

Growth Board 25<sup>th</sup> September 2018

Agenda item – Oxford to Cambridge Expressway

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## REPORT TO OXFORDSHIRE GROWTH BOARD OXFORD TO CAMBRIDGE EXPRESSWAY

### REPORT PURPOSE

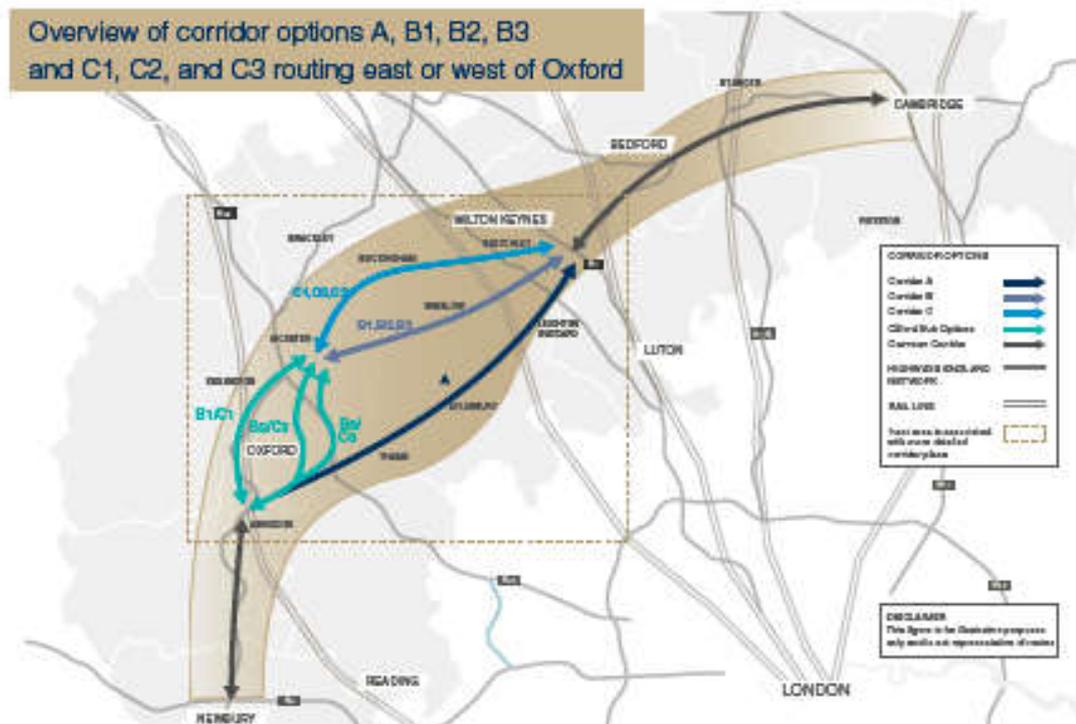
1. To update the Growth Board on the recent announcement made by the Department for Transport / Highways England confirming the preferred corridor for the “missing link” of the proposed Expressway between Oxfordshire and Milton Keynes.

### RECOMMENDATION

- i. That the Growth Board agree the principles to be taken into account in further decision making on the Expressway project

### BACKGROUND

2. Highways England are leading on the Oxford to Cambridge Expressway project for Government. Their project plan outlined last year included a number of milestones, notably a decision on a preferred corridor for the scheme between Oxford and Milton Keynes being made in summer 2018. This is the stage which has now been reached.
3. Three broad corridors were under consideration, two of which, B and C, each had three “sub corridor” variants, as shown below. The report considered existing conditions and constraints and opportunities relating to each, followed by a detailed assessment.



Growth Board 25<sup>th</sup> September 2018

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**CORRIDOR SELECTION**

4. The Government has now announced its choice of corridor. This is Corridor B, the middle option of three considered, broadly following the line of East West Rail. This has been selected because it was “able to support existing transport needs, as well as transformational growth, regeneration and redevelopment across the wider corridor”.
5. However, two of three sub-options around Oxford have been retained for further consideration. These are B1 west of Oxford (including a possible on-line upgrade of the existing A34) and B3 to the south and east of Oxford. Sub Option B2, across Otmoor, has been ruled out. The two remaining options are illustrated in Annex 1.
6. More details of the basis for this decision can be found in Highways England’s Corridor Assessment Report. A link to the Executive Summary of this report can be found at [link]; a copy of the full report is available on the Highways England website.
7. The corridor choice was made using seven strategic objectives with equal weight: Connectivity; Strategic Transformation; Economic Growth; Skills and Accessibility; Planning for the Future; Innovation and Environment. Each of these includes several sub-objectives as outlined in pages 5 to 8 of the Executive Summary report.
8. The results for each corridor are set out on pages 17-24 of the Executive Summary report, with the summary table for all 7 corridor variants reproduced below:

The results of each strategic objective rating as well as the overall rating of corridors are presented in the table below.

