

**Agenda Item No:** 8  
**Report To:** Ashford Joint Transportation Board



**Date:** 14 June 2011

**Report Title:** **Update report on Highway Improvements at Drovers Roundabout, M20 Junction 9, and a new foot/cycle bridge over the M20**

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**Summary:** **Members are updated on the progress being made on the construction of these major highways schemes that will support the growth of Ashford. Officers will be available to give a verbal update on the details of the programme for completing the schemes and the traffic management impacts.**

**Key Decision:** NO

**Affected Wards:** Stour, Godington, Bockhanger, Victoria

**Recommendations:** **The Board is asked to note the progress being made towards completing these projects.**

**Policy Overview:** These 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** Full costed risk assessment have been carried out and maintained for both schemes.

**Equalities Impact Assessment** No

**Exemption Clauses:** No

**Background Papers:** No

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## **Report Title: Update report on Highway Improvements at Drovers Roundabout and M20 Junction 9 / cyclebridge over the M20**

### **Purpose of the Report**

1. To advise Members of the progress that has been made with the construction of these two major highway schemes that support Ashford's growth programme.

### **Issues to be Decided**

2. None. This report is for Members' information.

### **Drovers Roundabout – Traffic Signals**

- 3 Since the last meeting of this Board considerable progress has been made on the construction works at Drovers Roundabout although progress has been slightly slower than planned. This was in part intentional - to lessen the impact on peoples' journeys; in part pragmatic - ensuring that the more critical bridge-installation took priority and in part because some scheduled tasks and particularly road resurfacing needed more time to complete than forecast. However, the traffic signals were switched-on two weeks earlier than planned because of safety concerns that had been reported to Kent County Council by several road users and the Police. No further mitigation was realistically possible to address the concerns and the decision was taken to switch-on the signals but this did require drivers adjusting to the new junction operation during the week commencing May 16 rather than risk operating under conventional roundabout control until the quieter half-term week. Although much of the temporary traffic management was removed for the switch-on there was unfortunately very considerable congestion during the first 24-hours and particularly the morning peak period of 17 May. On that initial perception, there resulted some public comment that traffic signals at this roundabout were unnecessary.
- 4 New road layouts and traffic signals invariably cause some disruption and congestion as drivers adapt and it usually takes several weeks for traffic patterns to settle down. The signals are also initially operating on to a fixed time plan and it will be a few weeks before vehicle detectors that continually measure traffic flows and queue lengths to optimise the timing of the traffic signals become operational. Understandably, this led to some frustration at quieter times of the day when many drivers were clearly held on a red light for longer than should be the case.
- 5 Members will be aware that the decision to install traffic signals at this junction was driven primarily by forecasts of traffic growth based on the planned development of Ashford and the infrastructure needs. The junction is a key part of the strategic access to Ashford and the old roundabout was unusual in

the sense of having five dual carriageway legs and being relatively small in size. The physical and development constraints have largely dictated the scheme. Drovers Roundabout was already under pressure and there are already permitted developments that had planning obligations to carry out improvements. Rather than have a series of such incremental improvements over the years, Government accepted the case to provide funding to carry out a comprehensive improvement. Making the changes now has meant that fewer people have been inconvenienced by the works than would have been the case had they been carried out over a number of years as nearby development was being constructed. The investment in Drovers Roundabout, M20 Junction 9 and the new cyclebridge also demonstrates to potential employers that the infrastructure is here to support their businesses, increasing the likelihood of the town's economic success.

- 6 Signal-control is now widely used to remedy traffic problems that frequently affect large roundabouts. At busy times of the day, traffic signals:
- stop traffic queuing to leave the roundabout blocking traffic from entering it or from leaving it at an exit that is free-flowing
  - regulate traffic flows rather than allowing certain movements to dominate under priority control.
  - help traffic join the roundabout that would otherwise have fast-flowing traffic on it
  - enable three or four lanes of traffic to safely and simultaneously join the roundabout
  - help pedestrians cross the road

There are some drawbacks, however:

- at peak times, the traffic movements that previously dominated under conventional roundabout control suffer delays.
- when traffic flows are light, the majority of journeys take longer due to drivers having to stop at red lights.

On balance, the benefits of reducing congestion at busy times of the day and improving facilities for pedestrians and cyclists throughout the day are considered to outweigh the drawbacks described above.

## **M20 Junction 9 and Foot/Cycle Bridge**

7. Since the last meeting of this Board, fabrication and erection of the foot/cycle bridge has proceeded according to programme. This included a very successful 33-hour closure of the M20 over the weekend of 14/15 May. Extensive preparations, widespread advance notice and excellent project management led to a smooth installation of the bridge with relatively minor traffic problems in and around Ashford. The view is that one big closure rather than a series of overnight closures was the right decision.
8. To minimise impact on traffic using the M20, the remaining works to the bridge are generally being carried out at night. With many of these finishing works being very weather dependent, it is not yet possible to provide a precise date for when the bridge will be opened but it is likely to be the end of July/early August.

## **Landscaping**

9. An exceedingly dry April and May has meant that much of the new planting has failed to thrive. Whilst larger plants such as trees are surviving, many smaller shrubs are failing to survive, despite regular watering. As a result, all planting was stopped on 23 April and any plants that do wither will be replaced in November when the landscaping is resumed.
10. It is envisaged that the refurbished 'Drover and Cows' figures will be reinstated on the Drovers junction island at the end of June/early July.

## **Portfolio Holder and Local Member Views**

11. Updates on all Ashford's Future led projects and the Growth Area Funding programme are regularly reviewed at Ashford's Future Company Board and at Ashford's Future Partnership Board meetings.

## **Spend against Budget**

12. Details of spend against budgets on the two schemes is regularly reviewed at Project Steering Groups and any implications on the overall programme for growth area funding programme are regularly reviewed at the Ashford's Future Company and Partnership Boards.

## **Conclusion**

13. The Board is asked to note the good progress made on these essential schemes that support Ashford's growth programme.
14. The Project Manager will be in attendance at the meeting to update members on progress and particularly on the traffic management aspects and to answer questions.

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## **Attachments:**

None