

MINUTES of the meeting of Environment Scrutiny Committee held at The Council Chamber, Brockington, 35 Hafod Road, Hereford on Monday, 28th February, 2005 at 2.00 p.m.

Present: Councillor J.H.R. Goodwin (Chairman)

Councillors: G.W. Davis, K.G. Grumbley, J.G.S. Guthrie, T.W. Hunt, G. Lucas, J.W. Newman and Miss F. Short

In attendance: Councillors Mrs. P.A. Andrews, P.J. Edwards (Cabinet Member - Environment), D.J. Fleet, Mrs. J.P. French, P.E. Harling, Mrs. J.A. Hyde, T.M. James, R. Mills, Mrs. J.E. Pemberton, R.J. Phillips, Mrs. S.J. Robertson, J. Stone, J.P. Thomas, W.J.S. Thomas and R.M. Wilson (Cabinet Member – Highways and Transportation)
Highways Agency - Mr C. Mercer, Mr D. Wheeler and Mr M. Worrallo.
West Mercia Police – Chief Insp. G. Higgins and Police Constable C. Mears.

46. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies had been received from Councillors W.L.S. Bowen, Mrs A.E. Gray and R. Mills.

47. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Councillor G. Lucas substituted for Councillor Mrs A.E. Gray. Councillor J. G. S. Guthrie substituted for Councillor R. Mills. (Councillor Mills subsequently attended and was able to speak but not vote).

48. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

49. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meetings held on 8th December, 2004 and 24th January, 2005 be approved and signed by the Chairman.

50. TRUNK ROADS IN HEREFORDSHIRE

The Committee considered the management of Trunk Roads in Herefordshire by the Highways Agency (HA).

The Chairman reminded the Committee that in response to concerns, primarily about safety on the A49 in the Ashton and Wellington areas, the Committee at its meeting on 8th December, 2004, had requested the opportunity to discuss the management of trunk roads with the Highways Agency. Subsequent to that meeting the Head of Highways and Transportation had collated, and forwarded to the Highways Agency, questions or comments from Members on the issue. Copies of the questions were made available at the meeting.

The Head of Highways and Transportation reminded the Committee of the trunk roads in the County namely: M50 Motorway; A40; A49 and A465 (Welsh border to Hereford), and that these were key components in the County's highway network. He reported that while there had been a significant reduction in the number of Killed and Seriously Injured Casualties (KSLIs) on Herefordshire's roads in recent years, the Route Management Strategies (RMS) produced by the HA indicated that accident rates on several sections of the A49 were above the national average for the class of road.

He further reported that while trunk roads represented only 3% of the total County network, they accounted for approximately 23% of all personal injury accidents. The Council was not the responsible Highway Authority for this 3% of the highway network. However, national targets for casualty reduction (BVPI 99) applied to Herefordshire Council, as local highway authority, and the Highways Agency. He warned that this position may impact on the Council's targets for reducing accidents, contained in the second Local Public Service Agreement, and ultimately adversely affect the potential for performance improvement grant.

He also reported that officers of the Council and the Highways Agency had begun discussions to identify options that might be considered if the delivery of casualty reduction schemes on trunk roads in Herefordshire were to be accelerated.

The Chairman welcomed the representatives from the Highways Agency (HA) to the meeting.

Mr C. Mercer, HA Network Strategy West Midlands, gave a presentation on the "Highways Agency's Roles and Responsibilities". The following are some of the principal points from the presentation:

