

Agenda Item No: 8
Report To: Ashford Joint Transportation Board
Date: 7 December 2010



Report Title: **Highway Improvements at M20 Junction 9 and Drovers Roundabout**

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Summary:	To inform Members of the progress of highway improvement works to M20 Junction 9 and Drovers Roundabout in Ashford and to set out the diversion routes to be used during a weekend closure of M20 between Junctions 9 and 10 in Spring 2011
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Key Decision: NO

Affected Wards: Stour, Godington, Bockhanger

Recommendations: **The Board is asked to:-**

- i) Note the progress on site of highway improvement works to M20 Junction 9 and Drovers Roundabout in Ashford**
- ii) Note the diversion routes to be used during a weekend closure of M20 between Junctions 9 and 10 in Spring 2011**

Policy Overview: Both schemes are consistent with policy CS15 of the adopted Local Development Framework's Core Strategy and the Ashford Transport Strategy.

Financial Implications: M20 Junction 9 and Drovers Roundabout are funded by Regional Infrastructure Fund (RIF) and Growth Area Funding (GAF3)

Risk Assessment Yes – a full risk assessment has been carried out and maintained for the scheme.

Equalities Impact Assessment No

Exemption Clauses: No

Background Papers: No

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Report Title: Highway Improvements at M20 Junction 9 and Drovers' Roundabout

Purpose of the Report

1. To advise Members of the progress that has been made with the construction of the highway improvements at Junction 9 of the M20 (Ashford West) and at Drovers Roundabout in Ashford.
2. To advise Members of the proposed diversion routes for traffic affected by the planned weekend closure of the M20 between Junctions 9 and 10 in the Spring of 2011 to allow the erection of the new bridge over the M20.

Issues to be Decided

3. None; this Report is for Members information.

Background

4. At the last meeting of this Board, Members were advised that highway improvements at Junction 9 of the M20 (Ashford West) and at Drovers Roundabout in Ashford were underway. Members voiced concern that lane closures during the working day were not being removed sufficiently early. Members were also given early notice that the bridge erection would require closure of the M20 and that traffic diversion routes in Ashford would be required.
5. Construction work started on site in July 2010 and the contractual completion date is 31 March 2011.

Drovers Roundabout

6. Congestion, particularly on the approaches to Drovers Roundabout has generally been caused by temporary traffic management and particularly lane closures being in place when traffic flows have been high. Lane closures are required both to provide the contractor with sufficient working space to carry out their construction works and to protect the workforce when carrying out this work. Safety legislation stipulates what width the lane closures must be when working on, or alongside, a live carriageway and if these closures are removed then no work may take place within 0.9metres of the live traffic.
7. Since the contract was awarded, the contractor has been instructed to carry out extra work in the vicinity of Drovers Roundabout. Much of this has been to facilitate the new underground utilities and accesses that will be required to serve the adjacent development sites. To accommodate this work within the contract period Kent Highway Services (KHS) agreed to the temporary lane closures remaining in place at Drovers Roundabout and at Junction 9 longer than was initially intended.

8. As well as the additional work, several other factors have led to the rate of construction being slightly slower than the contractor had forecast in his tender. The public funding agreement for these works is heavily conditioned and requires all work at Drovers to be completed by 31 March 2011. Looking at the work still to be carried out, it was concluded that there was a significant risk of missing this deadline unless the working day was extended. For this longer working day to be effective in bringing the scheme back on programme, the contractor required that lane closures were not lifted before 4pm. This has meant that the road network has generally not become free-flowing until 4.30pm. Whilst the additional disruption is regrettable and particularly at school dispersal time, building new accesses and laying ducts for services now will significantly reduce the traffic disruption and excavation and reinstatement of new surfacing if they had been done later as part of the future development.
9. The traffic management that is installed each day is carefully planned to work as a single entity and piecemeal removal to open-up areas where it is no longer needed it is not usually possible without compromising safety. Nonetheless, in recognition that the working hours have been extended, the site team remain vigilant to the potential for returning sections of coned-off road to live traffic in advance of the agreed deadline.
10. Notwithstanding the additional construction work and a slower rate of progress than had been submitted by the contractor at the time of tender, the mitigation measures agreed by the site team have ensued that the scheduled works completion date remains 31 March 2011.

M20 Junction 9 and Bridge

11. At the time of drafting this Report, a weekend date for erection of the bridge has not been firmly fixed or agreed with the contractor. A delay in completion of the main bridge abutments means that the earliest erection date is over the weekend of 19 March. However, this may be unachievable and because of the need to have availability of contingency weekends there is a risk that erection would have to be deferred until the weekend of 7 May. This is because a closure of the M20 would not be permitted over much of the intervening period because of school holidays, Easter and the extended May Bank Holiday. Every effort is being made by the site team in discussion with the contractor to try and achieve erection in March.
12. As reported to the last meeting of this Board, the safest and most efficient method of installing the bridge will be to close the M20 to all non-emergency traffic between 20:00 Saturday until 05:00 the following Monday. Members were understandably concerned about the impact on Ashford of what would include a Sunday daytime diversion of traffic and a wide-ranging traffic diversion strategy has been prepared and agreed with KHS and the Highways Agency, whereby:
 - Overhead gantry signs will advise drivers on the M25 heading for the ports to turn off at Dartford and use the A2/M2
 - Overhead gantry signs will advise drivers on the M20 heading for the ports to turn off at Maidstone and use Detling Hill to reach the M2/A2

