

# A46 EXPANSION – NOVEMBER Newsletter #3

## E-mail subscription to newsletter

Firstly, thank you to everyone who has already registered for e-mail updates on our website <http://taagroup.co.uk>. We now have around 70 households registered which will help to reduce print costs and enable speedier communication. If you haven't yet done so, please do consider registering to receive future updates electronically.

## Midlands Connect (MC)

At this week's TAPC meeting, Councillor Smith suggested that the original A46 report mentioned in our previous newsletter is available for us to have. However, while it was published and presented to MC, we have been told it is not and will not be publically available. We understand this is because it was produced by a third party for MC, who have used it together with other source material to produce their own report,

"The A46 Corridors Study - Stage 1 Enhanced Strategic Case". This was published on 7th November. The MC report is long, has a lot of general positioning and two thirds of the report consists of an environmental risk assessment (document link at <http://taagroup.co.uk>). However, it does contain some important details:

- MC repeated their strategic proposal of creating an expressway linking the M5 and the M40.
- An initial study completed in December '17 examined a mixture of offline (i.e. new road) alignment and online (i.e. existing road) dualling from M5 J9 to south of Evesham. The conclusion was that improved journey times and as yet unquantified wider economic benefits supported making a further study.
- This further study, which we understand includes the third party draft report we saw in June but not made public, reviewed existing evidence, confirmed the strategic case, identified a long list of options and from this the proposed priority developments.
- In what is termed an illustrative package of proposals for the entire A46 corridor, one of six key elements is for "offline bypasses of Ashchurch, Beckford & Evesham and other improvements to provide a high quality dual carriageway standard between the M5 and M40. \*
- The timeline for the full development is up to 20 years. However, Ashchurch is identified as a key priority for investment due to constraints on existing road alignment, new housing and job creation together with travel delays caused by congestion.
- Benefits are claimed for improved journey times and wider economic growth although neither is supported with any published data.
- A next step is for MC to work with Highways England to review their work on improvement options at Ashchurch and undertake more detailed design and routing options.

*\*The diagrammatic representation of key priorities clearly shows this linking with J9 M5. There has been speculation that J10 could become a more logical end point given the agreed four way expansion of this junction and proposed new cyber hub development to the west of Cheltenham.*

In summary, progress of sorts and confirmation that bypasses for both Ashchurch and Beckford remain key priorities. As this report is the final main deliverable from MC to set out their case for investment, the next stage is anticipated to seek and agree funding for specific route options. The next funding round is RIS2 (see below).

The MC report has generated mainstream media attention elsewhere along the A46 corridor but nothing so far in our area.

## Road Investment Strategy phase 2 (RIS2) & Autumn Budget

As mentioned in our last newsletter, RIS2 is in progress with the expectation that specific funding priorities for 2020/21 through 2024/25 will be decided in March 2019.

In the Government's autumn statement it was announced that RIS2 would be the largest ever investment in England's strategic roads. The government expects to spend £25.3 billion on this strategy between 2020-25. In the Department for Transport's accompanying paper "Shaping the Future of England's Strategic Roads" it does state that they will consider the case for investment in the A46 between the M5 and the Midlands as part of the development of the RIS2 Investment Plan.

## A46 Partnership Group

There is little to report. We have successfully chased to have the June minutes added to their website but these are of limited value. Chairmanship was due to pass from Councillor Smith to a Worcestershire representative at their October meeting but there were insufficient attendees to sign this off.

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## Tewkesbury Borough Plan 2011-31 – Preferred Options Consultation

This document undergoes public consultation until the end of November. Within the transport section, one of the policies is to support both online and offline measures where they improve A46 corridor accessibility and promote reliable journey times.

The online reference is justified by transport modelling work which has helped identify a package of infrastructure improvements to the A438/A46/M5 Junction 9 corridor. We have asked for details on what these are but so far have not received answers.

