

SUBJECT : ROUTE STRATEGIES ONLINE TOOL

The purpose of this e-mail is to provide alternative format input (i.e. to the "Online Tool") on the **NATIONAL HIGHWAYS - ROUTE STRATEGIES FOR RIS3 (2025-2030)**.

Route Section Referenced:

The circa 15 mile stretch of the A46 from the roundabout north of Evesham (latitude 52.11370, longitude -1.94080) to where it joins the M5, Junction 9 at Tewkesbury (latitude 51.99652, longitude -2.12169).

Comments:

- This section of the A46 has previously been identified as being the terminating southern end of a proposed 70 mile Trans Midlands Trade Corridor (TMTc) following the path of the M69/A46 from Leicestershire.
- The key proponent of the TMTc is Midlands Connect. For the section identified above, they have previously suggested that three new bypass developments will be required - around Evesham, at Beckford and at Ashchurch. However, none of these were considered to be a priority for inclusion in their RIS2 submission. Midlands Connect more recent strategic thinking questions the economic case for a bypass at Beckford and we understand they are continuing to review overall strategic priorities in the context of climate emergency and to deliver a net zero strategy.
- We are aware that Western Gateway and Gloucestershire County Council are completing detailed work for a proposed bypass of Ashchurch ahead of a public consultation in 2022. This proposal falls within the Local Large Major's (LLM) scheme funding process. As such, it's primary focus should be tailored to satisfy local objectives: namely, to alleviate congestion along the existing A46 and provide enabling road infrastructure for the development of a new garden town at Ashchurch.
- Given where we currently are on local A46 priorities, we wish to challenge the long-standing assumption that any strategic transport corridor must slavishly track the current route of the A46 as it runs from Stratford down to Tewkesbury. A route should not simply follow an existing road number and RIS3 provides an obvious opportunity to look again and consider all long term route options.
- We consider there is a credible alternative route option for a TMTc in a route which passes from the A46 to the north of Evesham to the M5. For example, from Alcester to Junction 7 or Evesham to Junction 8. Both of these would provide a more direct link to South Wales through more proximate access to the M50 while still providing an alternative route away from the busy M5/M40/M42 box. In addition, a more northerly route has advantages by avoiding the costly build of a second Evesham bypass and not having to cope with a congested 7 mile section of single carriageway along the A46 south of Evesham.
- It should not be a given that a strong economic case has already been made for a specific TMTc route. Research suggests that the majority of existing traffic travels along small sections of the A46 rather than traversing its full length with local economic growth linked to local commercial centres rather than large volumes of through traffic. Equally, there are smaller scale solutions that may provide more compelling business cases.

- Finally, since RIS2 the increased urgency to take action on environmental issues provides a compelling argument to ensure that these are fully recognised when deciding new scheme priorities for RIS3. Changes in working patterns post Covid pandemic (e.g. a flattening of peak traffic volumes) are very relevant to this in terms of required scale/capacity.

Summary:

We have raised this issue of an alternative strategic route to the existing A46 on a number of occasions with different bodies but have been previously advised this cannot be revisited. However, National Highways have indicated that through the current RIS3 engagement process they will be taking account of the views of road users, communities and a range of interested parties. Therefore, we respectfully request that this extends to re-examining the evidence for road priorities and route options associated with any use of the A46 as it joins the M5, should this be proposed for inclusion in final RIS3 priorities.

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