

PUBLIC QUESTIONS TO CABINET – 3 December 2020**Question 1****Mr I Morgan, Hereford****To: cabinet member, infrastructure and transport**

If the Cabinet decides to completely scrap the idea of a bypass and the Southern Link Road, can they guarantee the citizens of Herefordshire that the decision is not influenced by the impact of air pollution on environmental grounds as by 2030, under the Government's policy in ten years time, all cars and vans will have to be electric.

Response

The technical work presented in the Hereford Transport Strategy Review includes amongst other impacts an assessment of how air pollution in the city would be affected by the different packages. All modelling was carried out with a set date of 2026 in mind. For carbon emissions, this included applying Department of Transport estimates where we would be with the take-up of electric vehicles by 2026. It should be noted that the current Government policy is that there will be no new sales of petrol and diesel vehicles after 2030, although many will no doubt still be on the road after this date. The other, equally pertinent, consideration on the issue of environmental impact is the effect that the road building will have on the ecology and landscape of the land and also the amount of embedded carbon that the scheme will produce. These issues would need to be considered for any road scheme.

Question 2**Ms N Goodwin, Hereford****To: cabinet member, infrastructure and transport**

The critical friend review states that: "planning for the future by solely looking in the rear-view mirror is no longer adequate in the face of the opportunities, threats and uncertainties ahead. Can the cabinet confirm what they will do to ensure that the environmental assessment of carbon and climate impacts meets current requirements and takes into account the "exceptional floods and record-breaking water levels in the River Wye in Feb 2020" and that Climate Emergency, Net Zero and Net Gain are strategic objectives against which options are assessed and progressed as part of any future work on the package?"

Response

The Hereford Transport Strategy Review has included explicit reference to carbon and climate emergency issues as a central part of its assessment methodology. It is accepted that any further work to progress a package (or packages) will need to also include assessment of these issues in line with government guidance at that time.

Supplementary Question

The use of the word "accepted" seems vague. Is it representative of the cabinet members' individual and collective views on carbon and climate emergency issues or are they able to assure the public that such issues will be prioritised in accordance with the council's declaration to set a target of zero carbon emissions by 2030?

Response

Yes I can give that assurance that that is our ambition and that it is our collective view on carbon and climate emergency issues and they will be prioritised in accordance with the council's declaration.

Question 3

Dr N Geeson, Hereford

To: cabinet member, infrastructure and transport

The Southern Link Road route SC2 which is part of the South Wye Transport Package, was put forward in 2014. Is it the case that the previous Conservative administration could not claim funding to progress the Southern Link Road, even as late as spring 2019, because they could not finalise a strong enough business case?

Response

This is not entirely accurate. A strategic outline business case had been developed for the scheme which indicated, in accordance with DfT guidance, good value for money. It was on this basis that funding was awarded, on the condition that when a full business case was submitted and approved the full amount would be released. Earlier in the scheme development DfT released a proportion of the funding. In line with DfT requirements, the full business case would have been scheduled to be submitted and tested by them when the contract for the road was confirmed and tendered costs known.

The full business case was not completed and submitted and therefore not tested by DfT as the procurement process which ran from May 2018 to November 2018 did not progress to the award of the contract on the advice of the council's statutory officers who did not consider the procurement process to be sufficiently robust. The process was terminated in 2019 by the new administration on the advice of the statutory officers. Subsequently, the administration determined to undertake this review.

Supplementary Question

In considering the business case for the Southern Link Road, its major role would be to shunt traffic between the A465 Belmont Road and A49 Ross Road. It is likely that if this road were built, in order to escape congestion on the A465 Belmont Road a greater volume of traffic than now would use the A49 Ross Road to enter Hereford. We have recently learned that only 7% of traffic is through traffic in Hereford, and 93% has a source or destination (or both) within the City. Since the A465 and A49 converge to cross Greyfriars Bridge, do you agree that the Southern Link Road would bring only negligible advantage to traffic flow within Hereford City?

Response

I recall that in the original feasibility work for the southern link road it was indeed projected that traffic would be increased on the A49 down the Ross Road because traffic would move across from the Belmont Road to try and enter Hereford on a different approach, so as a standalone project it certainly has some difficulties.