The offline reference recognises that there are a limited number of online improvements to increase capacity and, therefore, an 'offline' solution is being explored to re-route the A46. This refers to the A46 Partnership Group/Midlands Connect/RIS2 process.

## Ashchurch Concepts Masterplan

As part of the Joint Core Strategy development (a partnership between Gloucester, Cheltenham & Tewkesbury Borough Councils), a report dated January 2018 has recently been made available for public consultation. This outlines the opportunity to transform Ashchurch into a "garden village". In setting out significant housing and retail expansion, the report acknowledges the constraints imposed by the existing A46 route. Short term (0-10 years) enabling actions include improvements at the M5 J9 and Aston crossroads. In the medium to longer term (10 years +) a new southern boundary concept road is proposed running towards the Teddington Hands roundabout.

The reference to short term improvement actions and positioning a new road as long term may appear to provide some comfort but this is another local government initiative endorsing a southern by-pass as essential for future growth.

## Lobbying

We have made a number of approaches to external organisations including the CPRE (Campaign for Protection of Rural England) and the AONB (Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty). This has proved frustrating but we do now appear to be on CPRE Gloucestershire's radar. They could be a key player, working with their counterparts in other counties affected by A46 developments, in raising environmental concerns and challenging economic rationale.

We have also written to our parliamentary representative, Laurence Robertson MP and our district councillor, John Evetts. We hope this will lead to face to face meetings.

## Expert advice

More general research has led us to an introduction with a strategic policy and campaigns advisor, Gerald Kells. Gerald has extensive experience in UK transport policy since the 1990's and worked for the CPRE for over 10 years. He's been involved with Campaign for Better Transport and assisted several action groups with new road schemes. He is already working with the East and West Midlands CPRE regions responding to Midlands Connect proposals for A46 developments. He has a useful combination of general campaigning experience and specific A46 development knowledge.

We met with Gerald in September. He shared a number of observations including the **importance of taking action before decisions are made, not accepting the need for a new road without a proven business case and ensuring other mitigating road improvement actions have been fully explored**. This suggests our pro-active approach is correct and that we should not accept a new south of Ashchurch expressway as the only solution to improving road infrastructure.

As a minimum, Gerald is someone who can keep us in the loop with what is happening through his existing engagement with Midlands Connect and, if obtainable using a freedom of information request, be able to share the traffic modelling and economic benefit data being used to justify investment. There is an option for Gerald to help us more directly to develop arguments and with communication/lobbying, although this would be at a cost. There is also the potential of him working jointly with the Gloucestershire CPRE who might then pay for his time.

## Funding

To date, all costs associated with setting up the website, producing newsletters and providing for a limited amount of consultancy with Gerald (in total c£500) have been covered by the TAAG team. Going forward, if we want to remain pro-active more significant sums will be required, especially if we seek external expertise.

We have met with representatives of the TAPC to explain the need for future funding. As a result we made an official request for a parish council grant and by now you will have seen the Parish Council flyer seeking resident views on increasing the parish precept for 2019/20. While this pre-empted us sending out this newsletter to provide you with the detail on why we think funding is required, it did prompt a discussion at this week's TAPC and agreement to provide up to £1,250 for appropriate work. TAPC will clarify how this decision impacts the 2019/20 precept process.

It's always difficult to have to ask for financial help but with the very real threat of a four lane expressway being built close to our villages we feel it's a necessary step. We strongly believe that to be pro-active before any Highways England funding proposals are signed off is the better approach than simply 'wait and see', although there are no guarantees our efforts will make a difference.

While the immediate TAPC grant is very welcome, we estimate the cost to make a limited but professional intervention could be double this amount. Therefore, we have also set up an official crowd funding page (full details on our website) to accept any additional public donations to help fund our work. In all matters we greatly appreciate the support we receive from many villagers.

As a final thought, does anyone reading this have or know of someone who has fundraising experience? Any assistance that could provide other funding ideas would be very helpful.

For more information and documentation please visit  
<http://taagroup.co.uk>