

REPORT TO: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE SERVICES COMMITTEE ON 8 MARCH 2011

SUBJECT: ELGIN TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT: WESTERN DISTRIBUTOR ROAD OPTION APPRAISAL

BY: HEAD OF DIRECT SERVICES

1. REASON FOR THE REPORT

- 1.1. The Committee is asked to note the outcome of the public consultation exercise and approve the recommendation of the Western Distributor Road (WDR) Stage 2 Option Assessment Report.
- 1.2. This report is submitted to Committee in terms of Section G (18) of the Council's Administrative Scheme relating to dealing with the preparation and implementation of traffic management schemes.

2. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Committee:

- 2.1. **Approves the findings of the consultant's Main Issues Report; namely**
 - 2.1.1. **Acknowledges the poor value for money represented by the Rural (Inner) and Rural (Outer) Routes and agrees they be discounted from any further consideration;**
 - 2.1.2. **Approves the recommendation to progress the Existing Network Enhancements whilst retaining the Urban (Inner) Route in the Local Plan.**
- 2.2. **Notes the implications as outlined in Section 10.**
- 2.3. **Approves the Elgin Traffic Management and Car Parking Capital allocation for 2011/12 covering the proposals outlined below.**

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1. A recommendation is based on the technical information together with the report of the public consultation. Both of these are now available and are brought to this Committee.
- 3.2. Reference is made to the report to this Committee on 15 June 2010 (Para 4 of the Minute refers) when approval was given to progress the appraisal of

the Do-Nothing and the four options for a possible Western Distributor Road and against a proposed timetable.

- 3.3. This option appraisal has followed the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (DMRB) process.
- 3.4. The DMRB Stage 1 report was submitted to this Committee on 24 August 2010 (Para 9 of the Minute refers).
- 3.5. The Interim DMRB Stage 2 report (covering technical issues only) was submitted for noting to this Committee on 14 December 2010 (Para 8 of the minute refers). The Committee also approved the proposals for public consultation.
- 3.6. Copies of the Final Stage 2 Report (including both technical issues and summary of the consultation) have been placed in the Members Library. This together with the details of the feedback from the public consultation exercise can be found on the Elected Members Information Portal.
- 3.7. The consultant's representatives will be at this Committee to answer technical questions and those relating to the public consultation. The reports will be on the Council's website soon after.
- 3.8. As advised at the December Committee meeting, the timetable for full consultation, analysis and preparation of this report was tight and was a balance between meeting report dates previously advised and giving the public sufficient time to consider the proposals. Members are reminded however that the technical aspects of the report have not changed since December.

4. OPTION SUMMARY

4.1. The options under consideration are:

- Do-Nothing (includes an access road to Bilbohall affordable housing)
- Existing Network Enhancements
- Urban (Inner) Route
- Rural (Inner) Route
- Rural (Outer) Route

5. CONSULTATION

- 5.1. The consultation phase is an integral part of the DMRB scheme appraisal process.

- 5.2. Presentations with question and answer sessions were given to representatives of Elgin Community Council as well as both the Elgin North and South Forums.
- 5.3. The 2-day public exhibition held in Elgin Library between 10am and 8pm each day was attended by nearly 500 people with about 180 subsequent responses received.
- 5.4. Feedback was sought over a 10day period following the exhibition. This feedback has been incorporated into the Stage 2 Consultation Report and is summarised below. All the papers and plans were available on the Council's website from before the public exhibition date until the end of the consultation period. It also included a consultation form which could be submitted on-line. In addition, there were articles in the press in response to a Council press release which was issued well in advance of the exhibition, and a press briefing which was held on the day before the exhibition opened.
- 5.5. Of those who responded, when asked about a preferred option, responses indicate the Rural (Outer) Route as joint favourite with not taking any option forward (25% each). The least favoured 'Do-Something' option is the Urban (Inner) Route (13%).
- 5.6. There was a common perception from a proportion of the public that a bypass was the obvious solution and that the Rural (Outer) Route provided part of that. It should be noted however that this distributor road option does not form part of a potential bypass route. A bypass and a distributor road are designed for different purposes and are in many ways mutually incompatible. It was apparent that support for the rural routes was regarded by some people as a way to oppose the Inner Urban Route.
- 5.7. 96% of the responses returned were from within the IV30 Elgin postcode area.
- 5.8. 52% stated that they are affected by congestion throughout the day.
- 5.9. 74% disagreed with the statement "*The current road network in Elgin will be capable of dealing with future transport demands*". The majority of people who responded take the view that improvements are required to the road network.
- 5.10. 30 properties on Wittet Drive were represented in responses. This equated to 36 separate responses.
- 5.11. Further analysis can be found in the attached report.

