

A27 Task Group - Briefing Note

Committee	Scrutiny
Date	4 December 2017
Subject	A27 Task Group Review
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In June 2016 the Scrutiny Committee invited Highways England to an informal briefing to discuss the current A27 east of Lewes and the £75m proposals to improve various sections of the road.

Highways England (HE) briefed the committee with regard to the feasibility study that had been undertaken, looking at traffic 'hotspots' along the A27. They stated that the study did not identify an economic case for a dual carriageway east of Lewes at this time. The Road Investment Strategy, published in December 2014, committed to the development of sustainable transport measures east of Lewes (and at Arundel, Worthing and Lancing) and £75m was set aside for smaller scale capacity improvements and measures to enhance accessibility, safety and resilience along the corridor east of Lewes.

A detailed plan had not yet been developed and the improvements were still in the early stages of development.

The Committee was advised that the Department for Transport, East Sussex County Council (ESCC) and HE would be involved in the final design / use of the £75m, SDNP would be seeking improvements for villages – including local schools. The timescale for the list of options commence with a series of consultations beginning in November 2016 at which point it would be discussed with stakeholders. Public consultation would take place in spring 2017, and 2020 would see the commencement of the agreed improvements.

As a result of this briefing, Members agreed that they wished to build an evidence based case for further investment into the road and agreed a terms of reference for a scrutiny review at the full committee meeting in September 2016.

At this time, the Committee expressed the wish to consult with key stakeholders including the emergency services. A task group comprising four Councillors (two from each party), supported by the Local Democracy Officer, agreed a methodology and began to undertake some further background research.

A27 Reference Group

During the course of the research it was discovered that East Sussex County Council (ESCC) had formed an A27 Reference Group comprising MP's, Council Leaders, Chief Executives and Key Officers of local authorities that the A27 passes through.

The Task Group invited Mr Jon Wheeler, Team Manager Strategic Economic Infrastructure, East Sussex County Council, to a meeting to provide them with further information on the work of the A27 Reference Group and to give an overview of ESCC views on the proposed improvements.

Eastbourne Borough Council prepared a response to the final proposals which was sent to Highways England in November 2016.

Following this meeting, the Task Group amended their terms of reference to reduce the scale of the review in the light of the work of the A27 Reference Group.

Survey

As part of this, an online survey was commissioned. The survey was added to the Council's website on 12 September 2016 and ran until 30 January 2017. The survey was publicised through social media and in the local papers.

The survey received a total of 306 responses, 286 of which were in favour of a dual carriage way between Polegate and Lewes. The responses were from a wide range of users from those who used the road daily, weekly and monthly to those who used the road less than twice a year.

The survey also included details of the times of use - the total time period surveyed was between 6am and 10pm.

15 responses suggested alternatives to a dual carriageway and they included:

- Banning cycling and agricultural vehicles
- Educating users
- Slowing traffic
- Adding traffic lights at various points and
- Adding passing places

The respondents did not consider the use of public transport an option (a series of rail strikes were underway during the course of the survey) stating that bus service timetabling was insufficient and that shift working patterns were prohibitive.

Challenges

Members are asked to note that a number of challenges arose during the course of this review, namely;

- The membership of the Task Group changed on 4 occasions.
- During January and February 2017, attempts were made to invite the emergency services to a meeting with the Task Group, however, prior commitments made this difficult to achieve.
- A meeting with East Sussex Fire and Rescue had been scheduled for April 2017, but unfortunately this was cancelled again due to the unavailability of Task Group members and staff.
- County Council Elections were held in May 2017 which impacted on Councillor and staff availability, and this was followed by the General Election in June.
- The Council was undertaking the Joint Transformation Programme with Local Democracy being part of the first phase.

On arranging the last and final meeting of the Task Group the Committee Officer (Local Democracy Officer) proposed a total of 5+ dates over a two month period, which, due to a number of constraints for all parties, resulted in the final meeting being held on 27 September 2017.

Dissolution of the Review

At its final meeting, the Task Group agreed that due to the challenges noted above, that the review should be dissolved.

Mr Jon Wheeler, Team Manager Strategic Economic Infrastructure, East Sussex County Council, was also in attendance and the Task Group requested that Mr Wheeler attend a meeting to advise Members of the work of the A27 Reference Group and give an update on the final agreed Highways England improvements to the A27 east of Lewes.

The Task Group were satisfied that the A27 Reference Group would fully support their original intended purpose for review.

A meeting has therefore been arranged for Thursday 11 January 2018 at 4.30pm Friston Room, 1 Grove Road and all Members are invited to attend.