

Leicestershire County Council's response to National Highways Route Strategies Development for RIS3 - December 2021

1. Introduction

Leicestershire County Council welcomes the opportunity to provide evidence and input into the third round of Route Strategies.

The Strategic Road Network (SRN) in Leicestershire is comprised of:

- M1
- M6
- M42/A42
- M69
- A5
- A14
- A46
- A50 (west of M1 J24)
- A52
- A453

Our comments are structured as follows:

- **Section 2:** Traffic conditions on the SRN in Leicestershire (by route), with our route-specific 'asks',
- **Section 3:** Strategic issues and strategic 'asks'.

1.1 Policy context

Our evidence and comments are informed by the following local policies relating to the long-term operation of the local road network in Leicestershire.

1.1.1 Local Transport Plan 3 (LTP3)

The LTP3 was approved in March 2011 and contains six strategic transport goals. Goal 1 is to have a transport system that supports a prosperous economy and provides successfully for population growth. We are currently developing our next Local Transport Plan (4) and it is envisaged that it will be underpinned by a similar Goal to LTP3 Goal 1.

1.1.2 Leicester and Leicestershire Strategic Growth Plan (SGP) and Strategic Transport Priorities (LLSTP)

The SGP provides the long-term (up to 2050) vision for planned growth for Leicestershire. It was approved by Leicestershire County Council, Leicester City Council, the seven Leicestershire district councils, and the Leicester and Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership (LLEP) in 2018. In November 2020, Leicestershire County Council and Leicester City Council published the LLSTP, which sets out the transport needs associated with the planned growth set out in the SGP.

1.1.3 *Climate Emergency Declaration*

Leicestershire County Council declared a climate emergency in May 2019. As part of the declaration, we committed to achieving carbon neutrality for our own operations by 2030, and to work with partners and lobby the Government towards the wider 2030 target. Work is ongoing to revise our Strategic Plan and Single Outcome Framework to incorporate these environment and climate change commitments.

2. **Traffic conditions on the SRN in Leicestershire**

We present our view of traffic conditions and issues on the SRN in Leicestershire geographically (South-North or West-East) by route, rather than categorising them by type of issue or National Highways objective.

2.1 **M1**

The M1 in Leicestershire is a primary north-south route between Southern England and major northern cities like Sheffield and Leeds. It is also a key connector of east-west routes, such as the A50 and A14 (including onwards to the east coast deep water ports). The proximity of the route to the City of Leicester means that it is often used for more local journeys, especially for traffic moving around the Leicester area.

Our assessment of this part of the SRN indicates that it is unlikely to be able to support future growth. Indeed, Leicestershire County Council's Pan-Regional Transport Model (PRTM) indicates that capacity at some sections is likely to reach 90% by 2037 in the Baseline scenario, before Local Plan growth is considered¹.

Capacity issues at M1 Junction 21 affect wider local road network. This is exacerbated by a general lack of route resilience, particularly around Leicester, which is just off the junction. The congestion resulting from frequent incidents at or near the junction have major economic and environmental impacts on much of the western part of the Leicester area, particularly as the junction forms the main SRN access to the City of Leicester. The junction is highlighted in our Local Transport Plan 3 (LTP3) as affecting inter-urban travel, as well as connectivity to Leicester and the southern suburbs, at peak times.

The link between junctions 21 and 21a, together with the junctions themselves, is of particular importance to traffic using the A46 corridor. However, this stretch is subject to significant congestion and accidents, especially at peak times. For example, between 2015 and 2019 there were 21 collisions at M1 Junction 21, and 15 at M1 Junction 21a. Collisions at the junctions, and on the link between, can cause significant disruption to traffic not just on the M1, but also on the local road network as a result of the use of diversion routes or traffic backing up on the local roads approaching the junctions.

The Midlands Connect A46 Corridor Study (Phase 2) also identifies the M1 junctions 21 and 21a, and the link between the two junctions as significant causes of delay to

¹ Source: Charnwood Local Plan Mitigation: The role of the Strategic Road Network in the context of planned growth

traffic using the A46 corridor. Congestion and delays on this link have knock-on impacts on the A46, which connects to the M1 South. Severe delays can affect the A46 as far back as the A46/A50 Brantings Roundabout.

Sub-standard weaving lengths, extensive sections of hard shoulder drop, and narrow structures all add to the issues faced by this link. It also should be noted that the link is the site of a designated Air Quality Management Area, and that air quality issues in this area will be exacerbated by congestion and high traffic volumes on the M1.

