

Agenda Item IMD18

INDIVIDUAL EXECUTIVE MEMBER DECISION

REFERENCE IMD: IMD 2023/18

TITLE	DfT/National Highways Route Strategies Consultation Response
DECISION TO BE MADE BY	Executive Member for Active Travel, Transport and Highways - Paul Fishwick
DATE, MEETING ROOM and TIME	4 August 2023 LGF8 at 11am
WARD	None Specific;
DIRECTOR / KEY OFFICER	Director, Place and Growth - Giorgio Framalocco

PURPOSE OF REPORT (Inc Strategic Outcomes)

This report sets out our responses to consultations regarding the Strategic Road Network and particularly the M4.

The consultations are intended to inform:

- The Department for Transport's long term vision to 2050 and
- National Highways' ongoing strategy and its development of the next Route Investment Strategy which will set out the expenditure that National Highways will consider from 2025-2030.

Key areas of interest relate to the Climate Emergency, noise, and safety.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive Member for Active Travel, Transport and Highways agrees the responses be submitted to the consultations regarding the Strategic Road Network and particularly the M4, as appended to the report.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

This report outlines the consultations which have been launched by the Department for Transport and National Highways. The responses to these consultations are appended along with a summary of each of the documents considered as part of completing these.

Background

National Highways issued an invitation to stakeholders on Friday 19th May 2023, requesting feedback on their draft Route Strategies documents. Twenty '**Route Strategy Initial Overview Reports**' have been published by National Highways. These cover twenty areas or routes within England, of which the key one for Wokingham Borough Council is the London to Wales report as this covers the section of M4 within the borough.

Alongside these reports, National Highways has also published their **Strategic Road Network (SRN) Initial Report** and **Connecting the Country** report.

The SRN Initial Report features National Highways' proposals to government about what is required in the next road period ("Route Investment Strategy 3" (RIS3)), covering 2025 to 2030. The SRN Initial report is informed by the Route Strategy reports which cover the state of the network now and in the immediate future. Connecting the Country is National Highways' long-term strategic plan setting out their 2050 vision (and masterplan) for the SRN. The 2050 vision underpins the SRN Initial Report and Route Strategies for future road periods to align delivery towards the 2050 vision.

The above suite of three National Highways documents is accessible via the Future Roads website <https://nationalhighways.co.uk/futureroads>

To capture feedback on these documents, National Highways has launched online feedback forms for the **Route Strategy Initial Overview Reports** and **Connecting the Country**. The feedback forms for these can also be found at <https://nationalhighways.co.uk/futureroads> and are open until 11th August 2023. Feedback provided on these documents will be taken into account when National Highways finalise their suite of planning documents and their advice to Government on the future of the strategic road network.

Separately, the Department for Transport (DfT) has consulted on the National Highways' proposals in the **SRN Initial Report** and **Shaping the Future of England's Strategic Roads** on the gov.uk website.

The DfT consultation ran for eight weeks from 18th May to Thursday 13th July 2023. Due to these timescales the response to this has been submitted subject to IEMD ahead of our submission to the consultation/feedback on the other two documents. Stakeholders such as Wokingham Borough Council have been invited to contribute to this as feedback will inform how the Government shapes the next stages of the Road Investment Strategy (RIS process). The link to the Department for Transport consultation on the **SRN Initial Report** and **Shaping the Future of England's Strategic Roads** can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/shaping-the-future-of-englands-strategic-roads>.

Finally, a fifth document has also been published by National Highways. This is their '**Environmental Sustainability Strategy**' <https://nationalhighways.co.uk/ESS> which complements the Road Investment Strategy reports. This latter document appears to be a final document and is not part of the consultation process.

The Appendices to this report contain the responses and summaries of each of the documents considered in the two consultations. In addition, the links to the original documents are provided above. These appendices are numbered as follows:

- Appendix 1 – Response to Consultation on SRN initial report and Shaping the Country (sent on 13 July 2023)
- Appendix 2 – Summary of SRN initial Report and Shaping the Country documents
- Appendix 3 – Response to Connecting the Country consultation (due to be submitted by 11 August)
- Appendix 4 – Response to Route Strategy Initial Overview Report (London to Wales) (due to be submitted by 11 August)
- Appendix 5 – Summary of Connecting the Country and Route Strategy Initial Overview Report (London to Wales)

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces unprecedented financial pressures as a result of; the longer term impact of the COVID-19 crisis, Brexit, the war in Ukraine and the general economic climate of rising prices and the increasing cost of debt. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are optimised and are focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	n/a	n/a	n/a
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	n/a	n/a	n/a
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	n/a	n/a	n/a

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

This IEMD is to agree the submissions to both National Highways’ and the Department for Transport’s consultations. There are no cost implications relating to the responses, however in the longer term this might influence those departments decisions in future which may in turn impact on the council. These decisions and the impact they might have on the council cannot be predicted at this time.

Cross-Council Implications

In the Shaping the Future of England’s Strategic Road report National Highways proposed the “trunking” and “de-trunking” of several routes. Of the nineteen routes proposed for trunking nationally two pass through Wokingham Borough as follows:

Road	Route
A329(M) + A322	A329(M) + A329 + A322 – Reading to Guildford
A33+A339	A33+A339 – Reading (M4 J11) to Basingstoke

“Trunking” means adding roads to the Strategic Road Network which are currently managed locally. This could have wide-ranging implications for the council across a range of council departments including planning as an increased number of developments may have an effect of the SRN. This may also impact upon the Local Plan. In response to our thoughts on whether to “trunk” these roads the Council responded “No”.

As part of RIS3 there is an objective for Improved Environmental Outcomes. The following challenges are noted within the Wokingham section of the M4; air quality, high noise levels, risks of flooding along the M4 South of Reading. The documents state that they will work toward mitigating these, but this may have an impact across the council, including with the Climate Emergency Team.

As these documents will be guiding both the short term and long term visions for National Highways and the Department for Transport there is the possibility for implications to be felt across the council, in particularly with the Climate Emergency team. The Climate Emergency Team has been consulted and agree with the support for the environmental/sustainability objectives as mentioned above, but also note that this may have impacts on the team's budgets/capacity depending on the extent to which these are implemented. As such this may require additional support from national government sources and the council itself.

Public Sector Equality Duty

This IEMD is to agree the submissions to both National Highways' and the Department for Transport's consultations. As per the finance section, there are no Equality implications to the responses, however in the longer term this might influence those departments decisions in future which may in turn impact on the council. These decisions and the impact they might have on the council cannot be predicted at this time.

SUMMARY OF CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Director – Resources and Assets	No comment
Monitoring Officer	No comment
Leader of the Council	No comment

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Town and Parish Councils

Twyford Parish Council	Twyford Parish Council are in full support of Wokingham Borough Council's submissions regarding the National Highways Route Strategies Consultation documents.
Woodley Town Council	<p>The Council shares WBC's concern regarding the M4 Smart Motorway, in terms of the proven danger of the loss of a hard shoulder on the M4 and other motorways.</p> <p>The Council believes more attention should be paid to net zero environmental targets.</p> <p>The Council is against road charging as a solution to reducing car use; this should be avoided in view of the pressure it would likely put on local roads - Woodley has (or is connected to) two access points to the M4 along the A329(M) and, as such, would suffer greatly from traffic finding alternative routes.</p> <p>Verges' and central reservations on motorways must be kept cut at all times; long grass on verges and central reservations provide a danger to motorists by reducing visibility.</p>

Reasons for considering the report in Part 2
N/A

List of Background Papers
Appendix 1 – Response to Consultation on SRN initial report and Shaping the Country (sent on 13 July 2023)
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