Question 4

Mr R Board, Hereford

To: cabinet member, infrastructure and transport

Given that the Hereford Transport Strategy Review has now ruled out a Full A49 Eastern Bypass due to the environmental sensitivities of the Lugg Meadow, Could the Hereford Transport Strategy Review now include a seventh option, this being a Western Bridge ONLY Option, as it appears that this option would perform well against the other bridge options in terms of Climate Emergency, Environment and Society and also that a Western bridge appears to be the only option that would allow for Hereford to ultimately have a full A49 Western Bypass.

Response

The review did not promote or rule out anything, its purpose was to assess transport options in line with national and local criteria. There were many considerations put forward for a new transport strategy and stakeholders feedback helped inform the Council and their consultants which of those should be taken forward for further consideration within the review. Cabinet is also not constrained by the transport options and packages which have been considered in the review and could continue to consider different options or variations of those options. At face value I do not see how such a proposal would work but I would welcome the opportunity to discuss this further with Mr Board.

Question 5

Mr R Palgrave, How Caple

To: cabinet member, infrastructure and transport

HM Treasury's Green Book provides guidance on how to appraise and evaluate policies, projects and programmes. It defines how interventions like transport measures are to be assessed and developed. A long list of possible measures is identified, then is sifted to produce a short list to be taken forward for more detailed evaluation. The shortlisting process carried out for the Hereford Transport Strategy appears to follow this path. Noting that the Southern Link Road was not included in the short list either on its own or in combination with other possible road schemes, how confident is the council that any future request for central government funding to build the SLR would be deemed compliant with the Green Book?

Response

It is not correct to say that the southern link road was not included in our assessment. It forms part of the Western Bypass option (ref page 55 of report) and is therefore included in Package A+C+D (page 73 of report). On this basis the assessment is compliant with the Green Book.

Supplementary Question

You responded to my question saying, "It is not correct to say that the southern link road was not included in our assessment." My question did not, however, say that the SLR was not included in the assessment - it said that the SLR is not included, either standalone or in combination, in the short list produced by the assessment. Now I have clarified that, can I have a response please?

Response

A written answer would be provided.

Question 6

Mrs C Protherough, Clehonger

To: cabinet member, infrastructure and transport

At the Scrutiny meeting Cllr Rone was very concerned about air pollution and the impact of vehicle pollution on Hereford residents, particularly those in South Wye. Modelling of the Southern Link Road showed that the scheme increased air pollution on the Ross Road and did little if nothing to reduce air pollution elsewhere in Hereford City. Which package in the Hereford Transport Strategy Review would deliver the best improvements not only to minimise air pollution but to also address the risk and impacts of Climate change?

Response

I presume you may be referencing studies done for the original assessment of the Southern Link road. I believe you are broadly correct, overall forecasted reduction in air pollution generally was not significant and there was a projected increase in air pollution and traffic numbers along the Ross Road. Whilst this recent review has not looked at the issue of air quality and carbon reduction in combination it has considered both issues for the city as a whole which has provided outputs in relation to each of the assessed packages. This indicates:

1. Overall carbon emissions in Hereford – Packages A, A+B and A+B+C are all forecast to have the largest impact on reducing carbon emissions (pages 76, 78 and 80 of report).
2. Impacts on the Air Quality Management Area – Package A+C+D is forecast to have the largest impact on reducing traffic flows through the AQMA (page 82 of report).

Supplementary Question

A further problem in the South Wye area, threatening life and wellbeing of adults and children, is a crisis of obesity. This area has the highest figures of all age groups in the County as evidenced in the Report on obesity (no 12) from HEREFORDSHIRE COUNCIL STRATEGIC INTELLIGENCE TEAM December 2016. For adults 16 plus, Belmont medical practice had an obesity rate of 17.8% compared with 9% nationwide. The figures for prevalence of obesity in reception at school ranged from 4.9 per cent in Greater Ledbury to 11.7 per cent in South West Wye. Taking into account the need to reduce obesity, especially starting young, what would be the best combination of measures to make lifetime health improvements in this area?

Response

That's quite a broad question and I'm not sure I'm the perfect person qualified to answer that. Obviously whatever support and help we can give in allowing people who live in that area to travel in an active way and whatever opportunity we can give to reduce congestion would be a priority but particularly the ability for children to walk and cycle safely to school by themselves or with their parents would be a really strong ambition. It is a possible ambition it's just a matter of priorities and putting the money and the effort into that strategy.