A Garden Village at Whetstone Pastures is being considered in Blaby District in parallel with a proposal for a new Junction 20A on the M1 where it passes under the A426. If delivered, this could have significant benefits for the operation of M1 Junction 21 (M69/A5460/A563), and consequently for the A46, over and above supporting delivery of the proposed Garden Village development.

Closures on the link between junctions 22 and 23 and associated diversions cause significant issues on the surrounding local roads. Although these roads are approved for use as an emergency diversion route, they are not suitable for the volume and nature of traffic which would normally use the M1 and should not be used for planned works without express consent of Leicestershire County Council. Efforts should also be made to reduce the number of unplanned incidents on the M1 which necessitate use of these roads as an emergency diversion route.

Junction 24 and the surrounding area is also the site of several accidents and congestion and delays on the M1 in the northern part of Leicestershire/south Nottinghamshire have knock on effects on other routes, including the A453 and A50. However, whilst there is a good standard grade-separated junction, we suspect that there is probably very little more that can be done at this location to provide further capacity within the existing Junction 24 to 24a arrangements. However, proposals for a Freeport; the Development Corporation proposals; the now proposed 'HS2 station' at East Midlands Parkway; and further growth in and around East Midlands Airport are likely to place significant extra pressures on these two junctions.

Our Asks

- Identify suitable schemes in the current RIS3 pipeline of projects, such as M1 Leicester Western Access and North Leicestershire Extra Capacity, and deliver those schemes in RIS3.
- Development funding in RIS3 to develop a pipeline project for a new M1 J20a for delivery in RIS4/5.
- To ensure further coordinated development and delivery of upgrades to the M1 in and around M1 Junction 24 to 24a to support the considerable growth proposals in north Leicestershire/south Nottinghamshire.

2.2 M6

In our view, the M1/M6/A14 junction improvement has resolved most of the M6 issues which affect Leicestershire. However, when incidents and roadworks occur on the M6, diverting traffic onto the A5 can cause significant issues on that poor standard route. This is covered in detail under section 1.5, A5.

2.3 M42/A42

Issues on the M42 and A42 in Leicestershire mainly arise as secondary effects of incidents on the M1 in and around M1 Junctions 23a to 25.

The corridor is heavily used by HGVs, but there is a lack of proper services and HGV parking provision along the route. The recent national discussions regarding the lack of HGV drivers have highlighted the important role played by rest facilities, particularly overnight facilities, in creating comfortable working conditions and recruiting and retaining drivers.

We expect further pressures on the corridor as a result of development. For example, a new logistics and distribution hub, 'Mercia Park', is currently under construction near M42 Junction 11 and once complete will accommodate various businesses including Jaguar Land Rover, resulting in additional commuter and freight traffic using the corridor.

2.4 M69

The primary issue for Leicestershire relating to the M69 is the lack of south facing slip roads at Junction 2, which restricts access to the SRN for Leicestershire residents (albeit evidence shows that such slip roads could not be delivered alone without complimentary measures on the local road network serving the junction). There is also a lack of service area provision on the route, which is less than ideal for HGV traffic as highlighted in 1.3, above.

The only other issues on this corridor in Leicestershire arise mainly as a result of incidents on and around M1 Junction 21, and the lack of capacity on the free-flow slip road from the M69 onto the M1 northbound.

2.5 A5

The A5 through Leicestershire is of mixed standard and provides an inconsistent experience for drivers. Issues include inconsistent design standards, lane gains/drops between dual carriageway and single carriageway, direct frontage access to businesses and residential properties, mixed speed limits, and multiple at-grade junctions.

The route is generally no longer fit for purpose for the volume of traffic which it has to carry; its poor performance leads to traffic diverting on to local roads affecting communities in Leicestershire and Warwickshire. Poor journey time reliability impacts upon traffic travelling through the corridor, particularly just in time deliveries. Significant work is required to bring the route up to a consistent standard and resolve congestion, safety, and severance issues.

Midlands Connect has carried out a study to identify a long-term, corridor, approach for investment in the A5 from Staffordshire to Warwickshire. This includes the section through Leicestershire. The study has identified the corridor as being of particular

importance to the logistics and distribution and advanced manufacturing and engineering sectors.

When incidents occur on the M1 or M6, the A5 is used as a diversion route for strategic traffic. The A5 is not capable of carrying such high volumes of traffic, particularly given the proportion of HGV vehicles, for the reasons set out above. This additional traffic not only causes congestion and safety issues on the A5 itself, but also on the adjacent local road networks and communities due to traffic backing up at junctions etc.