- That the HA were responsible for managing, operating and improving the motorway and trunk road network in England and that the strategic aims were safer roads, reliable journeys and informed travellers.
- Regional Teams in the Network Strategy Directorate were involved in Multi-Modal Studies (MMS); Road Based Studies; taking the lead with Targeted Programme of Improvement (TPI) schemes; liaising with stakeholders; advising on land use planning issues and developing their role as network operator/traffic manager.
- The HA had strategic plans, 3 covering investment areas (Maintain, Operate, Improve) and 5 investment criteria (Safety, Environment, Economy, Accessibility, Integration).
- Objectives of the HA were to deliver a high quality service to all customers by: reducing congestion and improving reliability; improving road safety; respecting the environment and seeking feedback from customers; to ensure more effective delivery through better working relationships; and to implement best practice and innovative solutions to improve service.
- The delivery of "Safer Roads, Reliable Journeys, Informed Travellers" would be delivered through working on Multi-Modal Studies; undertaking Route Management Strategies; and working with partners on various strategic initiatives e.g. Regional Planning Guidance, Regional Economic Strategy; Local Plans and Local Transport Plans.
- A Route Management Strategy was a technique developed by the HA to provide a framework for managing individual trunk routes as part of wider transport networks. These interlocked with local transport strategies within the context established by Regional Planning Guidance. Part of the process involved consulting major stakeholders and the public to establish the problems and issues.

- The RMS process had been developed to assist the HA in planning and optimising investment and delivering the Agency's strategic plans; to provide consistency, transparency and openness; enable the Agency to provide an input to strategies and plans; to maximise customer focus and improve the Agency's forward planning.
- An RMS was comprised of three elements: Policy Objectives; Route Functions and Performance and Route problems and issues.
- The Land Use and Development Control Strategy within the RMS outlined the HA approach to future land use and development issues which materially affect the route within the context established by the Regional Planning Guidance. This approach would allow the HA to contribute to the formulation of policy at all levels of the planning process.
- "Route Outcomes" set out what the HA seek to achieve for the route over a 10-year RMS period. Identified outcomes should contribute to policy objectives, improve performance of a route consistent with its future functions and seek to address route problems and issues. Outcomes may indicate further investigations and studies required as part of the development of the Route Management Plan (RMP).

Mr D. Wheeler, HA Traffic Operations MAC9, gave a presentation on the "A49 Trunk Road, Herefordshire". The following are the principal points from the presentation:

- The A49 Route Management Strategy route outcomes had been identified as:
 - To adopt a consistent, realistic and enforceable approach in the management of vehicle speeds along the route;
 - To improve overtaking opportunities and improve the safety and economic efficiency of the route;
 - To improve safety by seeking to reduce the number of personal injury collisions along the route;
 - To improve non-motorised user facilities to enhance accessibility along and across the route;
 - To improve the performance of the A49 through Hereford;
 - Seek to facilitate and support economic activity along the route through a proactive development control strategy;
 - To improve lay-by provision along the route;
 - Improve alignment to enhance the safety and economic efficiency of the route;
 - To enhance the provision of and rationalisation of signage and road markings along the route;
 - To seek to reduce the environmental impact of the route.
- Following the publication of the RMS in December, 2004, the HA would continue to develop the Studies programme, identified by the RMS, and continue to identify schemes based on the study analysis.
- A number of recent schemes had been implemented including: Peterstow traffic calming; south of Hereford extension to 30mph speed limit; Callow Hill to Hereford major road improvement; Holme Lacy Road and Ross Road pedestrian signals upgrade; Wellington footway renewal and various lining, signing, junction and drainage improvements.
- The following schemes were identified as being under development for completion in the next 2 to 3 years (subject to available finance):
 - Harewood End traffic calming,
 - Much Birch traffic calming,
 - Edgar Street pedestrian crossing upgrade,
 - Poolmill Turn, Bridstow, junction improvement,
 - Dinmore Hill vehicle restraint system,
 - Dinmore Hill 50mph speed limit,

- Major maintenance schemes for Berrington Hall, Munstone to Hereford racecourse and north of Ashton.
- A number of studies were ongoing e.g. traffic through Hereford; Tourist signing review; right turn and Village Gateway treatments and overtaking opportunities review. Studies were also underway on nine collision cluster sites that had been identified.

