

Notes from Department for Transport's A27 Stakeholder Reference Group

4 November, 2014

These notes were compiled by SCATE representatives who attended the meeting. Where the notes talk of a question or query, this has come from the group. Where the notes mention a response or explanation, 'they' refers to the DfT or its consultants.

At the beginning of the meeting it was emphasised that:

- They (the DfT) are not keeping us in the dark
- Diggers won't be out immediately after 3 December (contrary to concerns that have been expressed by some)
- They have received quite a lot of correspondence about this – expressing concern at the proposals
- The reference group is part of the checking out of this study – it is still work in progress
- They would not be displaying maps but will send out minutes – hope group will share responsibly

An MP immediately asked what status of meeting was – referencing that we weren't allowed to take maps away, while some (and they know who they are) have taken it upon themselves to put these in the public domain to excite local concern. He wanted to know what the basis of the meeting and suggested that maybe those involved (in informing the public) shouldn't stay in the room if they couldn't respect the rules.

The response was that the lines on the map were just there to help with costings. Ultimately the study will be published, but before then people needed to share the information responsibly and explain the context

There was a question about public transport and what has study done to follow up with Southern Rail for example.

Response: they had spoken to SDNPA and Southern Rail and would talk more about this in the meeting – they never did

Someone asked about why previous expansion of A27 east of Lewes had not been progressed.

Response: there was nothing definitive, but costs and lack of consensus politically reasons why it was not progressed.

Someone asked about trip pattern change and the response was that there had been no significant change in trip pattern change from SoCoMMs.

It was explained that this was the last meeting scheduled:

- Went over history of feasibility studies
- Output from studies – wanted to come up with proposals that were deliverable, affordable and offered value for money
- Expected members to act responsibly when sharing information with others

The DfT summarised what they were focussing on:

Arundel – bypass (offline) options

Worthing – maximum tunnels

– minimum interventions / online dualling

East of Lewes – off-line options

– on-line solutions

The assumption was that there would be investment in minor online and sustainable transport improvements, whatever happens.

When queried about what this meant, they had no response apart from to say that they were making broad assumptions on sustainable transport improvements (i.e. no proper modelling or investigation) – this was a high level review and nothing was decided. They couldn't say how much was involved, who would pay – whether it was Highways Agency money or other and how far that would go, i.e. was that within 100m of the A27, or several miles to enable a more comprehensive approach to be taken.

They went on to say that in Stage 3 they were prioritising:

- Cost estimation
- Modelling of benefits
- Review of value for money
- Developing of strategic outline business cases as relevant

There was a question asked about a refined Environmental Impact Assessment that was promised.

Response: they had reviewed this and felt that what they had was good enough.

They then presented graphs showing traffic volumes had fallen since 2006. They also showed graphs showing that through traffic at Arundel was 89% - this was defined by traffic that passed through Arundel and travelled along the A27 for 15 miles before or after it (but they were a little vague on this so might be worth checking)

For Worthing the corresponding figure was only 27% (not sure if that included travelling along A27 for 15 miles though)

Question asked – were they just focussing on east-west movement or travel to work area as this was important in understanding what people were doing and why?

Response: they accepted that it might be too east-west focussed.

In West Sussex, the statistics were based on the County Council's traffic model for the county, not on roadside interviews.

Displayed 2011 census data on how people travel to work

Arundel

Option A – Offline Pink / Blue route

Option B – Offline avoiding National Park

Option C – Offline closer to Arundel

Option D – Online dualling and 250m tunnel

Option E – Minor online and sustainable transport improvements

Option	Connectivity	Societal – severance & pollution	Economic	Safety & Resilience	Environmental	Accessibility	Cost (£millions)
A	✓✓✓	✓	✓✓✓	✓	XX	-	170 - 210
B	✓✓✓	✓	✓✓✓	✓	X	-	210 - 250
C	✓✓✓	✓	✓✓✓	✓	XX	-	170- 190
D	✓	X	✓✓✓	✓	X	X	300 - 370
E	X	X	X	X	✓	✓	n/a

Following points were made:

Someone questioned scoring of option B environmentally against Option A and was sceptical of the scoring of Option A (the impact on the National Park).

