

OXFORD-CAMBRIDGE EXPRESSWAY CORRIDOR OPTIONS
Councillor N Blake – Leader of the Council
Councillor Mrs Paternoster – Cabinet Member for Growth Strategy

1 Purpose

- 1.1 To consider the corridor options for the 'missing link' for the Oxford-Milton Keynes-Cambridge Corridor and to agree the key considerations to be included in the authority's written response to Highways England required by 12th April 2018, along with AVDC's written response to the National Infrastructure Commission's Report, 'Partnering for Prosperity: A new deal for the Cambridge-Milton Keynes-Oxford Arc'.

2 Recommendations/for decision

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| 2.1 | Cabinet is asked to consider the report and agree the principle points summarised from the Members sessions to be input into the authority's written response as set out in paragraph 4.14. |
| 2.2 | To delegate to the Director with responsibility for planning, in consultation with the Leader and Cabinet Member for Growth Strategy the writing of and submission of the formal written response to Highways England. |
| 2.3 | Cabinet is asked to support AVDC's written response to the National Infrastructure Commission's Report, 'Partnering for Prosperity: A new deal for the Cambridge-Milton Keynes-Oxford Arc', along the lines of the document attached as Appendix 3 and delegate to the Director with responsibility for planning, in consultation with the Leader and Cabinet Member for Growth Strategy the submission of the formal response to Government. |

3 Executive summary

- 3.1 The National Infrastructure Commission (NIC) report 'Partnering for Prosperity', published in November 2017 sees East West Infrastructure as a once-in-a-generation opportunity to unlock land for new settlements and alleviate some of the constraints in the arc in terms of housing affordability as well as congestion and to better link the thriving economies of Oxford and Cambridge. The decision of the 'missing link' of the Expressway corridor (option A, B or C) between M40 and M1 is key. Highways England, who have been commissioned by Department for Transport to deliver the expressway project, are seeking views from stakeholders on the preferred corridor and least preferred corridor. Members seminars have been held to seek views but no overall consensus has been reached on a preferred corridor. This report sets out the key considerations raised during the members seminars which focused on the lack of information available to be able to make a fully informed choice regarding the corridor route at this time and concern that the decision about this important aspect is being made in isolation of decisions for locations and scale of new settlements across the corridor and areas for economic growth. Comments were also made about the absence of evidence from connectivity studies or other detailed analysis. It is recommended that the written response be prepared and submitted on this basis.
- 3.2 The NIC's report also contained several recommendations which officers have drafted responses to. These are both attached in Appendix 3.

4 Supporting information

- 4.1 Oxford – Milton Keynes – Cambridge region has been identified as one of the most significant growth corridors in the country; these three economic areas being some of the fastest growing, innovative and productive in the UK. However, there is currently poor east-west connectivity, resulting in restricted interaction between these economies coupled with challenges including congestion, journey times and housing unaffordability which threaten further economic growth and reduce the attractiveness of the area as a place to live and work. The National Infrastructure Commission (NIC) in its report 'Partnering for Prosperity – a new deal for the Cambridge-Milton Keynes-Oxford Arc' (published November 2017), stated that without urgent action, a chronic undersupply of homes could jeopardise growth, limit access to labour and put prosperity at risk.
- 4.2 The NIC report stated that East West Rail (EWR) and the Oxford – Cambridge Expressway provide a once-in-a-generation opportunity to unlock land for new settlements. Estimates prepared for the Commission suggest that meeting the needs of the arc's future population and workforce which is set to increase by between 1.4-1.9 million in the period to 2050 could require 23,000 – 30,000 net new homes per year but taken in aggregate, current local plans make provision for fewer than 16,000 homes per year. Accommodating between 1.4 and 1.9 million people could require between 782,000 and 1,020,000 new homes by 2050 but current development plans, if realised in full, might be expected to deliver only 230,000 new homes.
- 4.3 With the level of growth indicated in the Objectively Assessed Need for areas like Aylesbury Vale shown in the recent Government consultation on this matter, and the increases to housing figures for the areas around the Vale, it is anticipated that the Vale will need to be a key contributor to the overall housing figure that the corridor is expected to achieve. Current calculations show Aylesbury Vale needs to allow for 970 dwellings per annum, but this will need to increase to 1499 dwellings per annum under the new methodology. It should be noted that these figures are for Aylesbury Vale only and do not include any unmet need.
- 4.4 An Expressway between Oxford and Cambridge (M4 and A14/M11) could alleviate some of the housing pressures facing both Oxford and Cambridge, improving connectivity to the central area and unlocking aspirational levels of growth in the corridor.
- 4.5 An Expressway is "an A-road that is as well-designed as a motorway and is able to offer the same standard of journey to users. At a minimum, Expressways will be largely or entirely carriageway standard roads that are safe, well-built and resilient to delays, have junctions that are safe, well built and resilient to delays, have junctions that are largely or entirely grade separated, include modern safety measures and construction standards and technology to manage traffic and provide better information to drivers" (RIS 1, December 2014).
- 4.6 The Expressway involves the conversion of sections of the A34, A421, A428 and A1 but there is a 'missing link' between Oxford and Milton Keynes and following appraisal processes, three corridor options (which include sub options to route around Oxford) have been short listed;
- Option A – via Aylesbury
 - Option B - the East West Rail (EWR) corridor

