

## Planning

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Dear Oxford to Cambridge Expressway Stakeholder Team

### Stakeholder Engagement on Expressway Corridors

Please find attached written feedback from South Oxfordshire District Council (SODC) to your e-mail of 23<sup>rd</sup> February asking for views on the currently identified Expressway Corridors.

The full response and rationale is set out below, but in summary I would note that the current preference of SODC is for **Road Option C** in combination with **Oxford Sub-Option S1**. The Council would also not be adverse to **Road Option B**, if this is linked to **Oxford Sub-Option S1**.

SODC is not generally supportive of **Road Option A**. However, if this option was chosen by central government to be the preferred option, the Council would strongly prefer that this was routed via the **Oxford Sub-Option S4**.

Yours sincerely

Adrian Duffield  
Head of Planning

## **Oxford to Cambridge Expressway Corridor Stakeholder Consultation**

### **Response to Stakeholder Engagement, due on 12 April 2018**

#### **Questions asked in the consultation:**

**-What is your preferred Corridor, and why?**

**-Are there any Corridors you do not support, and why?**

### **Response from South Oxfordshire District Council**

#### **Introduction**

South Oxfordshire continue to take a keen interest in development of plans for the Oxford to Cambridge Expressway. It is noted that at this stage, the Expressway Project Team have asked for feedback from stakeholders on preferences regarding the corridor to be chosen for the Expressway. It is understood that, alongside more detailed assessment work, this will help inform the government decision on a corridor planned for later this year.

The Council believe that delivery of the Expressway could impact both positively and negatively on our communities for years to come, with the scale of impact dependent on the corridor and route chosen. Meaningful and detailed consultation with our communities will therefore be necessary as the Expressway scheme further develops, particularly as more detail of proposed routes comes forward.

The response outlined below on corridor preferences should therefore be taken as an assessment based on the current evidence and information available. These views may change as more detailed evidence comes forward, and as this becomes available for discussion and review by all those potentially impacted by the proposed scheme. The response also builds on views on potential routes previously sent by the Leader of South Oxfordshire to Lord Adonis, chair of the National Infrastructure Commission in August 2017.

#### **Context**

South Oxfordshire District Council (SODC) is located in Oxfordshire, to the south and east of Oxford City, with its population spread between a number of market towns and villages. Significant growth of jobs and homes is planned across the district, predominately in the Didcot and Science Vale area where approximately 20,000 new homes and 20,000 new jobs are planned over the next 20 years (between SODC and the adjacent district of the Vale of White Horse). Growth is also planned at proposed strategic sites across the central area of the district, notably at Culham, Berinsfield and Chalgrove, which links back to Science Vale. SODC is located at the western end of the Oxford to Cambridge growth arc.

Outside of the proposed growth areas, the district is predominately rural in nature, with significant areas covered by environmental designations, including the Chiltern Hills and North Wessex Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. There are also several Sites of Special Scientific Interest, and Ancient Woodland including Shotover Hill, Ot Moor, Brasenose Wood, Holton Wood and Holly Wood. A significant area of Oxford Green Belt is also located in South Oxfordshire, predominantly to the south and east of Oxford.

The main Strategic Road Network (SRN) routes of main importance to the district are the M40, which routes through the north-east of the district, and the A34, which is located just to the west of the district, providing SRN access to Didcot.

The A34 and M40 is used daily by residents in SODC, for travel to work, services and for leisure, and provide key linkages for them to surrounding areas. However, as the route is also heavily used for longer-distance travel, including HGV traffic between the South Coast and the Midlands/ North of England, congestion is often experienced on the part of the route through Oxfordshire. Traffic Modelling work undertaken to support Local Plans in the area shows this is forecast to worsen as new jobs and homes come forward.

There is therefore an acknowledged need to improve the capacity and reliability of these routes, with the Ox-Cam Expressway plans likely to assist in tackling current and forecast operational issues, particularly on the A34. The Expressway could also link well with new housing and employment along its route where new junctions are located.

However, as plans for any improvements to these road routes come forward, there will need to be a careful consideration of environmental matters, including review of possible mitigation. The impacts of potential further traffic attracted to a new route will also need careful review, including how this could impact on the existing road network. This would relate to both the SRN at either end of any new route, and on the local road network at junctions on any new route.

