p>AM questioned the construction period being longer compared with the one shared during the consultation. The project manager explained this was due to the difference between the construction period for the junction and the construction period for all three phases, including the Park and Rides. VF asked for the construction period shown to be broken down into the three phases, and</p> |
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once again raised whether the overall timescale could be reduced and whether this could gain support from the DfT. **JS** said he did not wish to see the Army and Navy junction work delayed to accommodate Park and Ride works.

Officers said the Park and Ride was a crucial part of the overall package, helping remove vehicles from using the junction. The DfT had previously widened its objectives for the MRN fund, with wider focus on sustainable measures. Therefore, the package as a whole, including Park and Ride, put the scheme in a much stronger business case position.

VF said having capacity at Park and Ride was important, particularly during construction, plus it was important for the future. However, the change in habits during and after the pandemic might show the base level had changed and the team should be open-minded about this.

SR said it might be favourable to use Chelmer Valley during construction because of its associated bus lane. The new distributor road and the new station at Beaulieu could also have an impact. **LW** pointed out that enhanced Park and Ride facilities could also make a difference.

LW said it was important to keep re-emphasising the requirement for the Army and Navy Sustainable Transport Package, a point echoed by **JS**. **VF** said people should not be allowed to think that a new junction was not needed and that simply was not the case. The new railway station might help a bit but it would not solve issues at the Army and Navy junction. **VF** re-emphasised both the station and junction were needed.

LW closed the meeting, thanking all attendees for their time.