- Option C - the existing A421 corridor

- 4.7 Stage 0 of the Oxford to Cambridge Project, undertaken by DfT, involved Strategy, shaping and prioritisation and in July 2017, it was passed on to Highways England to initiate Stage 1 of the project. Stage 1 is split into 1a which is identification of the corridor (option A, B or C) to be complete by summer 2018 and 1b which is route selection within the preferred corridor, to be complete by Autumn 2020 following a public consultation to commence in Autumn 2019. The key milestones of the project thereafter comprise of the development phase which will include a Development Consent Order application which will be subject to Examination and a Public Inquiry to enable construction to commence 2025 with a view to the road being open in 2030.
- 4.8 As part of the process to identify the corridor, Jacobs have been appointed by Highways England to carry out stakeholder engagement. A number of stakeholder reference groups have been set up as well as a strategic stakeholder group and members and officers forums in order to gain understanding of the issues and concerns relating to the options. Technical teams have been working in parallel to collate information and evidence on traffic and economic modelling, environment and infrastructure.
- 4.9 Engagement events have set out the strategic aims of the Project:
- Safe and serviceable network
 - Supporting economic growth
 - More free-flowing network
 - Improved environment
 - Accessible and integrated
- 4.10 The following objectives for the Ox-Cam scheme have also been set out (updated following the publication of the NIC report):
1. Connectivity – provide an east-west strategic road link between MK and Oxford that delivers enhanced connectivity through faster, safer and more reliable connections across the corridor in the broad arc
 2. Strategic Transformation – support the creation of an integrated corridor between Oxford and Cambridge, reflecting and advancing plans for infrastructure, housing, business investment & development
 3. Economic Growth – unlock economic potential by facilitating strategic growth to the benefit of the UK economy through increased productivity, employment and housing and maximising synergies with potential growth associated with East West Rail
 4. Skills and Accessibility – promote accessibility and wider socio-economic benefits by improving access to job opportunities
 5. Planning for the Future – Reduce the impact of new housing on local roads for communities and contribute to better safety, security and health whilst promoting sustainable transport modes
 6. Environment – To provide a healthy, natural environment by reducing congestion and supporting sustainable travel modes and promoting equality and opportunity
 7. Innovation – apply innovative technology wherever possible to support the sustainable planning, construction and operation of transport measures

4.11 At the end of February 2018, the Project Team took the decision to give key stakeholders the opportunity to provide written feedback to Highways England to help inform the Summer 2018 Corridor decision. To aid in their analysis of the feedback, views were specifically asked to be framed around the following questions and to be submitted before 12th April 2018:

- 1) What is your preferred corridor and why?
- 2) Are there any corridors you do not support, and why?

4.12 HE confirmed that the information on the broad corridors being considered can be found at the Strategic Study Stage 3 Report by DfT dated 28 November 2016. This report recognised the potential for the Expressway to unlock aspirational growth by providing increased road capacity but also delivering strategic housing sites and set out next steps to assess further the economic, environmental, transport impacts and value for money as well as further analysis of the potential interaction with EWR. However, it did include some initial analysis which is summarised in the table below and broadly scored accordingly (1 – best performing and 2 – less well performing). This initial analysis showed option C as the lesser performing option.