There was scepticism of the scoring on the economy

The scoring seemed very crude and not terribly helpful and challenged the scoring of Option D and said he couldn't believe a tunnel would score worse on severance to an offline bypass that would cut off Binsted and Walberton from Arundel. There were a number of different possibilities with this option but it was very unclear what was being assessed. There was also a query as to why Option E was mostly negative.

This appeared to be a very unsophisticated process and there was a question mark against its value. In the Local Plan process the environmental assessment was done in a far more rigorous way.

Options	Strategic	Economic	Environment	Social	Cost (£millions)	Value for Money
Offline A	High	Large benefit	Moderate benefit (noise / air pollution) Large adverse (landscape)	Moderate benefit	190	Med - High
Offline B	High	Large benefit	Moderate benefit (noise / air pollution) Moderate adverse (landscape)	Moderate benefit	230	Low - med

It was asked whether this assessment included environmental benefits such as traffic removal from unsuitable routes in the National Park and elsewhere. The response was that it did.

The assumption that it would benefit places like Storrington was queried and the question asked as to whether they had any evidence that it would benefit the area. They had to admit that they had none, although Chamber of Commerce said that they had information from businesses in their survey saying they used other routes to avoid the A27.

The noise assessment was also queried saying that an elevated 70 mph road across the Arun Valley with the prevailing wind behind it would swamp Arundel in noise as the Lewes bypass had done for Lewes.

Concerns were raised that schemes were being ruled in or out using questionable data

DfT said they had detailed research to justify the scoring and a full write up of the study will be available though this will be high level.

The DfT were asked how they could say that the economic 'Time Saving Reliability' criteria will be met, and they responded that they couldn't 'hand on heart'.

Worthing

Option A – maximum tunnelling

Option B – tunnel / dualling

Option C – bypass / tunnel

Option D – dualling / bypass

Option E – dualling / tunnel

Option F – online dualling

Option G – online localised widening and junction improvements

Option H – public transport only

Option	Connectivity	Societal – severance & pollution	Economic	Safety & Resilience	Environmental	Accessibility	Cost (£millions)
A	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	X	-	1,315 + O+M
B	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	-	
C	✓	✓	✓	✓	XX	-	
D	✓	✓	✓	✓	XX	-	
E	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	-	
F	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	90 - 100
G	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	X	40 - 50
H	✓	✓	-	✓	-	X	<30

Options	Strategic	Economic	Environment	Social	Cost (£millions)	Value for Money
Option A	High	Large benefit	Moderate adverse	Large benefit	1,315 + O+M	Poor
Option F	High	Large benefit	Moderate adverse	Moderate benefit Moderate adverse	96	Med
Option G	Med	Slight benefit	Neutral	Slight benefit	50	tbc

It was admitted that the West Sussex County Council model they've used is not that robust – not designed to look at local movements in Worthing

The point was made that the case for Worthing was less strong but that it seemed to stack up for Arundel and east of Lewes.

It was asked whether option G was within the existing highway curtilage (not sure if an answer was given)

It was asked that if a scheme at Worthing didn't go ahead would that jeopardise the Arundel scheme? The response was that WSCC had indicated that they wouldn't support work at Arundel if Worthing didn't go ahead and it was then asked whether this would make the case for tunnelling stronger at Worthing.

Lewes – Polegate

They had used the SWETS model for traffic.

76% of traffic was classified as through traffic. The point was made that this wasn't the same as Arundel and the nearly a quarter of traffic was Brighton to Eastbourne and nearly a quarter of traffic was from Lewes to Eastbourne and therefore offered a great opportunity to move some of that traffic to sustainable modes.

It was pointed out that the value for money case for new roads around Bexhill would be impacted upon by an increase in traffic caused by expanding the A27 here.

Option A – dual offline

Option B – single offline

Option C – bypass at Selmeston

Option D – bypass at Wilmington to Cophall roundabout

Option E – Folkington link

Option F – Minor online and sustainable transport

Option	Connectivity	Societal – severance & pollution	Economic	Safety & Resilience	Environmental	Accessibility	Cost (£millions)
A	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	XX	✓✓✓	390 - 420
B	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	X	✓✓✓	290 - 330
C	X	✓	X	✓	XX	✓	30 - 45
D	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	-	70 - 90
E	✓	X	✓	-	X	X	35 - 50
F	X	X	X	✓ X	-	✓	(tba)

It was stated that the assumptions around a Selmeaton bypass were wrong and that Lord Gage would be prepared to accept a bypass close to the Barley Mow to address safety issues.

