

SOUTH WEST REGIONAL ASSEMBLY**SPECIAL REGIONAL ASSEMBLY MEETING****30 April 2004****The Bristol/Bath to South Coast Study****1. PURPOSE**

- 1.1 This report presents the conclusions and recommendations of the Transport Group on the Bristol/Bath to South Coast Study (BB2SCS) on each of the strategic issues addressed by the Study.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 The Transport Group recommends that the Assembly should: -

- (i) Withdraw its objection to detrunking of the A36/A46 in view of the results of the consultant's analysis of the function of the route which shows it is not inter-regional in function.
- (ii) Support the establishment of a route or corridor co-ordinating group to ensure a consistent treatment for the corridor in individual Local Transport Plans and between delivery agencies.
- (iii) Agree with the Consultants emphasis of a 'route management approach' making the most effective use of the network.
- (iv) Support the delivery of modal shift by rail and the establishment of clock-face services linking Bristol/Bath to Southampton. The Assembly also wishes to see the current overcrowding resolved by producing rolling stock capacity in the short term.
- (v) Support the need for an area strategy for Bath which will address the impact of North-South HGV through traffic on the World Heritage City. The strategy to include a further assessment of a package of measures including demand management, an A36-46 link and expansion of Park and Ride.
- (vi) Support the need for Local Authorities to work with bus companies to maximise the opportunity for bus use including the development of hub and interchange facilities and bus priority corridors.
- (vii) Support a signage strategy to direct HGV's to the A34 as the main inter-regional north-south route.
- (viii) Support the consideration of the North - South routes through the central part of the region as part of the review of the Regional

Transport Strategy having to decisions on the second strategic route into the South West (A303/A358).

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 In 1997, the “Roads Review – Consultation Document – What Role for Trunk Roads in England?” identified the fact that 40% of roads in the Trunk Road network would be potential candidates for detrunking. This included the A36/A46 between the M4 junction 18 and the M27 junction 2. The detrunking proposals for this particular route were strongly opposed by certain highway authorities as well as the then Regional Planning Conference.
- 3.2 The Government Office for the South West commissioned a short study to examine the case for detrunking and to facilitate future decisions on the status of the A36/A46. This report was produced in September 2000.
- 3.3 The report concluded that a further review would be required on the A36/A46, and the A350. The Regional Assembly reconfirmed their objection to the detrunking proposals on the grounds that the analysis in the report had not led to the conclusion that the route should be detrunked. The Secretary of State however, confirmed the decision to promote the detrunking of the route.
- 3.4 In order to address the concerns of the Regional Assembly and the highway authorities, the Government Office for the South West, in consultation with the Highways Agency, commissioned a further study, the Bristol/Bath to South Coast (BB2SC) Study.

Study Area

- 3.5 The study area includes the A37 to the west in order to take account of issues pertinent to the A350 and A37 from south-east Dorset and the Poole/Bournemouth conurbation to the M4/M5 corridors. To the east the study area is bounded by the A34 which is itself to be the subject of a scoping study to be commissioned by Government Office for the South East. To the north, the M4 bounds the study area and to the south, the south coast.
- 3.6 Within the study area, there are a number of routes of significance including the A36/A46. The A350 runs due south through the towns of Melksham and Westbury connecting to the A36 at Warminster, before continuing to Poole, via Shaftesbury and Blandford. The A35/A37 in the west extends from the south east Dorset region and runs due north to the A303 and on to Bristol as well as connecting to the M5 via the A358. In the east, the A34 is a Trunk Road and connects the M3 to the A303 and the M4.

- 3.7 East/west issues have recently been examined by the SWARMMS study and are not covered in any detail as part of this work.
- 3.8 Within this study area there are also important rail routes which offer opportunities for improved freight and passenger flows, most notably the line between Bristol and Bath, Westbury and Southampton.

Study Objectives

- 3.9 The objectives for the study are:
- To identify and recommend a transport strategy for maintaining an appropriate level of service in the corridor which is multi-modal in approach, concentrating on long distance HGV and car traffic.
 - To develop implementation plans to address the strategic and sub-regional transport plans within the corridor.
 - To produce an implementation programme which focuses on overcoming particular constraints within the corridor.
 - To assist in developing an integrated transportation strategy to address the issues relating to through traffic in the corridor on the historic city of Bath.

4. CONSULTANTS RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 A summary of the consultants recommendations for the corridor and Bath are set out in Appendix 1.

5. RESPONSE FROM STAKEHOLDERS

- 5.1 Before determining its response to the Secretary of State the Assembly has consulted regional stakeholders on the main strategic recommendations set out in the consultants report.
- 5.2 A summary of responses received from stakeholders is set out in Appendix 2.

