

Information

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for County Councillors

From:	Sunita Mills Service Commissioning Manager – Transport Policy
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To:	All County Councillors
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A303/A358/A30 Highways Improvements

Introduction

This is an update to work by Highways England (HE) to improve the A303/A358/A30 as part of the Road Investment Strategy 2015 – 2020, including public engagement events this month that you may wish to attend.

It is also an update on the Somerset County Council (SCC) work to bring forward improvements to Junction 25 of the M5. There are 3 specific sections of the corridor identified for improvement to in the Roads Investment Strategy 2015 to 2020, these are -

- A303 Amesbury to Berwick Down
- A303 Sparkford – Ilchester dualling
- A358 Taunton to Southfields

In addition the Government committed to smaller scale improvements to the A303 from Southfield roundabout to the A30.

A report was presented to the Policies and Place Scrutiny Committee on 29 September 2015 that explained the process that HE will follow. This includes the development consent order (DCO) activities to get to a stage of constructing the A303 / A358 / A30 schemes. HE is required to examine all options as part of this process and whilst previous work will be considered there is no assumption that any of the previously developed schemes will be the ones taken forward. This consent process will take up to 5 years to achieve and it is therefore unlikely that construction activities will commence before 2020.

A303 / A358 / A30 Progress Update

There are regular opportunities in the HE process for local engagement at a technical and non-technical level. HE has already involved SCC officers in a number of discussions regarding the process and the development of the scheme.

A constructive opening dialogue has taken place between the communications teams from HE, SCC, Taunton Deane Borough Council (TDBC) and South Somerset District Council with the purpose of ensuring future public engagement events will be well publicised across a broad range of media to

reach a wide audience. The teams will keep in contact over the life of the scheme to ensure local knowledge and interests are thoroughly represented. A number of technical discussions have taken place with SCC Highways staff to start to understand the local issues that will have an impact on the scheme. These will be considered in more detail as the scheme development progresses.

HE is also involving Natural England, Environment Agency, Historic England, the National Trust and other such bodies to cover environmental issues from the outset.

Initial public engagement

HE is planning initial public roadshow events at the end of February 2016 to explain the process of the scheme development and to highlight ongoing maintenance and other activities that will be taking place over the next four years. All the roadshows take place between 1pm and 8pm. The dates and locations are –

- 19 February 2016 – Lady Antrobus House, Amesbury
- 22 February 2016 – The Podymore Inn, just off the Podimore roundabout on the A303
- 25 February 2016 – The Monks Yard, Ilminster
- 26 February 2016 – Creative Innovation Centre CIC, Taunton and Tesco Superstore, Castle Street, Taunton.

SCC will be represented at the event at the Creative Innovation Centre in Taunton to answer any queries regarding the M5 Junction 25 scheme.

Once work has progressed further on the schemes HE currently anticipates public consultation exercises will take place on the options for each of the schemes towards the end of 2016.

M5 Junction 25 progress

In early 2015 the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership (HotSW LEP) confirmed an allocation of funding up to £12.9m for highway capacity improvements at M5 Junction 25 to support growth in Taunton, particularly a new employment site close to the junction. The scheme is to be delivered in advance of the HE's works on A358. HE will take account of the junction improvement that SCC delivers when planning and designing the A358 improvement. HE may need to carry out additional works in the future at M5 Junction 25 but until the Development Consent Order has been granted for a preferred option there is no certainty around what additional works may be needed.

SCC has been developing the initial business case for the scheme for submission to the Local Transport Board (LTB in April 2016). Once this case has been approved the next phase of work to develop the detailed design of the scheme can commence. SCC anticipates carrying out consultation and engagement activities in May/June 2016 to inform the detailed design of the scheme. It is anticipated to take over a year to complete the detailed design and appoint contractors to build the scheme so construction is likely to commence in late 2017 or early 2018.

Junction 25 Strategic Employment Site

The aspiration for growth in Taunton is shared between SCC and TDBC. SCC is keen to support the borough council where possible to bring forward planned residential and employment development. To this end SCC has been supporting TDBC on activities to bring forward the Strategic Employment Site at Junction 25 including enabling access to the site, should it be developed. TDBC has recently confirmed it will be progressing a Local Development Order (LDO) for the site; the work that SCC is carrying out on M5 Junction 25 is a key component to the LDO. The programme for this process is under development by TDBC.

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