There were various comments about the use of the road network not being straightforward and that more could and should be done to promote sustainable transport and demand management.

It was explained that the Highways Agency plan being created to develop an investment strategy. It was working on its own, not with other departments.

The meeting was told that the Highways Agency had worked on demand management and workplace travel plans and that this should form part of any plan (not sure if this was taken on board by the DfT).

East Sussex County Council said that we need to improve capacity to unlock benefits for more bus corridors. They also asked about costs and risks.

Response: costs are as realistic as possible

Options	Strategic	Economic	Environment	Social	Cost (£millions)	Value for Money
Option A	High	Large benefit	Moderate benefit (noise / air pollution Large adverse (landscape)	Large benefit	405	Poor - low
Option B	High	Large benefit	Moderate benefit (noise / air pollution Moderate adverse (landscape)	Large benefit	310	Low - med
Option C	Poor	Neutral	Large adverse	Slight benefit	38	Poor (tbc)
Option D	High	Moderate benefit	Large adverse	Large benefit	85	High (tbc)
Option E	Low	Large benefit	Moderate adverse	Slight benefit	44	High – v.high

Chamber of Commerce said that from their survey of 1,069 businesses, 51% said they would employ more people if there was a new road.

It was asked:

- Did the figures include induced traffic and what assumptions had been made about this?
- When calculating the benefits, had the likelihood of increased congestion in Brighton and Eastbourne been factored into this?
- Had the cumulative impact of increasing more than one part of the A27 been considered on traffic levels and value for money calculation as well as the cumulative impact on the National Park and the pressure this would create for even more road infrastructure

No response was received

The Coast to Capital (Local Enterprise Partnership) asked about wider economic impacts (without specifying what these might be)

It was said that the DfT would do more work on this. They would be putting forward the case made by the LEP and if they found more benefits this could increase the value for money calculations.

A question was asked what would happen to the old A27

Response: it would be de-trunked and for local use but they didn't say whether money would be spent on traffic calming it.

There was a question whether assessment of Folkington link was against current conditions

Response: it was against minor improvements

There was concern expressed that the environmental costs weren't monetised and so it was difficult to assess these plans properly.

Someone else stressed the need to invest in rural bus services and rail and if we think about climate change we were really on the wrong page here with these big new road proposals.

The point was made that the impacts on the SDNP from noise pollution would be devastating and the impact on the long views from the South Downs would be detrimental too

Figures were quoted from ESCC monitoring of the A27 to show increased volumes over time, while someone else held up figures from the Highways Agency for the same period showing a different set of figures. The point was made that whilst SoCoMMs had planned on a 26% increase in volume to 2016 actual volumes were only slightly increased in the worst scenario and had decreased in many places across the A27.

Someone asked whether the individual schemes could be given such high scores in isolation, each small scheme having little effect on increasing capacity, only a very localised benefit.

An MP again attacked those who had 'leaked' the routes to the press and public and said he quite expected to see this in the press in a few weeks time.

Someone responded saying that it wasn't right to keep attacking NGOs for informing the wider public and that many politicians in the room had been sharing information in the press as well.

Another MP said that it was to be expected and you couldn't hope to keep this all quiet. He said that he hadn't signed the official secrets act over this and had a duty to inform his constituents.

The day was rounded up by saying what would happen next:

- Completion of the study and drafting of strategic outline business cases
- Expects to be able to report back at Autumn Statement with solutions
- Outcomes will be used to inform Roads Investment Strategy
- Studies will be published together – likely to be after the Autumn Statement as not all studies progressing at same rate. She assured us that this would include background data and assumptions
- Letters sent in would be reported back as part of the process

If there was a recommendation to proceed with schemes and funding was allocated that all the options would be reviewed again.

How credible this statement is we will have to wait and see. However, there is a concern as to how thorough the review of all other options would be given they have just spent a year on this not very thorough study.

Meeting ended 1.30pm (half an hour over)