6. TRANSPORT GROUP

- 6.1 The Transport Group met on the 13th April 2004, to consider the main strategic issues addressed in the consultant's report. Members emphasised the need to ensure the Assembly addresses the key strategic issues and does not seek to take a view about matters which are more appropriately addressed at local level by the relevant local authorities.
- 6.2 At the meeting a representative from Dorset County Council was in attendance to explain the views of the County Council backed up by the business community. It was proposed by Dorset County Council that: "the Regional Transport Group recommend: -

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- (a) The Assembly response to the Bristol/Bath to South Coast study should support the definition of the A350/C13 corridor as a regionally significant route;
- (b) The Regional Transport Strategy should define the A350/C13 corridor as a regionally significant route and include a commitment to supporting its importance.

6.3 Members received a copy of a letter sent to the Dorset Chamber of Commerce and Industry by the Government Office of the South West which was circulated to Members and is appended to this report, Appendix 3. Following discussions and having regard to the GOSW letter, the Members of the Transport Group did not accept the Dorset recommendations for the reasons set out in Section 8: Issues to Be Addressed by the Assembly.

6.4 The Transport Group did however feel that the needs of the North - South routes should be reassessed in the context of the review of the Regional Transport Strategy taking account of decisions regarding the improvement of the Second Strategic East - West route and in particular whether the Secretary of State for Transport approves the dualling of the A358.

6.5 Members reiterated the need to ensure that suitable arrangements are put in place to co-ordinate the local authority Local Transport Plans where there is a need to take a "route" or "corridor" approach. The Transport Group's recommendations to the Assembly are set out in paragraph 2.

7. OFFICER GROUP

7.1 The consultant's reports and recommendations were considered by the Assembly Transport Officers' Sub Group on the 8th April 2004. The officer group agrees with the recommendations set out in this report but wanted the Assembly to support the A36 - A46 link as it had been recommended by the consultants.

8. ISSUES TO BE ADDRESSED BY THE ASSEMBLY

(A) FUNCTION OF THE ROUTES

8.1 The previous Parkman study did not provide sufficient information to enable the Assembly to judge the function of the A36/A46 route and to conclude whether or not it warranted "Trunk" status by way of the volume and nature of traffic flows.

8.2 The analysis supplied by the consultants in the BB2SC Study enables the Assembly to reconsider its position which was previously to oppose detrunking.

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- 8.3 The “Problems and Issues” report prepared by the consultants analyses the traffic flows on the routes compared with “benchmark” traffic figures for routes in the country. This shows that the main North-South inter-regional link is the A34, with the A36/A46/A350 performing an intra-regional role linking main urban areas and supporting the local economy. ***The consultants conclude that the A36/A46 is not “Trunk” in nature and on this basis the Assembly may wish to withdraw its objection to detrunking providing sufficient resources are devolved to local authorities. The Secretary of State for Transport has already made a decision in principle to detrunk the route but has not yet proceeded with publishing the necessary orders at the request of the Assembly.***

(B) STRATEGIC APPROACH – ROUTE MANAGEMENT FOCUS

- 8.4 The consultants recommend a strategy for the A36/A46 route which is designed to manage the route to make the most effective use of the existing infrastructure. Major improvements in journey times are not advocated. **In view of the detrunking of the route this approach should be supported by the Assembly.**
- 8.5 However, Dorset County Council state that the consultants analysis was limited in that it only looked at traffic flows and did not pay enough attention to the nature of the traffic. Furthermore because of problems with data collection Dorset have pointed out that the information available to the consultants about the nature of traffic flows was limited. Dorset concede that the A350 and C13 do not carry high volumes of traffic but argue that they do have a longer distance function and recommend that the Assembly supports **improvements** to the A350/C13.
- 8.6 From a **regional perspective** the A36/A46/A350 (and C13) do serve a intra-regional function in facilitating movement between SE Dorset and the Bristol/Bath area and the M4 and this should be recognised. However, while acknowledging this function the consultants have not advocated a strategy that seeks to “improve” the routes to reduce journey time and encourage traffic onto these roads. Rather the strategic corridor emphasis is to facilitate modal shift and make the best use of the existing infrastructure in line with National Policy.
- 8.7 The consultants have advocated that longer distance traffic should be encouraged to use the “Trunk” or inter-Regional route which is the A34. To “improve” the A350/C13 could encourage traffic to use these roads and divert from the A34.
- 8.8 Any “improvement” to the A350/C13 would have major environmental implications and may well be resisted by statutory and other environmental organisations. On the other hand the routes are used by longer distance traffic which causes environmental and other local problems for communities along the route.