6. OPTION APPRAISAL OUTCOME

6.1. The key findings from the Final DMRB Stage 2 Report and a summary of public opinion are summarised below and supported by the Main Issues Report appended as **Appendix 1**.

6.2. Do-Nothing

- The access road to the affordable housing site is estimated to cost £3million and needs to be added to the following costs for each option. As advised previously, this is a contractual commitment for the Council linked to the sale of land at Bilbohall for affordable housing.

6.3. Existing Network Enhancements

- At an estimated cost of £7.2 million this requires the lowest capital expenditure of the 'Do-Something' options.
- Traffic modelling suggests that strategic junction capacity enhancements would alleviate congestion within the centre of Elgin.
- The Benefit to Cost Ratio (BCR) of 1.2 indicates that the benefits marginally outweigh the cost.
- Approximately 19% of the public consultation returns highlighted this as a preferred option.
- This option can be delivered in a phased manner.
- This option does not provide a new rail crossing.
- A junction improvement at the A96/Wittet Drive junction would require property acquisition. There are two options for a roundabout location under consideration and either one would require property acquisition.

6.4. Urban (Inner) Route

- The estimated cost of this option is £12.7 million.
- Traffic modelling suggests that this option would attract in excess of 6000 vehicles per day and provides an attractive alternative to existing roads within central Elgin.
- The BCR of 1.1 indicates that the benefits marginally outweigh the cost.

- This option was the least favoured by the public with it being perceived as the most disruptive to Wittet Drive residents despite the benefits to the wider population of Elgin. Approximately 13% highlighted this as a preferred option.
- This option can be delivered in a phased manner.
- This option provides a new rail crossing.
- A junction improvement at the A96/Wittet Drive junction would require property acquisition. There are two options for a roundabout location under consideration and either one would require property acquisition.

6.5. Rural (Inner) Route

- The estimated cost of this option is £24.5 million.
- Traffic modelling suggests that this option would attract less than 2700 vehicles per day.
- The BCR of 0.2 indicates that this option does not represent value for money.
- Following the public consultation approximately 17% highlighted this as a preferred option.
- This option cannot be delivered in a phased manner.
- This option does provide a new rail crossing.
- This option impacts on the Riverside Caravan Park as well as residential properties in the area of Palmers Cross.

6.6 Rural (Outer) Route

- The estimated cost of this option is £68.2 million.
- Traffic modelling suggests that this option would attract less than 2000 vehicles per day.
- The BCR of less than 0.1 indicates that this option does not represent value for money.
- Following the public consultation approximately 25% highlighted this as a preferred option.

- This option cannot be delivered in a phased manner.
- This option does provide a new rail crossing.
- This option impacts on the Riverside Caravan Park.

7. PROPOSALS

The consultant's recommendations are summarised below:

- 7.1. The Rural (Outer) and Rural (Inner) routes cannot be recommended as they do not provide value for money.
- 7.2. The Existing Network Enhancements should be promoted as the short-term measure with detailed junction design and traffic modelling to establish which individual enhancements provide the greatest benefits. It is important to note that each of the individual improvements within this package contributes different amounts of benefit. For example it is expected that the A96/Wittet Drive junction alone provides a significant proportion of the benefit. Therefore it is not recommended that any of the elements be discounted at this stage.
- 7.3. Detailed design should be developed to establish precisely how many and exactly which properties would need to be acquired thus minimising those properties with potential blight. This will include seeking approval for the A96 junction improvement from Transport Scotland. It is anticipated that necessary investigations will be complete to enable a report to be brought back to this Committee before the end of this year.
- 7.4. The Urban (Inner) Route should be retained within the Local Plan whilst short-term measures are promoted, implemented and their performance monitored. It is anticipated that this option may require additional garden ground but no additional property over and above that required for the Existing Network Enhancements option.
- 7.5. The Urban (Inner) Route is contained within the current Local Plan. The Council's position on this Route as Roads Authority would be considered in future Local Plan reviews. This is a separate statutory process within the remit of the Council's Planning and Regulatory Services Committee.
- 7.6. The "Do-Nothing" option includes an access road to the affordable housing site at Bilbohall. This should be progressed.