Bringing the route up to a consistent dual carriageway standard and improving some of the pinch point junctions would help to alleviate the congestion and safety issues caused by the additional traffic, and would enable the A5 to operate as an effective diversion route.

National Highways are already aware of the issues associated with the low bridge, where the A5 passes underneath the Nuneaton to Leicester rail line, which continues to be struck by high vehicles on a regular basis. This bridge was struck 11 times in the financial year 2020/21, making it the 7th most struck bridge in the country². Bridge strikes present a serious safety concern, in addition to being disruptive to drivers on the A5 and surrounding local road network, and rail passengers as the road is closed for inspections and repairs.

The A5 is also a key focus for growth within Leicestershire over future Local Plan periods to 2036 and beyond. It is an important access route for major manufacturing and logistics developments, including the MIRA Enterprise & Technology Park, DIRFT near Daventry, and Magna Park in Lutterworth³. All of these sites are expected to see expansion and increased traffic between now and 2050. As a result, upgrading the corridor to support future growth is highlighted as a key priority in the Leicester and Leicestershire Strategic Growth Plan and Strategic Transport Priorities. In particular, the composite scheme which has been identified by National Highways to mitigate the impacts of consented and planned growth at Magna Park, DIRFT phase 3, and Lutterworth SUE will be needed earlier than 2028 (the currently proposed earliest date for delivery).

Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council are currently developing a new Local Plan. It is likely that growth in the Borough will add to the current operational and safety issues, unless suitable mitigation measures are delivered. This can be alleviated if the cancelled RIS2 scheme to widen the A5 to dual carriageway between Longshoot and Dodwells, or a fit-for-purpose alternative scheme, is developed and delivered to support delivery of the Local Plan.

In safety terms, the A5/B4455 High Cross junction continues to suffer from a high number of collisions, including recent fatal accidents. Between 2015 and 2019 there were 6 separate KSI collisions at the junction. We have excluded the collision data for 2020, due to the impacts of the coronavirus pandemic on traffic flows, but we are

² Source: Network Rail (<https://www.networkrail.co.uk/running-the-railway/looking-after-the-railway/bridges-tunnels-and-viaducts/the-risk-of-bridge-strikes/>)

³ Source: Leicester and Leicestershire Strategic Growth Plan

aware of a further fatal collision in November 2021. National Highways should work with Leicestershire and Warwickshire County Councils to develop and deliver an improvement scheme to resolve the safety issues at this junction.

Our Asks

- Prompt identification and delivery of alternative measures to the now abandoned Dodwells to Longshoot dualling, including as appropriate measures to encourage sustainable modes of travel on the local road network.
- Identify suitable schemes in the current RIS3 pipeline of projects, such as for the A5 Hinckley to Tamworth section, and deliver those schemes in RIS3.
- Identify and deliver a solution to address the problems caused by the low bridge where the A5 passes under the Nuneaton-Leicester rail line, preferably ahead of RIS3.
- Identify and deliver a solution to address the casualty issues on the A5, including at A5/B4455 High Cross junction and at Smokington Hollow, preferably ahead of RIS3.

2.6 A14

There are no significant issues on the A14 in Leicestershire since the M1/M6/A14 junction improvement was opened to traffic.

2.7 A46

The A46 includes an important bypass to take strategic traffic around the outside of Leicester, instead of through the City. Link capacity issues and a general lack of route resilience have significant economic and environmental impacts on much of the northern part of the Leicester area, and villages in Leicestershire along the A46 corridor, particularly when incidents occur.

In particular, the A46/Syston Hobby Horse junction is identified as the main bottleneck for this section of the route. Many of the junctions on the A46 in Leicestershire are grade-separated, but this is not the case for the Hobby Horse junction. The Midlands Connect A46 Corridor Study found that delays at this junction can average 25 minutes at peak times. The junction was also the site of the 4th highest number of collisions between 2013 and 2017. Although many of these only resulted in slight injuries, the disruption to drivers and impact on journey times is considerable whenever there is a collision at the junction.

Closures on the A46 in the vicinity of Hobby Horse junction, and the associated, diversions cause significant issues on the surrounding local roads. Although these roads are approved for use as an emergency diversion route, they are not suitable for the volume and nature of traffic which would normally use the A46 and should not be used for planned works without express consent of Leicestershire County Council. Efforts should also be made to reduce the number of unplanned incidents (collisions and emergency maintenance works) on the A46 which necessitate use of these roads as an emergency diversion route.