Strategic objectives	Summary						
Objectives	A	B1	B2	B3	C1	C2	C3
Connectivity	Highly advantageous	Highly advantageous	Highly advantageous	Highly advantageous	Highly advantageous	Highly advantageous	Highly advantageous
Strategic transformation	Highly advantageous	Highly advantageous	Highly advantageous	Highly advantageous	Slightly advantageous	Slightly advantageous	Slightly advantageous
Economic growth	Highly advantageous	Highly advantageous	Highly advantageous	Highly advantageous	Highly advantageous	Highly advantageous	Highly advantageous
Skills and Accessibility	Highly advantageous	Highly advantageous	Highly advantageous	Highly advantageous	Slightly advantageous	Slightly advantageous	Slightly advantageous
Planning for the future	Slightly advantageous	Highly advantageous	Highly advantageous	Highly advantageous	Highly advantageous	Highly advantageous	Highly advantageous
Environment	Moderately disadvantageous	Highly disadvantageous	Highly disadvantageous	Moderately disadvantageous	Highly disadvantageous	Highly disadvantageous	Moderately disadvantageous
Innovation	Slightly advantageous	Highly advantageous	Highly advantageous	Highly advantageous	Slightly advantageous	Slightly advantageous	Slightly advantageous
Overall rating	Slightly advantageous	Highly advantageous	Highly advantageous	Highly advantageous	Slightly advantageous	Slightly advantageous	Slightly advantageous

■ Highly advantageous  
 ■ Moderately advantageous  
 ■ Slightly advantageous  
 ■ Neutral case  
 ■ Slightly disadvantageous  
 ■ Moderately disadvantageous  
 ■ Highly disadvantageous

9. This shows that Option B performs best overall for most criteria. In terms of environmental impact, this is worst for sub-options B1 and C1 (west of Oxford) and for sub-options B2 and C2 (across Otmoor). These adverse impacts are also reflected in the

Growth Board 25<sup>th</sup> September 2018

Agenda item – Oxford to Cambridge Expressway

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Strategic Delivery Risk Assessment with a red “High Risk” rating for these sub-options, as shown in the summary table below:

**Evaluation of risks to delivery**

	Corridor						
Risk Area	A	B1	B2	B3	C1	C2	C3
Constructability	Medium risk						
Consentability	Medium risk	High risk	High risk	Medium risk	High risk	High risk	Medium risk
Stakeholder acceptance	Medium risk						
Flexibility	High risk	High risk	High risk	Medium risk	High risk	High risk	Medium risk
Overall rating	Medium risk	High risk	High risk	Medium risk	High risk	High risk	Medium risk

■ Low risk   
 ■ Medium risk   
 ■ High risk

10. This suggests this could have led Highways England to choose corridor B3 in preference to B1, ruling out the latter, especially as this has a very similar strategic profile to B2. But B1 was retained by Highways England on the grounds that *“it does however have the lowest predicted outturn cost and could offer an online solution around Oxford utilising existing strategic road network”*.
11. This is a significant concern, given that the County Council in particular has expressed clear views that *“Specifically, the Expressway must not use the section of the A34 through central Oxfordshire (broadly defined as at least the section between the Lodge Hill junction, north of Abingdon and the Bicester Road junction, east of Kidlington). This section is where the A34 currently operates as both a regional/national strategic route and a local distributor route (forming part of the Oxford Ring Road) and it is essential that the new Expressway infrastructure provides a completely separate strategic route to avoid this conflict of use.”* It is recognised this is only one consideration.

**GROWTH BOARD CONSIDERATION**

12. Councils and other bodies will have different views on responses to this announcement, some of which have been expressed. However, a set of common principles has been developed for the Expressway project, for consideration by this Board, which would allow Oxfordshire to have an overall strategic position and make clear the main issues which require further consideration, whilst allowing individual views to be given. These principles say that any decision on the Expressway should:
  - i. Help to secure a more sustainable and integrated Oxfordshire Transport Network by:
    - Providing enhanced local connections to reduce transport pressures on local roads around key settlements.