8. IMPLICATIONS FOR AN ACCESS TO BILBOHALL AFFORDABLE HOUSING SITE

- 8.1. The proposals recommend that the Existing Network Enhancements should be promoted as the short-term measure with the Urban (Inner) Route

retained in the Local Plan, and included in the forthcoming review, as a possible longer term solution.

- 8.2. The design of the access road to the housing site will depend on the decision taken on the option appraisal.
- 8.3. If the access road is designed before a decision on the distributor road options is made there is a risk of abortive work and additional cost to the Council.

9. COSTS AND BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1. The Financial Plan for 2011/12 was approved at a special meeting of the Council on 10 February 2011 subject to individual budget allocations being approved by the appropriate service committee.
- 9.2. £250k has been allocated to Elgin Traffic Management and Car Parking for 2011/12. This will be used to allow further design and modelling of junctions to establish which individual enhancements provide greatest benefits as well as to establish the impact on properties
- 9.3. During the detailed design phase any necessary property acquisition will be identified and cost estimates developed. Property acquisition and any compensation claims will reduce the amount available in future years of the plan (which are as yet only provisionally approved) for the construction of network enhancements. It is not possible to quantify these at this stage.

10. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

(a) Single Outcome Agreement/ Service Improvement Plan

This report is in line with National Outcome 1 and Local Outcome 3: "Moray will benefit from an improved and safer transportation infrastructure".

Service Priority 2 (Elgin Traffic Management Plan) of the Service Improvement Plan.

(b) Policy and Legal

Should the recommendations be approved, it would be necessary to carry out further design work to establish which properties would need to be acquired to improve the A96/Wittet Drive junction. After this statutory blight may apply and property acquisition may be necessary.

Should a decision be deferred, all properties currently “at risk” will remain so.

(c) Financial implications

As indicated in Section 9.

(d) Risk Implications

Should a decision be taken to Do-Nothing or defer a decision significantly there may be implications for the forthcoming review of the Local Plan.

There are currently a number of major planning applications under consideration and dealing effectively with these would be severely constrained.

If the Urban (Inner) Route is abandoned it is likely to result in a planning application to build further houses on the alignment and would leave the legacy of any future rail crossing only being possible much further west and at considerably higher cost whilst being less effective for congestion relief. It would also have a considerable long-term impact on the future development of Elgin.

Should the recommendations be approved, it would be necessary to carry out further design work to establish which properties would need to be acquired to improve the A96/Wittet Drive junction. After this statutory blight may apply and property acquisition may be necessary.

Should a decision be deferred, all properties currently “at risk” will remain so.

If the access road is designed before a decision on the distributor road options is made there is a risk of abortive work and additional cost to the Council.

(e) Staffing Implications

None.

(f) Property

None.

(g) Equalities

There are no issues in this case.

(h) Consultations

The Elgin South West Developments Working Group have been advised of and discussed the report.

Aileen Scott, Principal Solicitor (Commercial and Conveyancing) has been consulted and her comments have been incorporated into this report.

Alasdair McEachan, Senior Solicitor (Commercial and Conveyancing) has been consulted and his comments have been incorporated into this report.

Lorraine Paisey, Principal Accountant has been consulted and her comments have been incorporated into this report.

11. CONCLUSIONS

- 11.1. It is important to note that the Western Distributor Road proposal forms just one element of the Elgin Traffic Management Programme. There are a number of other transportation improvements (TSPs) identified in the Local Plan which are required to meet the objective of *“providing a quicker, safer, more reliable transport system in and around Elgin while accommodating future development”*.**
- 11.2. It is important that a decision on a future strategy for a distributor road is made since this will allow identification of any properties at risk and remove the fear of those whose properties will not be affected.**
- 11.3. The financial risk to the Council is kept to a minimum by adopting the recommendations and investigating the network enhancements in more detail whilst retaining the Urban (Inner) Route in the Local Plan as a possible long-term solution.**
- 11.4. It is important to note that no extra traffic is being generated as a result of these options. It is a re-distribution of existing traffic and consequently if not affecting Wittet Drive, it will be affecting residential properties elsewhere in Elgin.**

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Background Papers:

Ref:

ITEM: 8

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