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- 8.9 The document ‘Developing the Regional Transport Strategy’ has recently reviewed the priorities for the region. The priorities that have been agreed for consultation are to achieve a second strategic East–West route and to invest in the major urban areas (PUA’s) to support the spatial strategy and address urban congestion. An approach which sort to “improve” North–South routes to facilitate increased movement would mean that existing priorities would need to be changed. The most appropriate time for this debate is through consultation of the RTS not a response to this Study.
- 8.10 The priorities identified for Dorset relate to making the conurbation of South East Dorset work more effectively and, in particular, addressing access to the port/airport and conurbation from the A31. Investing in public transport within the urban area is also seen as important given its focus for future development in the spatial planning strategy.
- 8.11 In essence the strategic approach advocated by the consultants, which is to manage the North-South routes to make the most effective use of the network and encourage modal shift is supported by the “Developing the RTS” document with priority for strategic investment in Dorset given to the SE Dorset conurbation and its links to the A31. National guidance states that Assemblyies should not promote a long “wish list” of priorities which do not relate to the level of resources available. This position was recently reiterated to the South East of England Assembly by the Transport Minister Tony McNulty.
- 8.12 It is recognised however that within this strategic approach there are local issues which local authorities will wish to address. Within Wiltshire and Dorset local authorities will want to consider safety, community and environmental concerns. It is not for the Assembly to take a view on these local solutions if they are developed within the context of the Route Management Strategy approach.
- 8.13 **In conclusion the Assembly should take a strategic view which, while acknowledging the intra-regional functions of the A36/A46/A350 (C13), supports the Route Management approach advocated by the consultants.**
- 8.14 Complementary to the approach advocated for the A36/A46/A350 routes the study identified the importance of the A34 as the main North/South route for HGV’s – the Trunk Route. The consultants recommend a signing strategy to encourage HGV ‘s to use the A34. In strategic terms the Assembly, in accepting this approach, will need to work with SEERA to achieve delivery of the strategy.
- 8.15 The North-South routes perform an intra-regional function. However future decisions may have an impact on the nature and volume of traffic using these routes. For example should the Secretary of State take a decision to improve the A358 there may be more traffic utilising the A358-A37-A35 route. Further work looking at the future of North-

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South routes and the strategic role of the A37 will need to be revisited in the review of the RTS in the light of the Secretary of State's decision.

STRATEGIC APPROACH – CO-ORDINATION ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE ROUTES

- 8.16 The consultants conclude that there is a need for partnership arrangements to provide a co-ordinated management strategy for the corridor. It is essential that the relevant LTP's address the corridor in a consistent way. ***It is concluded that the Assembly should support this approach and play a role in ensuring that a co-ordinated approach to the corridor is adopted by working with the GOSW and local transport authorities as advocated by the consultants.***
- 8.17 Further assessment work will need to take place regarding the future function and role of the A37 when the decision on the A358 is known.

Public Transport

- 8.18 One of the objectives of commissioning the Study was to consider the scope for modal shift and the extent to which public transport services and infrastructure could be improved.
- 8.19 The consultants have identified the limited scope for modal shift but where it is realistic and feasible have recommended the establishment of clock face services and capacity improvements to achieve it. Members attention is drawn to the SRA's comments in Appendix 2 which do not offer support for the consultants recommendations.
- 8.20 ***It is concluded that the Assembly should welcome the proposed improvements to bus and rail and should work with the SRA, bus companies and local authorities to achieve the improvements to public transport.***
- 8.21 Of particular importance is the consultants recommendation for a Corridor Co-ordinating Group to address the wider inter-relationships between administrative areas and between modes.

Bath

- 8.22 The consultants analysis revealed that most of the HGV traffic passing through Bath on the A36/A46 did not have business within or in the vicinity of the city. The impact of the traffic on the World Heritage City and residents was highlighted during consultation.
- 8.23 The Study has looked at a number of interventions to address this issue including demand management measures and a A36-A46 link road. The consultants concluded that the A36-A46 link could deliver the benefits by taking HGV's out of the city, but it would have major

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environmental implications. In order to prevent the benefits being lost by induced traffic utilising the spare capacity generated it will be important to implement a demand management package within the city. Clearly the consultation response indicates that there is concern about the A36-A46 link road.

- 8.24 ***In conclusion the Assembly should support the need for an area strategy for Bath which will address the impact of North-South HGV traffic through the World Heritage City. The strategy will need to include further assessment of a package of measures including demand management, an A36-A46 link and Park and Ride.***

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