

4d

CABINET MEETING ON 26 APRIL 2022 - AGENDA ITEM 4**MAJOR ROAD NETWORK - IDENTIFICATION OF THE NEXT PRIORITY CORRIDOR****COMMENTS FROM MR. JOHN MARRIOTT**

I note there is a report going to Cabinet on 26th April, Major Road Network - Identification of the Next Priority Corridor. The purpose of this is to increase the capacity of the road network which would facilitate an increase in traffic.

In another Cabinet report on the Net Zero Carbon 2045 Roadmap for Leicestershire, Theme 1 of the Action Plan is to reduce vehicle mileage. The Action Plan fails to note the extent to which poorly designed and badly located new development has contributed to increasing traffic and will continue to do so for decades.

These two reports are therefore not compatible.

Identification of Next MRN Corridor

Appendix A to the MRN Cabinet report is an attempt at a pseudo-technical approach to making such a decision using a very crude scoring system applied to "Conditional outputs" and "Economic Objectives" suggested by Midlands Connect. In the Director's report to the Scrutiny Commission this is referred to as a "comprehensive scoring framework", but this belies both the factors used and the crudeness of the scoring system.

Under Resource Implications it states that there is potentially £200,000 available for study work in 2022/23 but a suggestion that a business case could cost "millions of pounds" with no guarantee of funding for any proposal. In fact the prospects already look poor before the reality of climate change is factored in.

The recommended priority is the A6(N) from Leicester City boundary to the M1 at Kegworth (J24), including the A6004 through Loughborough.

A bit of history

A bypass for A6 Trunk Road Loughborough was approved by the Department of Transport in the 1930s. Part of this was built as a dual carriageway between Ashby Road and Alan Moss Road in the 60s but the rest was abandoned for use as a trunk road bypass. Charnwood subsequently approved development over the alignment north of Warwick Way without informing the County Council. When the County Council found out it was furious.

Subsequently the remainder of the bypass route was prioritised in a 1979 Loughborough Highway Review for use as a local road. This became Epinal Way, which opened in stages during the 80s, connecting Warwick Way to Park Road. The Quorn-Mountsorrel bypass opened in 1991 and was constructed as a trunk road. Epinal Way was later extended from Park Road to Quorn to join up with the Quorn-Mountsorrel bypass.

When the Department decided to de-trunk the A6 the County Council was given an assurance that it would look at a bypass for Loughborough. A scheme was developed during the 1990s for a route that wriggled its way past the railway station to avoid the SSSI and flood plain east of the town. A few weeks before this was due to go to public consultation the government scrapped numerous bypass schemes, including Loughborough.

The remainder of the route has numerous constraints including Birstall and Hathern, although Kegworth now has a bypass. The A46/A6 junction, north of Birstall, is an obvious constraint, which is likely to get much worse given the scale of car-dependent development that has been permitted across the County.

The report also contains a reference to Charnwood Local Plan modelling. The extensiveness of this modelling work shows clearly that the pressure of development is already such that traffic growth will far outstrip any realistic funding for any infrastructure led approach. Ninety years after a bypass was first proposed for Loughborough there is no prospect of any solution to reduce traffic in the town.

Role of the A6 between Leicester and Kegworth

I suggest there is virtually no traffic that uses this route from end to end, not least because of the constraints at Loughborough. In terms of providing a link from Loughborough to the developments around the M1 / A50, then Hathern is a significant constraint with no obvious solution. The Garendon and Shepshed developments will both affect this area adversely.

The Charnwood Local Plan proposes significant development around the south of Loughborough and in the Soar Valley, in addition to Broadnook and Thorpebury. Leicester City Council is proposing even more development at Beaumont Leys adding to the traffic through Thurgate which is already avoiding the A6 through Birstall.

The close proximity of the M1 to Loughborough at Junction 23 means that this is the obvious alternative for travelling north and south from much of Loughborough. However, the pressure from all the development at Garendon Park, the Science Park and in Shepshed looks set to swamp Junction 23. The expensive works there seem to have achieved very little. This has been recognised in some of the modelling work for the Charnwood Local Plan, which suggested further improvements, but of course the traffic impacts extend over a much wider area. There is now virtually no opportunity for significant developer funding from this area as all the major sites have been approved with very little attempt to reduce the traffic generated by them.

There seems to be no prospect for increasing bus use unless the Government acknowledges that a major reform is needed to the way bus services are planned and funded together with ensuring that developments are put in places where they can be served efficiently by bus and designed to support bus use.

A Suggestion

At some stage the Government will have to reconcile its climate change commitments with its aspirations to allow seemingly unfettered development

regardless of its implications for increasing traffic. The MRN report makes it clear that funding is limited and it is far from clear what may emerge.

Loughborough, being a compact university town, would be an ideal place to demonstrate what could be achieved with a strong commitment to making cycling attractive and safe. It works very well in the Netherlands and Denmark and there's no reason why it couldn't here given the will.

Forget chasing money for roads that will make things worse, especially when essentially only crumbs are on the table, and start to tackle climate change by reducing the traffic from new developments. Demonstrate that cycling is the quickest, cheapest and most effective way to achieve it by making it safe and convenient.

Regards

John Marriott (author of the 1979 Loughborough Highway Review)

This page is intentionally left blank