Question 7

Mrs V Wegg-Prosser, Breinton

To: cabinet member, infrastructure and transport

Appendix D the Peer Review HTP Technical Report (cl. 4.3.6) notes that the Bypass Stage 2 Environmental Assessment lacks a sufficient assessment of carbon and climate change impacts compared to current requirements.

Planning Application No. 162921, Land Drainage comments (IntConsResp 36) on the Three Elms Development note 'great uncertainty' with regard to the Western Bypass scheduled to travel

through this large urban extension ... where significant land for flood alleviation will be required, jeopardising delivery of the proposed employment land to the west of the proposed route.

Could the Cabinet member responsible for Infrastructure please explain whether the 'great uncertainty' associated with the Three Elms site was specifically factored in to the economic, social and environmental evaluation of the Bypass Stage 2 Environmental Assessment, and if not, why not?

Response

I have been assured that the Hereford Transport Package Stage 2 Environmental Assessment Report did take into account the land use proposals for Three Elms and these informed the assessment of route options. In light of the climate emergency declarations and government policy direction we anticipate that DfT will be updating guidance on the environmental assessment of major transport schemes. It is possible a new assessment could produce different results based on that updated guidance.

Question 8

Mr P Chapman, Breinton Common

To: cabinet member, infrastructure and transport

I understand that all the road schemes have been packaged with 'Demand Management', which thus includes some form of congestion charging, in order to minimise the effects of induced demand. Obviously, this could nullify any benefits from providing extra road capacity. What is the expected price point and average cost to the local motorist, at which such charging would retain the benefits of any new road scheme in tackling congestion and would the expansion of a cycling network further increase charges if demand is even further reduced?

Response

The review has considered several possible components of a demand management strategy for Hereford (page 52 of report). However, no decision has been taken by cabinet on which aspects would be taken forward. It is not correct that all the road schemes include congestion charging and the report makes it clear that the more likely demand management measures to be considered further are the consolidation of off-street parking, parking pricing and/or a workplace parking levy. In the event that cabinet wished to progress a congestion charge further work would need to be undertaken to assess appropriate charging levels and extent of any scheme.

Question 9

Ms K Sharp, Hereford

To: cabinet member, infrastructure and transport

In an answer to Mr P Price at the GSC meeting (9/11/2020, question 29) about the planning permission for the Southern Link Road, would officers please confirm whether the current planning approval (P151314/F), would deliver the road scheme or whether new designs would have to be prepared - and planning permission sought - increasing the height of the railway bridge crossing etc (see the Options Refinement Report dated November 2018, 4.3 - Changes after

Grant of Planning Permission - where ten 'significant' design changes to the scheme were identified by structural engineers) thus increasing the negative impact of the scheme?

Response

The planning permissions for the scheme as granted remain valid. The refinement of the design identified potential changes which will need to be processed through the planning system in due course if the scheme progresses and the changes are adopted. Further amendments to planning consent would need to be approved by the planning authority as modifications have been made to the design.

Supplementary Question

When the first planning permission for the SLR was determined in 2015 and 2016, there were lengthy discussions between Historic England and the council concerning the negative landscape impacts of the scheme. The Planning Officer Report records that measures (planting, noise barriers etc) would be designed into the scheme, particularly on the railway bridge with its embankment, to mitigate these impacts. The ten significant engineering changes that I referred to in my original question were first identified in 2017 - but were never progressed through planning - and included, amongst other things, raising the height of the railway bridge by 0.5 m. If planning permission is sought for the major changes, will the landscape considerations that were so controversial in 2016 be thoroughly re-examined given the structures along the entire route will have to be significantly widened, extended and increased in height?

Response

Modifications will be needed there's no doubt about that and as a result a view on that would be needed from the planning officers and either a modification within the existing position or new permissions and I should imagine that if that is the case the other considerations will have to be taken into account. I will get a written answer from the head of planning to clarify that.

Question 10

Mr T Meadows, Hereford

To: cabinet member, infrastructure and transport

When I asked at the Scrutiny meeting "If the full effects of induced demand were provided in the Hereford Transport Model, please state what would be the average journey time saving in minutes in Hereford on each of the key routes into the city?" the officers were unable to provide an answer of the journey time saving in minutes. Therefore I need to ask again, even if the full effects of induced demand are not included, according to the Hereford Transport Model, which is reported to overestimate the benefits of new roads, what would be the average journey time savings, for the average motorist, at peak time on each of the key routes into the city?