Improvements to the A46 at Newark, albeit greatly needed, will remove a bottleneck which currently slows the flow of traffic to Hobby Horse junction. The increased rate at which traffic reaches the junction is likely to exacerbate the safety and congestion issues at Hobby Horse junction.

The interactions between the A46 and M1 Junctions 21 to 21a are also highlighted as key barriers to growth, based on Inrix data⁴. It is one of the most congested sections on the corridor, and a source of significant delay for drivers travelling along the route through Leicestershire.

The A46 Corridor is identified as a Priority Growth Corridor in the Leicester and Leicestershire Strategic Growth Plan (SGP), which estimates that the corridor has the potential to support delivery of 38,000 new homes and additional employment sites in the period to 2050.

Substantial growth impacting the A46 is planned in the vicinity of the northern edge of the Leicester Urban Area through current (adopted) and future (emerging) Local Plans. This includes the emerging Local Plans of Charnwood Borough and the City of Leicester, both of which are currently expected to be submitted for examination (and potentially adopted) within the next 12 months.

It is likely that further significant growth will be proposed in and around this area through Blaby District's and/or Hinckley and Bosworth Borough's new Local Plans (which are currently at a less advanced state than Charnwood or the City of Leicester).

Transport assessment work to support the Charnwood Borough and City of Leicester Local Plans has identified that the stretch of the A46 between the Hobby Horse Roundabout and the M1 at J21a has insufficient residual capacity to accommodate this growth. Several junctions on this section of the route already exceed 85% capacity⁵, and are forecast to get worse once development traffic and background growth are taken into account⁶. This will result in increased journey time unreliability along the corridor and widespread re-routings along less appropriate, more minor routes to avoid congestion and delays on the A46.

The A46 to the north of Syston/Hobby Horse Roundabout is generally free flowing by comparison. Most of the major junctions along this section within Leicestershire are grade-separated, except for the at-grade crossroads with Seagrave Road and Park Hill Lane, between Seagrave and Thrussington. The volume of traffic travelling along the A46 at this location makes this junction a significant barrier to travel between Seagrave and Thrussington. For drivers using the A46, the junction is an anomaly that is firmly at odds with the general standard and experience of the corridor between the Hobby Horse and Farndon Roundabouts.

Leicester City Football Club's new training ground is accessed via the A46/Seagrave Road/Park Hill Lane junction. National Highways requested that minor improvements

⁴ Midland Connect A46 Corridor Study (phase 2)

⁵ Midlands Connect A46 Corridor Study (phase 2)

⁶ Charnwood Borough Emerging Local Plan

to the junction were conditioned as part of the planning consent⁷, to address safety concerns associated with the junction. It remains to be seen whether these improvements are sufficient. This should be reviewed at an appropriate point during RIS3, to identify any further safety improvements which may be required.

Our Asks

- Identify and deliver improvement schemes to support growth on the A46 corridor, particularly at the Hobby Horse roundabout at Syston.
- Review collision data at the A46/Seagrave Road/Park Hill Lane junction, following completion of the improvement works associated with the Leicester City Football Club planning consent, at an appropriate point during RIS3, with a view to identifying if further safety improvements are needed.

2.8 A50

The only significant issue on the A50 in Leicestershire arises from the interactions with M1 Junction 24, particularly when accidents and other incidents occur at the junction.

2.9 A52

There are no strategic issues on this route.

2.10 A453

As with the A50, the only significant issue on the A453 in Leicestershire arises from the interactions with M1 Junction 24, particularly when accidents and other incidents occur at the junction.

3. Strategic issues

The following constitute the main strategic concerns which Leicestershire County Council have relating to the SRN in Leicestershire.

3.1 Economic Growth

The SRN, and National Highways, need to enable and support the successful development, adoption, and delivery of Local Plans which are currently being prepared or on which work is due to start during the RIS3 period. There is currently a disconnect between National Highways' involvement in Local Plans and the development of the Route Strategies, which needs to be addressed if we are to achieve a fully co-ordinated approach to road transport in England.

The SRN will also need to support long-term growth in Leicester and Leicestershire to 2050, as identified through the SGP. We accept the importance of maintaining the overall functionality of the SRN for strategic journeys. However, consideration must be given to whether the existing SRN (in particular the M1, A46 Leicester Western

⁷ Planning consent reference P/18/1269/2

Bypass and A5) is sufficient to support long-term growth aspirations in Leicester and Leicestershire.