	Corridor A – Aylesbury	Corridor B – Line of East West rail	Corridor C – Buckingham
Distance in miles	1 (40 miles)	2 (42-46 miles)	3 (47-51 miles)
Scheme Costs – Base cost (plus uncertainty and project risk)	2 (£3,452 million)	1 (£3,035-£3,366 million)	3 (£3,216 - £3,514 million)
Scheme beneficiaries – all would benefit freight industry, business travellers, commuters, leisure travellers, local communities and wider economy	1 (reduced traffic congestion referencing Thame and Aylesbury)	2 (complement EWR)	3
Estimated journey time M4 Chieveley to M1 (MK) Eastbound(E), Westbound (W) Base line 2015: E 01:39 W 01:35	1 E 00:57 W 00:56	2 E 00:59-01:01 W 00:57-00:59	3 E 01:03-01:05 W 01:02-01:04
Predicted change in workers within 45 mins drive time of key corridor locations – all 3 routes offer significant overlapping of 45 min drive time catchments – potential for stronger relationship	2	1 Specific analysis on this route showing an additional 340,000 people predicted to be brought into 45 min drive time of MK, 123,000 more into Aylesbury catchment	2
Summary of 2041 Socio-economic impacts – direct transport access and travel benefits for total no. of jobs by 2041	1 736,000	2 683,000	2 689,000
Total	8	10	16

4.13 To inform the written response which AVDC intend to submit, two Members seminars have been held (15.03.18 and 22.03.18) to inform Members of the process above and initial analysis carried out and to seek their views. Officers had also mapped the constraints and existing planned growth areas in the Vale for information and provided commentary on the growth context.

4.14 No consensus was reached in these sessions to the questions posed but some key considerations were raised. These principle points are summarised below to be incorporated into the final response:

- The need to be clear on the purpose for the Expressway and what is trying to be achieved in order to answer these questions well
- A proper informed view is not possible to set out based on the evidence currently available or in the proposed timelines
- Corridor decision needs to be planned in an integrated way to ensure that as well as improving the utility of the national road network, it maximises the potential to support and deliver new and aspirational growth whilst preserving the Vale as a great place to live
- Engagement process for the corridor decision is not effective as consultation process is not offered until route selection in 2019
- Concern that project is being carried out in isolation to and in advance of discussions and progress on scale and locations for growth
- Serious concern that the Expressway is being carved up as a discrete Highways project and not joined up with the vision to unlock land for new settlements as championed by the NIC. The Project team, which is headed up by DfT – needs to be integrated with other Government departments – MHCLG and BEIS and treated as a priority as part of the focus on the Corridor as a serious competitor to the Midlands Engine and Northern Powerhouse
- Need to be clear on the corridor choice and interplay with place making and place shaping
- Lack of context to the consultation in terms of the numbers of houses expected to be delivered and the overall scale of development
- Need results of the wider connectivity study currently being prepared by England's Economic Heartlands and information on junctions to understand how the Expressway can link in with existing road network and places and what other infrastructure can be brought forward to truly unlock economic growth and the right connections
- Sequencing of announcements is key - concern that mechanism for capturing land value uplift is not in place prior to the corridor announcement. This is a key opportunity to capture land value uplift to deliver infrastructure and improve connections
- One size fits all engagement process is not appropriate; specific and regular dialogue is needed with Aylesbury Vale as approximately 70% of the missing road length passes through the District, dialogue to include liaison with MPs
- Require more information from Government on the intentions for the area such as the announcements for new settlements or garden communities and to knit these elements together
- Difficult to comment on the corridor without knowing the position on either end eg. Oxford sub options – noting the current issues with A34
- Gigabyte broadband has the potential to substantially reduce the need for physical movements and may influence the need for hard infrastructure

4.15 Following the seminars, a number of members put forward their own views on the options presented and individual responses to the questions posed.

4.16 The main points raised by those members at the seminars with regard to each option and question are summarised below:

	Reasons for Preferred	Reasons for least preferred
Option A	Scored best in Stage 3 report; delivers dual carriageway bypass for Aylesbury as well as one for Wing (need bypass to SE of Oxford); potential for delivery of new homes at Leighton Buzzard, Aylesbury, Cheddington and Haddenham – all 3 have a mainline station; close to Enterprise Zones and will link these with Science parks in ‘brain belt’; potential for HS2 station; land value capture opportunities to develop around this area	Increase in local congestion as will attract more development; insufficient capacity for growth; constrained by current committed development and AONB and Green Belt; little or no benefit to Aylesbury Vale; would also require upgrades of Cheddington and Leighton Buzzard railway stations; environmental constraints AAL etc; would not benefit or easily connect to Buckingham, Bicester or Northern Aylesbury Vale or offer any relief to the A421; concern how to navigate road around Aylesbury owing to development committed and position of Historic Park and Garden
Option B	Sensible to deliver fastest road; delivers significant housing and economic growth potential in Vale in contained areas; opens up potential development land even for a new town and aspirational growth at scale; some containment to growth using EWR rail boundary and creating a genuine corridor offering advantages for road and rail in one corridor where development will then naturally occur; B1 option links to Aylesbury; connects two of Enterprise Zones; potential for HS2 station at the crossing point with HS2 (providing N/S connectivity) and a site for development; less environmental constraints; provide equal local transport benefits for and opportunities for link roads to Buckingham, Winslow, Bicester and Aylesbury relieving pressure on A421;	Scored worse than option A in stage 3 report; not a sustainable location for housing growth and road network is not suitable; adverse environmental impact on rural Vale as development would be on greenfield sites; danger of coalescence with Bicester and MK; should be used to solve existing infrastructure deficit not add to it; concern about competition with EWR and duplicating benefits
Option C		Does not open up much land potential for development; fails to link with or benefit Aylesbury or the two enterprise zones to the south of the Vale ignoring new developments

