

Midlands Connect (MC)

With an announcement on next phase investment decisions (the RIS2 process) not expected until later this year, we were a little surprised to discover they had published a brief document at the end of March - "Midlands Connect & RIS, Turning evidence into investment" (see our website <http://taagroup.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/ris-2-priorities-final-online-20032019.pdf>). On a positive note, any local A46 development/realignment is excluded from their list of specific investment priorities. However, they have also stated that the use of five year planning periods is not suitable to support long term investment in transport corridors, such as the A46. As a result they have requested a more formal role alongside Highways England and the Department for Transport to shape priorities for RIS3 (2025-30) and RIS4 (2030-35).

In earlier newsletters we referred to an A46 corridor studies report, produced for Midlands Connect and presented to the A46 Partnership Group in June 2018, but never published. Following a freedom of information (FoI) request made by Gerald Kells, it has now been released and can be viewed through this link on our website (<http://taagroup.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/The-Final-version-of-the-Initial-Report-1.pdf>). While the report adds little to what we already knew (as we were shown a draft copy), it is encouraging that FoI can be used successfully.

Western Gateway (WG)

In the second half of 2018 we became aware of an emerging new south western transport group, the "Western Gateway Sub National Transport Body". This body includes a number of councils - Bath and North East Somerset, Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole (BCP), Bristol City, Dorset, Gloucestershire County, North Somerset, South Gloucestershire, Wiltshire and the West of England Combined Authority. These councils are committed to working together and providing a single voice to Government on strategic transport investment and prioritisation.

While newly formed, WG acts as a regional equivalent to MC. Their immediate relevance to us is that they are preparing their own response to RIS2 and have identified an M5 Junction 9 and A46 Ashchurch bypass as one of their two large local major scheme priorities. In their words "this scheme will resolve a critical pinch-point on a route linking the M5 with the M40 and M1.....the route is also identified as a priority corridor by Midlands Connect Sub National Transport Body and is essential to the delivery of the recently announced Garden Town at Ashchurch to deliver up to 10,195 houses by 2041". We understand a business case is being prepared by GCC but it's unclear whether this will be in addition to or co-ordinated with the work of MC.

What does this all mean? Well, while MC appear not to be pressing for any prioritised development for our stretch of the A46 to be included within the RIS2 phase of works for 2020-25, the submission of WG does. How the contrasting submissions will be interpreted by Highways England and the DfT is unclear but if funding is granted for WG to submit a detailed business case it can expect to have the full support of MC. Even if no explicit funding for development is granted as part of RIS2, we expect MC to publish further details of their ongoing A46 corridor studies report later this year. This could set out a proposed investment programme to develop the entire A46 corridor over a 10-20 year period. In conclusion, there is a reasonable chance that the start of new A46 works may not be agreed for RIS2 but the continuing threat to our villages, from now two transport lobby bodies, remains.

JULY 2019 UPDATE (Newsletter #5)

RIS2

We have outlined above the latest details of MC and WG submission proposals. There is no update on when RIS2 decisions will be made or published although it still seems likely the process will be delayed by ongoing distractions of choosing a new Prime Minister and Brexit.

CPRE

The report mentioned in the March newsletter, commissioned and paid for by Gloucestershire CPRE, was produced by Gerald Kells at the end of April. As this report was for use by the CPRE, we are not currently able to share a copy online. His review covered a critique of local development plans (including the Ashchurch Masterplan) and of the Midlands Connect A46 proposals. Following production of this report, CPRE have now arranged a meeting with Annette Roberts, Head of Planning TBC to discuss the Ashchurch Masterplan and we have been invited to attend this meeting.

Expert Report

Gerald's recommendations are tailored to CPRE'S broader brief although he makes a number of observations which are supportive of the concerns we have previously raised. Our intention is to commission him to produce a further report representing a robust independent summary of arguments and challenges from the specific perspective of Teddington & Alstone. This will then be used as a communication and lobbying tool for interested parties and key influencers. We have produced a brief, sent it to Gerald and we are now awaiting his response.

Summary

Despite some prospect of a delay in decisions and, therefore, in the actual start of any work to make changes to the existing A46 route from the Worcestershire border down to J9 M5, there are many uncertainties. We intend pressing on with lobbying actions and, in particular, pursue production of a suitable "expert" report which we can use to influence future decisions.