In relation to this, we observe that National Highways' current RIS Pipeline Project scoping and business case modelling processes and requirements only take full account of future development that has secured planning permission. However, development that is allocated through Local Plans (adopted or emerging) but has yet to secure planning approval is classified as 'aspirational growth' and is not included in the main RIS business case modelling and appraisal scenarios. This also applies to long-term growth identified through the SGP. This appears to inhibit the identification of future SRN improvements capable of supporting long-term growth identified through Local Plans (or wider/HMA-wide strategies such as the SGP) as part of the RIS process.

In addition to the issue of capacity on parts of the existing SRN as set out in section 2, above, there is a need to review whether new routes and junctions should be added to improve accessibility to/from the SRN in the County in order to facilitate growth. The Leicester and Leicestershire Strategic Transport Priorities, which was developed to support the growth proposed through the SGP, highlights the potential need for a new orbital link road to the south and east of Leicester, connecting with the M1 (via a new junction) to the south-west and the A46 to the north-east of Leicester, as well as to existing radial transport corridors into the city.

Finally, National Highways should ensure that the SRN can continue to effectively support Leicester and Leicestershire's locally, regionally, and nationally important logistics, minerals and construction materials sectors. This includes working with the private sector ensure that there is appropriate service and rest area provision for HGV drivers using the SRN to travel through/to/from Leicestershire.

Our Asks

- Greater co-ordination between National Highways' involvement in development of Local Plans and developing the RIS.
- Greater co-ordination between National Highways' development of the RIS and delivery of the Leicester and Leicestershire SGP.
- Identify any further projects on the SRN required to support Leicester and Leicestershire's growth over the next 10 to 15 years (covering the current round of Local Plan development).
- Plan for what the SRN needs to look like to meet the area's long-term growth needs out to 2050.
- Work with Leicestershire County Council (through our Sub National Transport Body, Midlands Connect), and the Department for Transport, to:
 - ensure that the SRN through Leicestershire is made fit-for-purpose and remains fit-for-purpose to 2050 and beyond.
 - seek changes to the RIS pipeline project development and appraisal processes that would allow greater account to be taken of long-term growth allocated through Local Plans and/or proposed through the SGP.
- Achieve a more coordinated approach to the planning of and the investment in measure on the SRN, Major Road Network and Local Road network,

including longer-term funding settlements for Local Transport Authority aligned to the RIS windows.

3.2 Environment

National Highways should ensure that the SRN in Leicestershire is managed in a way which will contribute towards reducing Leicestershire's carbon footprint and support delivery of a more environmentally friendly, sustainable, road transport system.

Our Asks

- Ensuring that any schemes which are delivered (including maintenance) are made as carbon neutral as possible.
- Aim to achieve positive biodiversity impacts in all schemes (including maintenance where appropriate).
- Supporting and facilitating greater take-up of electric cars, for example by providing EV chargepoints at rest areas and motorway service areas.
- Supporting decarbonisation of HGVs.
- Supporting and enabling solutions for alternatively powered HGVs with proper last mile integration.
- Where appropriate, provision for active and sustainable travel modes should be built into schemes as standard (including revenue support to influence modal shift).
- Ensure that the necessary strategies and investment are in place and/or made to support the decarbonisation of the SRN, including:
 - practical, workable solutions for decarbonising road-based logistics and movement of minerals and related construction materials
 - support for coordinated investment in local, sustainable measures that help to remove 'local trips' from the SRN to improve the SRN's functioning
 - support for Midlands Connect ideas for improved strategic coach links
 - revisiting the approach to business case assessment to better reflect carbon and societal (e.g. reduction of severance) benefits and savings (in comparison with more traditional BCR metrics)

3.3 Network Integration

Our aim is to achieve a proper integration of all networks to give a consistent driving experience door-to-door. There is a need for better and greater integration of planning and investment with the Major Road Network (MRN) and Local Road Network (LRN), to smooth the transition from SRN to MRN and LRN and ensure that solving issues on the SRN does not have an adverse impact on other routes.

Our Asks

- Developing schemes and programmes in a co-ordinated manner, rather than in isolation.
- Integration of last mile solutions.
- Integrated technology solutions.

- Ensuring consistent quality of journey (for example maintenance standards) and integration with the MRN and LRN.
- Engaging with Leicestershire County Council (through our STB, Midlands Connect) and the relevant Government Departments to ensure that future technologies are developed and delivered in an integrated manner across the SRN, MRN, and LRN.

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