Growth Board 25<sup>th</sup> September 2018

Agenda item – Oxford to Cambridge Expressway

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- Linking with and strengthen key transport hubs, such as integrated bus, rail and Park and Ride facilities.
  - Securing opportunities for the development of new Park and Ride connections to Oxford, Milton Keynes and Cambridge and rapid bus links between the three cities and surrounding market towns.
- ii.* Minimise its environmental damage and avoid sensitive areas such as areas with SSIs and protected habitats.
- iii.* Support growth and the investigation of new settlement options through Joint Spatial Plans.
- iv.* Be future proofed, in terms of taking account of modal shift and innovation such as the rise of autonomous vehicles.
13. These principles, in the light of the corridor decision and the fast-changing Oxfordshire context, further suggest that the following factors, many of which follow on from the principles outlined above, need to be taken into account in the next stages:
- i.* The need to reinforce the point that, in Oxfordshire, housing and affordable housing are critical to unlocking growth potential (*“Increased investment in infrastructure to improve connectivity and support the delivery of new homes, particularly affordable homes, is critical to unlocking Oxfordshire’s economic potential”*) which reinforces principle 12 (v) above
  - ii.* The decision needs to address the A34 – dealing with congestion, not adding to it, referencing the argument made in paragraph 11 above
  - iii.* Include reference to pre-eminence of the East West Rail link – the expressway needs to be integrated with this decision, making sure it supports the rail link and does not undermine the use or case for it. A major concern of the option selected is that it carries a higher risk of undermining East West Rail by performing too similar a function along a closely parallel corridor, rather than a proposal which would complement or feed the railway
  - iv.* In our criteria on point 12 (iii) above, links and support to key transport nodes, there is an opportunity to place greater emphasis on sustainable forms of transport, including pedestrians and cycling
  - v.* The need for certainty and early clarity about decision and process – especially important in Oxfordshire because of our work on the Joint Statutory Spatial Plan and Local Industrial Strategy in planning for future growth
  - vi.* The need to be clearer about what we expect from the next stages in the process, especially for further consultation and engagement, including a clear understanding of the evidence base behind the option and ensuring all supporting information is put it in the public domain.

Growth Board 25<sup>th</sup> September 2018

Agenda item – Oxford to Cambridge Expressway

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**NEXT STEPS**

14. Highways England is planning local Council and Stakeholder engagement, to provide an update on the decision and outline the next stages in the project, proposed to take place this Autumn with details to be confirmed.
15. The next formal, decision-making, stage on the project programme is route selection. Whereas the corridors are wide swathes of land, routes will be more clearly defined as single lines on a map. This offers the advantage of greater clarity and less ambiguity when Highways England puts these to public consultation, planned for autumn 2019.
16. It is understood that the choice of east or west of Oxford will be framed in the same way, i.e. that there will be one or more lines of route to the west of Oxford (which could include on-line upgrading of the existing A34) and to the east of Oxford.
17. In the coming months Highways England will be working up a long list of route options within chosen corridor B1/B3. These will be sifted, taking into account the case for the scheme under the Government's headline business case tests, which are familiar from our experience in developing major infrastructure projects:
  - Strategic
  - Economic
  - Managerial
  - Financial
  - Commercial
18. This work will be carried out by specialist teams covering: Traffic Modelling; Growth Modelling; Engineering Design; Environmental Impact Assessment; Economic Assessment and Stakeholder Engagement. More details on these areas have been set out by Highways England previously.
19. This high-level approach suggests there may not be sufficient opportunity to emphasise the critical factors the Growth Board may wish to see in influencing the Expressway route development. In particular, there is a strong argument for explicitly including "supporting delivery of housing and affordable housing" as a criterion for the option selection process, in line with the emphasis Government and the NIC have placed in taking forward infrastructure and housing delivery together.
20. We also need to ensure that any complementary investment in the Oxfordshire Highway Network required to support the Expressway route is included as part of the overall proposals, and that shorter term existing commitments (for example on introducing safety measures on the existing A34) are introduced.
21. Finally, it will also be important to consider views of neighbouring authorities and the England's Economic Heartland Area in reaching a final decision on the scheme.

Growth Board 25<sup>th</sup> September 2018

Agenda item – Oxford to Cambridge Expressway

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Support growth and the investigation of new settlement options through Joint Spatial Plans'