The Committee debated issues raised during the presentations, questions forwarded to the HA in advance of the meeting and a number of general policy issues. The following principal points were raised:

1. Reference was made to a recent BBC Radio 4 interview with the Head of the Highways Agency which called into question the maintenance priorities of the HA e.g. the Motorway network vs. trunk roads maintenance. The HA representatives assured the Committee that maintenance was based on identified need. This may be based on accident statistics from the Police to determine whether there was any pattern of accidents. Management of the M50 was defined in its own RMS, a copy of which would be supplied to the Cabinet Member (Highways and Transport).
2. Reference was also made to the BBC Radio 4 "File on 4" programme, "Hidden Menace" on UK's roads, which had questioned the use of stone mastic asphalt (SMA) road surfacing because of fears about its poor grip qualities. The Council had stopped using SMA two years ago, however, the HA continued to use it, particularly on bends. The HA commented that there was a national policy on its use. SMA provided a quieter surface and it was used in anti-skid locations where this could be justified on a business case.
3. The Council collected its accident statistics from West Mercia Police Authority. The HA collected its statistics from a number of Authorities and this caused a delay in the use of the statistics. The HA are reviewing the situation and may move to a bi-annual statistic review period. Safety was a high priority issue with both the Council and the HA and there was an apparent mismatch in statistic availability and use, particularly to meet government targets. It was suggested that this issue be highlighted to the Department for Transport Local Government and the Regions (DTLR) in the Council's revised Local Transport Plan.
4. An inconsistency was highlighted between the HA statement issued on 7th December: "A49 Trunk Road: Accidents at Ashton and A49 Route Management Strategy Between Ross-on-Wye and Shrewsbury" which reported that "Ashton had not been identified as a problem area for accidents" and the statement in the RMS at paragraph 2.5.3 which indicated that the area was above the national average (local severity ratio 0.31 compared to 0.22 nationally). The HA acknowledged that the statistics were now out of date. However, they would be looking at a number of accident cluster sites in the area and would discuss with stakeholders the local priorities, which would be based on identified need and then prioritised against other schemes.
5. A number of issues were raised concerning possible improvements to the A49/Eye Lane (Berrington Hall) junction, namely: speed reduction measures; white lining; flashing warning signs and speed cameras. The HA responded that they had to work within the criteria set by the DTLR. Speed warning signs were to be trialled at Church Stretton. Speed cameras were installed by the Safety Camera Partnership in West Mercia.
6. The DTLR, in a recent Ministerial interview broadcast by the BBC, had given the strong impression that the Local Highway Authority (the Council) was responsible for introducing speed restrictions on trunk roads. The HA corrected any misunderstanding confirming that the HA, following consultation and in accordance with national criteria, was responsible for

implementing speed restrictions on trunk roads.