- Portable variable message signs at the ports will advise non-local traffic to use the A2/M2
- Standard traffic diversion signs will direct all coastbound traffic reaching Junction 9 to use a diversion route to the north of Ashford (A251 Trinity Road / Faversham Road, A28 Canterbury Road, A2070 Willesborough Road)
- Standard traffic diversion signs will direct all London-bound traffic reaching Junction 10 to use a diversion route to the south of Ashford (A2070 Bad Munsteriefel Road, A2042 Romney Marsh Road, B2229 Norman Road / Beaver Road / Brookfield Road, A28 Chart Road / Templer Way / Fougères Way)

A detailed traffic simulation model has demonstrated that the above strategy should be sufficient to limit queuing to levels similar to the daytime peak-periods on the diversion routes. We are aware of the operational sensitivities particularly on sections of the diversion routes such as Norman Road and Brookfield Road and between 1000 and 1800 on the Sunday, KCC's Traffic Management Centre will use CCTV, police officers and KHS officers on site to implement local diversions on the Ashford ring road or to the A2 at Canterbury should traffic conditions dictate. A plan showing the diversion routes will be on display at the Board meeting.

13. As with Drovers Roundabout, the roadworks to Junction 9 are progressing at a slower rate than was expected by the contractor at the time of tender. Whilst working hours have been extended to reduce the consequential delay, a need to revise the drainage design, problems encountered by BT's contractors when diverting telecommunication ducts, and damage to the Highway Agency's telecommunications network is currently pushing the completion date for the works to the junction beyond the 31 March 2011 funding deadline. However, the site team are working with the contractor to introduce changes to the work programme such that the new junction layout would be operational by that deadline.
14. However, the need to maintain temporary pedestrian access through Junction 9 means that works cannot be fully completed until about 2 months after the bridge is opened and the alternative pedestrian route is available. The difficulty is that working space on the north side of the M20 to allow the bridge to be erected prevents the approach ramps being completed until the bridge is in place. In order to fully complete the roadworks and bearing in mind the very low usage of the existing pedestrian route, there may be a case, nearer the time, for closing the route and asking pedestrians to use the alternative route via Fougères Way and Canterbury Road bridge until the new route over the bridge becomes available.

Related Developments

15. Regular co-ordination meetings are held with the developers of sites close to Drovers Roundabout to manage the interface between the Drovers Roundabout scheme, the future Park & Ride/SmartLink designs, and the development proposals. KCC are required to meet a number of obligations arising from the land transfer agreement in relation to the provision of accesses, services and ducting, and good progress has been made to future proof the highways works as far as possible and to prevent, or at least greatly

reduce, the amount of disturbance to the highway areas as these development sites come forward.

16. Work on the Park & Ride scheme has now been taken as far as possible but stopping short of a formal planning application in light of recent announcements following the comprehensive spending review, that SmartLink and Park & Ride will not receive funding via the Department of Transport until 2014/15 at the earliest. Planning applications are likely to be submitted shortly for new housing off Maidstone Road (opposite Repton Park) and a Care Home and offices off Simon Weil Avenue. A planning application is intended to be submitted early in the new year for a new bulky goods retail store next to the planned Park & Ride site off Fougères Way.
17. The Drivers Roundabout scheme will include the construction of 3 new access points for all of these developments, in accordance with the planning permissions already achieved earlier this year, and ducting for new services.

Portfolio Holder and Local Member Views

18. Updates on all Ashford's Future led projects and the Growth Area Funding programme are also regularly reviewed at Ashford's Future Company Board meetings attended by an ABC Council Director (previously Cllr Paul Bartlett), and at Ashford's Future Partnership Board meetings chaired by Councillor Paul Clokie.
19. Members of the Boards have expressed continued support for the project.
20. The Councillor for Godinton considers that the afternoon lane closures at Drivers Roundabout should be lifted no later than 3.15pm because of the contribution of the school run to congestion. He does not consider that this will have an impact on the construction programme or cost and that KHS and the contractor are indifferent to the effects of congestion in this area of Ashford.

Finance

21. The overall project remains within the total funding available. However, in funding terms, Drivers Roundabout and Junction 9, including the bridge, are discreet projects. Drivers Roundabout is under budget while Junction 9 particularly because of the uniqueness of the bridge, will exceed the contingency provision. The funders have been approached with a request to a virement of the underused contingency from Drivers Roundabout to Junction 9. The underlying difficulty is that the split of funding was made at an early stage based on estimates and we were always aware that the balance was not ideal.

Conclusion

22. The Board is asked to note the progress made on these essential schemes that support Ashford's and Kent's growth programme and to comment on the concept of a future closing of the pedestrian route through Junction 9 in order to allow the roadworks to be fully completed without residual works being necessary after the new bridge is open.

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Attachments:

None