		in Aylesbury Vale; insufficient space for major new housing or economic growth due to flood plain and other natural features; unviable owing to amount of roundabouts/junctions, disruptive and expensive
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- 4.17 Opinion also endorsed for the road to be linked from the M40 at Bicester (new junction) with a new road to Bedford and there was considerable favour with a hybrid option from M40 at Bicester (corridor B) to then link into Aylesbury (corridor A) (option labelled B1 option). North-south connections were also expressed as being important and that the A41 west of Aylesbury needs to be improved as well as extension of the A41 south dual carriageway from Aylesbury to East West rail spine.
- 4.18 No overall consensus can be derived from AVDC Members views on the response to question 1, with corridors A and B being “preferred” but for different reasons, as well as a hybrid option of A and B. The lack of support for option C as a preferred route means this could be put forward as the response to question 2 expanding on the points summarised above.
- 4.19 Bearing in mind the principle points bulleted and the lack of consensus on a preferred corridor, it is recommended that the written response from AVDC to Highways England focuses on the main principle points. The above reasoning from Members can be expanded upon to express the benefits and limitations of options A and B (and the hybrid option) in response to question 1 if Members wish for a view to be submitted with option C being expressed as the least preferred route. BCC have confirmed a preference for option A which remains their position, which they set out in the Call for Evidence submission to the NIC in August 2016. AVDC did not express a view on the corridor at that time.
- 4.20 The key message to deliver in the response from Aylesbury Vale is that investment in infrastructure is welcomed but it is critical that the purpose of the Expressway is properly considered and understood in order to properly inform and influence the corridor choice and that sequencing of announcements makes sense to this purpose. Any of the three corridor choices are feasible but depending on what needs to be achieved, affects the weighting of the benefits and limitations of the options. AVDC consider it is critical that the road delivers more than just a connection between places at the fastest possible time but that it truly unlocks transformational and aspirational growth to maximise this once in a generation opportunity which must not be wasted.
- 4.21 To that end, the Council consider that the Expressway project needs to be delivered as a co-ordinated and integral part of the wider ambitions for the Oxford to Cambridge arc as set out in the NIC report. The correct sequencing of decisions on settlement options, infrastructure, land value capture and new governance arrangements to allow effective interplay between these elements needs to be in place to maximise this opportunity. This also needs to be joined up at Government level to ensure the area achieves its full potential. As such, the Council’s response to the Expressway questions will also be framed as part of our overall response to the NIC report.
- 4.22 The Council are willing to partner in discussions and continue and increase dialogue and engagement with Highways England and Government in the decision making processes on the Expressway both at an officer and member level. The importance that this Government scheme has for our area is

unparalleled across the corridor and there is therefore a special case for the Vale to be particularly and closely involved with the planning.

5 Options considered

- 5.1 There is an option not to submit any response to Highways England but the location of the Expressway will have a significant impact on the growth of Aylesbury Vale and therefore, submitting our views is considered essential.

6 Reasons for Recommendation

- 6.1 To set out the Cabinet's view in respect of how to respond to the questions posed by Highways England.

7 Resource implications

- 7.1 None immediately as our work in relation to the expressway is being met from within existing resources.

Contact Officer
Background Documents

Claire Britton 01296 585471
Strategic Study Stage 3 Report
NIC 'Partnering for Prosperity' report

Appendices: AVDC Response to Call for Evidence Aug 2016
Corridor options – officer options
AVDC Response to the National Infrastructure Commission Report
Director Generals' Letter re Cambridge – Milton Keynes – Oxford
corridor next steps letter