7. A number of questions were raised concerning the availability of up to date usage rate and casualty figures compared to those quoted in Section 3 of the RMS. The HA responded that the figures were not to hand but would be looked at.
8. In relation to land development that would affect the trunk road e.g. mineral extraction at Morton on Lugg, HA guidance required the developer to adopt measures not to affect the road or to provide mitigation measures.
9. The HA would be looking very closely at the recent incidents at Wellington Marsh.
10. Responding to a question regarding extending the speed restriction zone down the south side of Dinmore Hill to Burghope, the HA responded that a written answer had already been provided to the questioner. Confusion over the extent of the zone may have arisen during temporary works at both north and south ends of the 50mph zone. The HA and the Police were satisfied that the speed restriction was appropriately placed.
11. In relation to the proposed Harewood End footpath scheme it was pointed out that the new scheme needed to provide some form of pedestrian crossing to the existing footway on the other side of the road.
12. In response to whether the road in the Harewood End area was sub-standard, indicated by the number of "Slippery Road" warning signs, the HA responded that the condition of the carriageway was regularly reviewed by undertaking mechanical surveys followed by visual inspection. If carriageway works were required then warning signs were erected and the work was programmed according to the 'value criteria'.
13. The Committee appreciated that junction improvements at Poolmill, Bridstow would be undertaken in the next financial year. On questioning whether improvement works, particularly in relation to a pedestrian crossing at Peterstow and a school crossing at Bridstow would be undertaken, the Committee were informed that while a scheme was being looked at for Bridstow it would currently be difficult to justify.
14. The Committee debated issues concerning Belmont roundabout. The effect that traffic had on estate roads or country lanes e.g. Haywood Lane between Belmont and Grafton, in an attempt to get from the queues in Belmont Road (A465) across to the Ross Road (A49), which had a higher priority at the roundabout, was noted. The HA reported that they had been unable to show significant benefits from implementing improvements at the roundabout under the value criteria, particularly as land acquisition would be involved. However, they were in close liaison concerning the Asda development to improve the roundabout junction in terms of traffic flow and flood alleviation. The HA stated that the Asda development would provide a greater opportunity to develop this junction than the HA alone could undertake.
15. While safety issues on the Belmont Road (A465) would be looked at the response to a number of issues raised probably depended on whether the road was to be de-trunked. The Committee emphasised that if it were de-trunked, adequate management funding should also be transferred. It was agreed that a written response to the various issues raised would be made by the HA.
16. It was noted that the Council had been designated as a National Centre of Excellence for Local Transport Delivery, awarded for expertise in "Road Safety and Public Transport in Rural/Urban Areas".
17. The HA were questioned in relation to the removal of broken down vehicles; the setting up of diversions and the degree of liaison with the Council concerning the route of a diversion. The HA responded that, in the event of an accident, the Incident Support Unit attended and, diversions were set up under the direction of the Police. So far as they were aware the Unit worked closely with the Council concerning diversion routes, particularly as in the

recent past the Unit had occupied the same building as the Highways Team. The HA were not empowered to remove vehicles.

18. Litter removal from trunk roads, including the M50, was the Council's responsibility. However, for safety reasons, particularly on the M50, the Council co-ordinated this work with the HA.
19. In relation to the possibility of a by-pass for Hereford the HA stated that it was charged with making best use of the existing network. It was suggested that should the Council wish to progress the issue the matter should be taken up with the Regional Planning Body or raised through the Local Transport Plan (LTP) process. Questioned as to whether the Government sought the views of the HA in such matters the HA reported that they would be consulted. However, the current HA view was that the economic argument for a by-pass did not hold up.
20. The Director of Environment commented that the HA seemed to be rigid about implementing procedures whereas the Council was more flexible in its approach to risk management and more innovative in tackling problems. Questioned about possible HA input into the revised Herefordshire LTP the HA indicated they would be happy to discuss issues during the drafting stages.
21. The HA confirmed that temporary signs, e.g. similar to those sited on the southbound side of the Greyfriars Bridge warning of new traffic signals, should only be in place for approximately 6 months.
22. Invited to comment on how issues would now be taken forward the HA said that there was already a degree of commonality between the HA and the Council. However, while it had been the practice for regular meetings to be held, unfortunately a number of recent officer level meetings had been cancelled and the Council had been unable to provide staff to talk over a number of 'design issues'.
23. The Head of Highways and Transportation commented that the agenda for officer meetings would be expanded to incorporate the wider issues. He further commented that the Council had a slightly different approach to the HA concerning the treatment of accident sites, e.g. the ranking of sites, in that the Council used the statistics at an early stage in an attempt to be proactive in detecting accident trends, whereas the HA were more reactive to trends.

The Chairman thanked the representatives from the Highways Agency for attending and discussing the many issues concerning trunk roads in Herefordshire.

In summing up, the Chairman summarised comments made by Members of the Committee and from the wider audience, that it was a great disappointment that the HA had not been able to deal with specific problem areas on the A49, identified through questions submitted to them some two weeks before the meeting. However, he thanked the representatives of the HA for attending and giving their presentation and hoped that the improved liaison envisaged would be able to create a swifter method of actioning accident problems on the trunk roads of Herefordshire.

The meeting ended at 4.20 p.m.

CHAIRMAN