### **Answer to questions asked:**

#### **What is your preferred corridor and why?**

The Council have reviewed the proposed corridors, with reference to the plans within the 'Oxford to Cambridge Expressway Strategic Study Stage 3 Report,' published in November 2016, and in particular the road options plan shown in Appendix 1. On the basis of the plan in this report (Appendix 1), the Council would prefer **Road Option C** which would route between Milton Keynes and the A34 via Buckinghamshire, and past Bicester.

The plan also includes a number of sub-options around Oxford. The Council would prefer the **Oxford Sub-Option S1** which links south off the route of **Road Option C** towards the north of Oxford and would link back to the A34 between Abingdon and Didcot.

It is considered that a combination of **Road Option C** and the **Oxford Sub-Option S1**, would have the following key benefits:

- The route would more closely align with the current main route along this corridor- A34- M40- A421- M1, helping alleviate congestion along this route.
- This route would more closely align with the growth locations along the corridor such as Bicester and Didcot Garden Town, and potential further growth areas in Buckinghamshire and Northamptonshire.

- The route would more closely align with the other key-east- west infrastructure schemes, such as East-West rail.

Although not as preferable as **Road Option C**, the Council would not be adverse to delivery of **Road Option B**, only if it is linked to **Oxford Sub Option S1**.

### **Are there any Corridors you do not support, and why?**

SODC is not generally supportive of **Road Option A**, particularly if this routed close to the south of Oxford. The main concerns relate to the following likely impacts in our district:

- Depending on the exact route there would likely to be significant adverse impact on communities to the south of Oxford, particularly in the Garsington and Baldon areas, as well as the Oxford Green Belt.
- Depending on the route, the district would be concerned regarding environmental impacts at areas including Shotover Hill, Ot Moor and Bernwood Forest. This includes designated Sites of Special Scientific Interest at Shotover Hill and several woodlands. These concerns also include the impact on the Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and their setting. Depending on the precise routing, there is potential for adverse impact to The North Wessex Downs AONB and also to the Long Whittenham Clumps (Special Area of Conservation). In addition there is the potential for the route to impact upon the Chilterns AONB and its setting. The Chilterns AONB covers a significant area of South Oxfordshire and runs at its western edge from Goring to Chinnor and from Warborough to Henley on Thames. The impact would be considerable on these areas both physically and in terms of visual impact.

If **Road Option A** was chosen by central government to be the preferred Expressway corridor option, the district would strongly prefer that this was routed via the Oxford **Sub-option S4**, rather than closer to Oxford. This is mainly to ensure that the Expressway could link with our areas of identified growth, particularly at Didcot Garden Town, but also through the central area of the district. In addition it may be possible to limit its impact on the Green Belt. The Council would not wish for the Expressway to route through the district, without connecting effectively with existing settlements and proposed development (over 15,000 homes at Didcot Garden Town, including strategic sites to come forward in the emerging South Oxfordshire plan).

However, should this route be chosen the Council would want to engage further with Highways England to understand impacts on the district in more detail. In particular, the Council would want to discuss how any routes within the corridor would impact on our communities, and how mitigation could be developed to address these forecast impacts, including on the Green Belt.

### **Conclusion:**

The above comments on route options are given on the basis of the information available at this time. As more detail of assessments comes forward, and once a preferred corridor is chosen, the Council would want to continue to be engaged on potential benefits and impacts of the Expressway. In addition, it is important to note that South Oxfordshire, along with the other districts in Oxfordshire is working on a Joint Statutory Spatial Plan (JSSP) which will set out the high level growth in

Oxfordshire to 2050. The route of the potential corridor will likely have a significant bearing on this document and the relationship with future growth. For the JSSP to meet the deadlines agreed with MHCLG for its production, this is a critical part of the jigsaw we are keen to understand.

Finally, we would particularly like to see a decision on the preferred corridor also make clear the preferred sub-option around Oxford. This will ensure greater clarity for all regarding the complete proposed route.