Response

WSP have not provided, in their assessment of congestion reduction, journey times in a 'minutes saved' format. That information would be of interest. Chapter 7 of the review sets out the journey time reductions for the same key routes for each of the assessed packages. These are presented as percentage time savings compared with the do minimum. Further details on the indicator are provided in the table at page 60 of the review and the journey time indicator is 5.2 in the table.

Supplementary Question

Percentages are meaningless when the average journey time is not referenced at all. This was acknowledged by Amey in their 2010 report when, they explained that “a statistic which is easier to understand and relates well to public perception is the Journey Time analysis”. The Amey report showed that a bypass would only improve a north-south journey time by just 1 minute more for cars than if sustainable transport measures were introduced and before allowing for the effect of induced demand from the new road. Can WSP confirm that all the percentages on journey time savings they have referenced for vehicles are on average less than 5 minutes, and that many of these journey time savings can be achieved more simply and cheaply by implementing sustainable transport measures?

Response

That is a valid point and will be included in our discussion.

Question 11

Mrs E Morawiecka, Breinton

To: cabinet member, infrastructure and transport

The most recent new road scheme delivered in Hereford City is the City Link Road. The publication of the evaluation of the new road scheme performance has still not been made public before the deadline for public questions for 3rd December. One of the key benefits of this scheme was that local residents, businesses and other users of the Hereford transport network would see improved management of traffic flows and speeds, with the majority of the scheme benefits forecast to be delivered through improved journey times on the city centre road network when compared to the no scheme scenario. As an indicator as to how new roads in Hereford deliver on the forecast outcomes, please confirm how the new City Link Road has improved journey times on the A49 trunk Road in Hereford and reduced air pollution in the AQMA.

Response

Following the completion of the City Link Road element of the HCCTP an interim traffic flow evaluation was undertaken to evaluate the impact of the City Link Road on the traffic flows in the areas surrounding the road. The findings of this are contained within the HCCTP interim Traffic Flow Evaluation Report. I apologise that this was not published before the deadline for questions for today's Cabinet Meeting. The report has been now published on the council's website and can be found by following the link below:

<https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/roads-1/hereford-2020/3>

The delivery of the city link road was not predicted to reduce traffic flows on the A49 but was to enable expansion of the city centre and regeneration of the area to the north of the inner ring road. This would include providing capacity to enable upgrading of Blueschool Street, Newmarket Street and Commercial Road for pedestrians, cyclists and public transport and to promote sustainable transport. This interim report shows, as forecast, reductions in traffic flows on Blueschool Street, Newmarket Street and Commercial Road. However, an increase in traffic flows on College Road has been observed which will be monitored and reviewed in the delivery of the remaining elements of the package.

A Monitoring & Evaluation Plan (MEP) for the HCCTP has been developed and this sets out the monitoring programme. The MEP outlines the monitoring of the journey time and air quality aspects, along with other aspects such as walking and cycling flows and confirms monitoring will be undertaken one year and five years after the completion of the whole package. This is on the basis that it is the full package that supports the mode shift to realise changes to these outcomes.

Supplementary Question

Now the report is published, the answer is on page 7 of the evaluation report. This states that morning peak traffic flows have increased on Edgar St by 21%-25% and evening peak flows have increased 32%-68%. Whilst the City Link Road has reduced vehicles on Newmarket St, Blueschool St, it appears that this was at the expense of other roads, particularly residential ones such as College Road (vehicles up 42% & 15%) and Venns Lane (up 14% & 8%). This new road, has increased car use, congestion and air pollution on Edgar St, despite being part of the AQMA. With the changes in traffic volumes miles out from that modelled, and with some of the impacts particularly detrimental to residential areas and around schools and colleges, how can councillors have any confidence in the modelling for further road building?

Response

It is a rhetorical question but it's a fair question and I think it's one that we've addressed in the past. We've discussed this issued that when we commission reports it's often best to try and stay away from specific metrics because you tend to concentrate on them for all sorts of reasons and it's particularly important to look at the ambition that you're trying to achieve. That said you need to monitor the projections that consultants give you to have faith in them and you need to follow up and see how the predictions line up with the realities after the event. I think they don't always line up very well and that is for a variety of reasons and sometime unavoidable but I think it's just something you bear I mind when we are looking forward at projections, that they are at the end of the day assumptions made either on data or on qualitative expertise.