# Appendix 1: Schematic figure from Stage 3 Oxford to Cambridge Expressway Report, Nov 2016

Oxford to Cambridge Expressway Strategic Study: Stage 3 Report

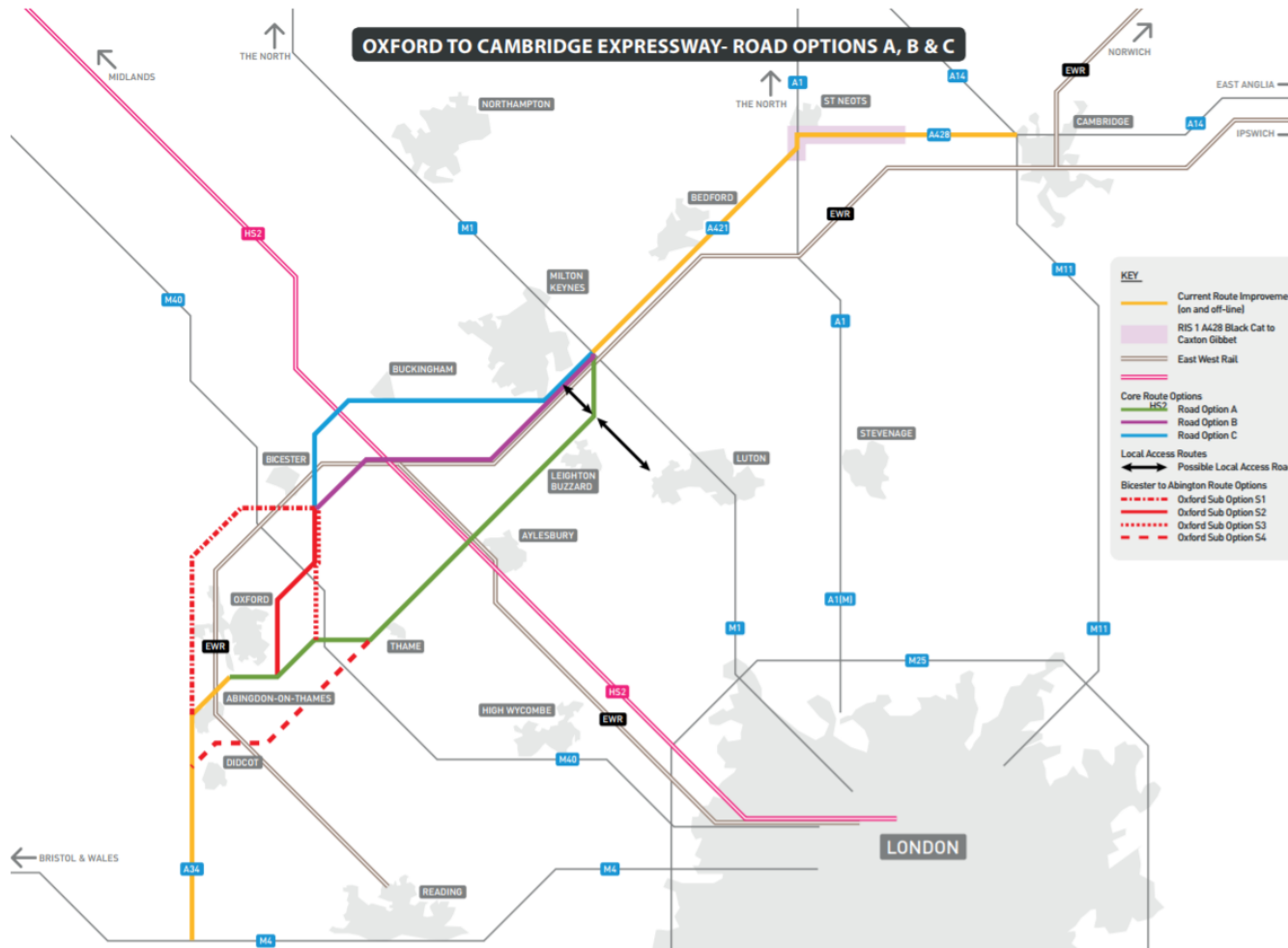


Figure 5-2: Shortlisted Intervention Options